

Good Morning Everyone,

I am Mary Floyd from Bethel, former teacher, business owner, parent and grandparent, civic volunteer, and co-chair of the Bethel Conservation Commission. I am going to speak to you about the effort to conserve the area now called Carla's Meadow, which provides a scenic RT 12 entrance at the north end of Bethel Village.

In 2017, I and other Conservation Commission members, attended a Bethel Development Review Board Hearing, where a representative from Dollar General proposed building their store in a ten acre floodplain just north of Bethel Village. The representative presented a very positive picture of what Dollar General could bring to our town—an attractive building, no obtrusive lighting or construction materials, and many job opportunities. The property was owned by someone who did not live in the community and had bought the property very reasonably for development purposes.

The approximately 10 acres of open field next to the river had for many years provided an important access area where the Third Branch of the White River and its many tributaries streams from the surrounding mountainsides had dissipated flood waters during heavy rain events. It also provided a space for back-up water caused by occasional ice jams in the river to spread out safely.

It seemed obvious to the Conservation Commission and to several other Bethel citizens that the geography of the surrounding landscape, the soil types, and the structure of the railroad and Route 12, in addition to the meadow's scenic beauty, all contributed to the necessity of preserving this open landscape to allow it to continue in its important capacity.

During the long process of many hearings and open meetings, allowing a great deal of discussion with Dollar General, the property owners, state and town agencies, and residents of Bethel, Steve Libby and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition provided very valuable support.

Many months later when Dollar General withdrew from the process and the property owners then proposed a housing project at the same location, VHCC's continued support remained steady and invaluable. Their expertise and monetary support allowed the venture to eventually become possible.

The conservation of this property has allowed one of the last farmers in the town to continue mowing, and thus feeding his animals, in return for keeping the field section open. He is working with us to encourage the growth of the existing wetland area.

A river walk trail which we intend to make ADA accessible, cross country skiing and snowshoe trails have been established along the treescape near the river and through the open spaces. The Vermont Association of Snow Travelers maintains a trail through the property. The area lies very near to our school and its recreation fields and their woodland forest trails, as well as just north of the historic village center. We are working to link all of those areas.

VHCC worked with the White River Valley Partnership to determine where to plant trees to stabilize part of the river bank. The CC has plans in the spring to work with adults and students from our town's Recreation Committee to install bluebird houses. Beavers have moved into the area and built their houses on the river bank. Foxes, deer, bald eagles and song birds, and ducks and geese, continue to frequent the area.

Land conservation projects such as this one are very important to the integrity of Vermont and I urge you to fully fund the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition's request to allow them to continue to participate in and make possible successful projects such as Carla's Meadow.