

My name is Kristin Palace. I thank the Board for the opportunity to say a few words regarding the citizen's petition to amend Topsfield's Zoning By-law to prohibit Nursing and Community Care facilities near the commercial centers our town.

I am here today both in my capacity as the Moderator for the Congregational Church of Topsfield and as a resident of Topsfield.

As Moderator of the Church, I want to convey to you that the Church opposes the citizen's petition. At the last planning board meeting, the petition's main sponsor, Holger Luther, admitted that the petition was filed to prevent the church from developing Emerson Field, property owned by the Church, into an assisted living facility. The change to the zoning by-law would significantly reduce the value of the property that the church owns. Unfortunately, the church is in the position of needing to develop additional sources of funding in order to maintain the two historic buildings that sit on the Town Common as well as to continue its charitable work. The Church has long supported the community. The beauty of the Meetinghouse and the Emerson Center enhance the Town. Numerous groups have used the Emerson Center and its parking lot for years for little or no cost – Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Historical Society, the Tri-Town Council, school groups, DASH, medical clinics, seniors, to name but a few. Several local charities are supported by donations from the Church. Now, at a time when the Church needs to find financial stability in order to continue its work, the town is throwing up roadblocks in its path. I'm asking the planning board to consider carefully whether this is in the best interests of the town. Does it really make sense to imperil the church's ability to maintain those historic structures? Or to impede the church's ability to support charities? Isn't it possible that an assisted living facility in the downtown area would be in the town's best interest? At a time when property taxes are far too high, such a facility would offer the town significant revenue. It would not put additional burdens on schools or school budgets. It would offer Topsfield residents a local option if they or a loved one needed this type of care. The question of whether a facility on the Emerson Field could comply with all local permit requirements is a question for later, when and if a specific facility is ever proposed. But banning these facilities in the very districts where they are most likely to ever be proposed – near commercial centers – is short-sighted and not in the town's best interest.