

March 9, 2016

Senator Mullin, Chair
The Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs

Dear Senator Mullin:

We are writing as members of the Building Committee and Board of Trustees of the United Methodist Church of White River Junction, Vermont.

As you know, last Fall our church missed out on what the Building Committee and Trustee members considered a “golden” opportunity. This was a unique opportunity, that we are sure won’t present itself to too many other churches, or our church again for that matter.

Like many churches in Vermont, we are struggling financially and physically and have a shrinking membership. We have a wonderful group of friends/family in our congregation, but it is getting smaller by the year, which means our finances are getting tighter each year. Our building was built in the late 1800’s, and is in need of many repairs.

The “golden” opportunity came this past summer when a local developer offered to build us a new church just three doors down the street.....in exchange for our property. He owns the property beside and directly behind us and is planning to build an assisted living facility there. With the addition of our property, he would have had a much larger and more appealing site on which to build.

This wasn’t only a great opportunity for us, but for the Town of Hartford and its citizens as well. White River Junction has been in a slump for quite some time and there is a buzz about town now and lots of rejuvenation going on: the transformation of an old car dealership into a beautiful theatre building, the revitalization of the old Legion into needed housing and retail space, the cartoon school and the many artisan shops and businesses housed in the old Tip Top Bakery building and sprinkled around town. There is still more to come and bringing an assisted living facility downtown will top it off, providing a larger population (and, as a bonus, a larger tax base)! It is very exciting for the residents of Hartford to watch as WRJ comes alive again!

All our enthusiasm came to an abrupt halt after an affirmative vote in September with the discovery of Statute number 862 of the State of Vermont (Title 27; Chapter 7, Subchapter 5). Apparently, an old (1833) state law declares that the Trustees of the United Methodist Church cannot convey property without a two-third majority vote by the membership.

After discovering this information, we decided to take a second vote at our annual conference in November. This vote again was in the affirmative; and though there was an increase in the percentage, we still fell short of the two-thirds requirement.

We now present ourselves to ask the Legislature to revise this outdated Statute to a requirement of a simple majority vote which would allow the Trustees to transfer property. It would be painful to see other Methodist churches within the State have to endure the agony and heartbreak that we have.

We ask that you and your committee vote in favor of making this change for the good of other Methodist churches that might find themselves in a similar situation of having to sell or close.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Linda J. Johnson, Chair, Building Committee
Member, Board of Trustees
United Methodist Church of White River Junction, VT

Thomas P. Franklin, DVM, Member, Building Committee
Member, Board of Trustees
United Methodist Church of White River Junction, VT

Kim Finney, Member, Building Committee
Member, Board of Trustees
United Methodist Church of White River Junction, VT