

Zoning Board of Appeals
Application for Zoning Relief Form A
Proposal a. General Description

The Topsfield Historical Society is seeking variances from the Topsfield Zoning Code Article IV Dimension and Density Regulations 12A and 12D having to do with parking requirements.

4.12 Parking

A. General Requirements. All off street parking areas and loading areas, other than those provided for dwellings, but including drives and other access ways, shall be treated with bituminous or other impervious surfacing material; and shall be provided where necessary with appropriate bumper and wheel guards. Illuminations shall be so arranged as to deflect light away from adjoining lots and abutting streets; and screening shall be provided where required by this By-Law.

D. Parking Setback. No parking shall be located in the required front yard (setback).

Since 1913 the Society's headquarters have been at 1 Howlett Street when the Parson Capen House was saved from demolition and opened to the public to learn about 17th century life. In 1995 the Society restored another first period structure on the site, the Gould Barn which is one of only six remaining barns in the Country dating from this time. For over 100 years the Society, the Capen House, the Priscilla Capen Herb Garden and the Gould Barn has been an integral part of the community.

Last year the Congregational Church Board of Trustees has informed the Society that we will no longer have access to the twelve parking spaces in their lot, which the Society has relied upon since the Gould Barn was built nearly 30 years ago. The spaces include a ADA required marked space and access path to the Barn from the Emerson Center parking lot. The design proposed includes a new designated spot and access path as well as 11 additional spaces.

In addition to the use of the spaces for Society and public programming, the Society is already contractually committed to rentals this year and well into next year, which are now in jeopardy due to the lack of parking, including handicap and safety access. Use of those 12 parking spaces is part of the rental agreement and an important factor in attracting rental clients. Without parking, the Society's ability to utilize and rent the barn will be severely limited or eliminated, removing the bulk of funding for the Society's mission to preserve and educate about Topsfield's history. This restricted utilization will also impact many community organizations that rely on access to the Gould Barn for meetings, activities and events.

IV 12A: To determine the appropriate surfacing material for the parking lot, the Society consulted with Heidi Gaffney, Conservation Commission Administrator and David Bond representing the Planning Board. Both require that bituminous (hot top) not be used, but to use gravel which will allow water to naturally permeate towards the swale located on the boundary between the Society's property and the Emerson Center parking lot. This swale leads toward a vernal pool located on the Congregational Church's property and is within the ConsCom jurisdiction. Furthermore, the Society would like to keep the more historically appropriate aesthetic of natural colored stone rather than hot top and preserve as much greenspace as possible.

IV 12D: Likewise, because of the locations of the historic buildings and the drainage swale leading into Conservation Commission restricted areas, the Society cannot put the parking area elsewhere on the property, thus requiring the parking area to be along the side of Howlett Street.