

Jerry Bley  
27 Giles Road  
Readfield, ME 04355

August 25, 2021

Readfield Planning Board  
Town of Readfield  
8 Old Kents Hill Rd.  
Readfield, ME 04355

Dear Planning Board Members:

I had hoped to speak at the public hearing for the Safe Space Meeting House (SSMH) proposal this evening, but had to leave before my opportunity arose due to another commitment. Please accept this written account of my planned remarks.

Tonight, I wear a variety of hats:

- I am a neighbor to the proposed SSMH site living at 27 Giles Rd.;
- I am an acquaintance of the owner of the property, Bob Bittar and his late wife, Helen, having known them for many decades;
- I am a long-time member of the Readfield Conservation Commission (which is not involved in these deliberations) and helped coordinate the donation the Mill Stream Dam trail easement and trail use agreement by the property owners to provide recreational and historic benefits to Town residents; and
- And in my day job, I am a land use consultant providing planning and conservation expertise to clients and have been through numerous permitting procedures over my career.

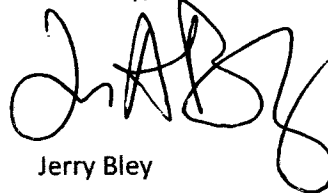
So, with those different perspectives, I would like to share a variety of thoughts that this proposal has given rise.

- As we all know, there is a lot of history – and regardless of one’s perspective, ugly history – that pre-dates this proposal. My hope is that the Planning Board will leave that baggage behind and judge this proposal based upon the facts and its merits.
- I am not afraid of change in my town or even in my neighborhood, in fact I welcome it. Otherwise, community life becomes stale. The Planning Board has the challenging task of providing for that lifeblood of positive change while being responsive to the fears and legitimate concerns that inevitably accompanies it.
- And I think that we, as a community, can do a better job of welcoming and assisting new enterprises, whether they be businesses, farmers or associations. Somehow there needs to be an alternative to the tortured saga that has occurred at Mill Stream. In my day job, I spend a lot of time facilitating creative solutions to challenging situations. That doesn’t typically happen through the permit review process – it needs to happen in other ways. It certainly didn’t happen here.

- Love it or hate it, the SSMH proposal (as well as the proceeding proposals on this site) is about one thing – providing a benefit to the community. It is not about personal gain or profit. The stated mission of the SSMH aligns with the values that I hold dear in Readfield and fits squarely within the concept of a community center.
- And in that light, I think it is important that the Planning Board look around the town and see how other similar facilities have managed to co-exist within neighborhoods. What has worked and what hasn't? The SSMH proposal should be assessed in a manner consistent and commensurate with these other facilities.
- I understand and appreciate the legitimate concerns expressed by some neighbors; noise, parking, safety and others -- have some of them myself. But, I also understand the role and power of the planning board to address those concerns through permit conditions and other means. The applicant appears open to such limitations.
- Is that possible here? Quite honestly, I am not sure, but I hope that is where the Planning Board's efforts will focus. You have a proposal that seeks to fill an important need in our community; one that will make us a better and stronger town. I believe it fits the definition of a community center, an allowed use in the zone. And yet, it is proposed in a challenging location where great care is required to prevent unwelcome impacts, most notably to close-by neighbors.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts with the Planning Board.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Bley". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first letter "J" being particularly large and the last letter "y" having a long, sweeping tail.

Jerry Bley