

Lois Kilby-Chesley
Durham, ME
LD 438

To: Esteemed members of the Taxation Committee

From Lois Kilby-Chesley

My name is Lois Kilby-Chesley. I live in Durham, ME in Androscoggin County.

I urge you to oppose LD 438, An Act to Allow Municipalities to Limit Nonprofit Property Tax Exemptions

and LD 1795, An Act to Change the Calculation for Municipal Service Charges for Tax-exempt Organizations, two bills which would allow municipalities to increase taxes on nonprofits.

I serve as chair of the Friends of the West Durham Methodist Church and am the primary caretaker of the former Church at 23 Runaround Pond Rd in Durham. The former Church has been on the National Registry for Historic Places since April 22, 2003. In 2019, after years of requests from concerned citizens to the Town of Durham about the neglect and disrepair of the town owned building, ownership transferred to the nonprofit Friends of the West Durham Methodist Church. The FOWDMC began renovations upon receiving its first grant (2019) from the STK Foundation. At the same time we began a partnership with the Durham Historical Society, agreeing that when the renovations are complete and if/when the Friends of the West Durham Methodist Church ceases to exist, building ownership will transfer to the DHS in full.

At this time FOWDMC is continuing to search for grants to continue renovations. We depend on our non-profit status to exist as we have no income and depend on grants for specific purposes such as our grants for the roof replacement, windows and foundation. Grants do not generally allow for operating expenses. For 5 years I paid the electric bill out of my pocket, and in 2024 the Durham Historical Society stepped in as a partner and picked up that cost. Other work, such as a recent cleanup, trash removal, mowing and general day-to-day work is done by volunteers like me.

Asking FOWDMC, as a nonprofit, to pay taxes or additional fees fundamentally goes against the principle of our charitable status and would destroy our ability to make improvements to the building. The oldest Church in Durham would once again deteriorate and become a safety issue leading to its possible removal.

We are a small group with less than 15 members. We depend on our non-profit status to exist. The intention of the FOWDMC is to renovate the former Church for use as a community center/arts venue/historical museum/lending library. There are ample opportunities to use the space to benefit the community which we intend to advantage. The pews encourage book readings, small concerts, historical presentations, and other community activities. From the pulpit area, the acoustics are quite fine. There is ample wall and floor space for small art shows. With two alcoves in the rear of the sanctuary, one is intended as a small museum of local artifacts and the other as a small library with attention to area interests.

FOWDMC is looking forward with new ideas to improve our community and to open up many opportunities for our future.

I ask you to vote to oppose LD 438 and LD 1795. Thank you.