

Advocate-Oriented Talking Points for the Board of Appeals

1. Respect for Sacred Ground

- “Cemeteries are not just parcels of land — they are sacred spaces, resting places for our loved ones, and part of our community’s cultural heritage.”
- “When we start making decisions that prioritize short-term commercial gain over the dignity and integrity of a cemetery, we lose sight of what these spaces represent.”

2. Environmental Stewardship Matters

- “Removing mature trees, especially without a permit, is not consistent with the values of environmental responsibility that our city upholds.”
- “Mature trees are one of the most effective tools we have for carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, and stormwater management. Replacing them with solar panels may appear ‘green,’ but it’s a false trade-off when we lose established tree canopy.”
- “Sustainable energy shouldn’t come at the expense of cutting down the very trees that protect our environment.”

3. Rule of Law and Fair Process

- “The Diocese made a conscious choice to proceed without obtaining the required permits. That undermines the integrity of South Portland’s processes and sets a dangerous precedent.”
- “If we allow this after-the-fact appeal, we send a message that institutions can ignore the rules and ask for forgiveness later, while everyday residents are expected to follow the law.”

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4. Slippery Slope of Commercial Use

- “This is not just about trees — it’s about fundamentally changing the use of cemetery land for private, profit-driven purposes.”
- “If this five-year solar lease is approved, what’s next? More commercial projects? Expanded non-cemetery uses? We need to draw the line clearly now.”

5. Community Voice and Transparency

- “The permit process exists so neighbors and community members can weigh in before major decisions are made. That right was taken from us when these trees were cut down without permission.”
- “This Board has a responsibility to uphold transparency and ensure that public input remains central to land use decisions.”

6. There Are Better Paths to Renewable Energy

- “We all support renewable energy. But cutting mature trees in a cemetery, without community input, is not how we achieve those goals.”
- “South Portland has other locations for solar development that do not come with these ethical, environmental, and community concerns.”

Closing Appeal

“We ask this Board to reject this after-the-fact appeal. Uphold the permit process, respect our community spaces, and send a clear message that South Portland stands for transparency, environmental responsibility, and respect for our cemeteries.”