

January 2022

Learn to do right; seek justice.

Defend the oppressed.

Take up the cause of the fatherless;

plead the case of the widow. Isaiah 1:17

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Mark 12:31

To the members of the Ayer Select Board -

As members of the clergy, our faith compels us to speak out in response to the undeserved, mass eviction of Devenscrest tenants by Brady Sullivan Properties. The communities of faith in Ayer stand in solidarity with the Devenscrest tenants and call upon state and local officials to exercise their authority to allow Devenscrest tenants to remain in their homes. The evictions of the residents of these apartments creates both a personal crisis for these residents and an ethical crisis for the larger community. Rising prices in the area leave long time tenants with no affordable place to go. These residents include people who contribute to our community, hold local jobs and have children in the Ayer school system. They are our neighbors. Their displacement will be a loss for all of Ayer. We call upon you to use your office and leadership to do everything in your power to keep our neighbors housed.

Specifically, we call upon the Ayer Select Board to:

- Send a letter asking Brady Sullivan Properties to appear at a public meeting of the Select Board or other appropriate local public body to disclose its plans for Devenscrest and answer questions. While the board can't compel this appearance, we believe that if all Select Board members sign such a letter, then Brady Sullivan will appear.
- Actively explore redevelopment of Devenscrest by the current owner in a manner that will protect the current residents of Devenscrest from displacement and maintain affordability. This can be done using town staff time and a small amount of money for "technical assistance" consulting. Making a show of support will demonstrate the town cares and it may result in a satisfactory long-term solution
- Support efforts by the Devenscrest Tenant Association (DTA) and it's partners to seek state funding for preservation of Devenscrest either as rental housing or as cooperative resident-controlled housing. This can be done by sending an official letter to the state

legislative delegation requesting that they work to secure such funding.

On our end, we are encouraging our congregations and the wider public to support efforts to protect the affordability of the Devenscrest apartments, and to help keep those tenants who have no other options to stay at Devenscrest for as long as they need. Some ways they can do so include the following:

- Write a letter of support to the Ayer Select Board.
- Participate in public meetings which will discuss the future of Devenscrest
- Share the information with neighbors/friends
- Host a meeting where Devenscrest tenants can speak
- Host a lawn sign, buy a T-Shirt, help with organizing and/or legal/admin work
- Make a contribution to help Devenscrest tenants continue their work to ensure the affordability of the Devenscrest apartments forever
- Inform anyone you know who lives in a Brady Sullivan apartment at Devenscrest that NorthEast Legal Aid has received a grant and is representing tenants in court for free. The more tenants that register with NLA, the stronger the defense is.
- Visit www.Devenscrest.org for more information

The residents of Devenscrest are our neighbors, our parishioners, and our friends. They contribute to our local economy in the work they do and to the spirit and diversity of Ayer by being who they are. We ask you to take an active and creative leadership role in finding ways to preserve the Devenscrest apartments as an affordable place to live in Ayer.

Signed:

The Rev. Joyce Scherer- Hooek, Rector, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Ayer
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The Rev. Susan Gaeta, Pastor, Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church

The Rev. Dr. William Bergmann, Homeowner and Ayer Resident
Priest in Charge, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Leominster

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New Hope community church Ayer