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March 13, 2025

Representative Alice Emmons
Chair, House Committee on Corrections and Institutions

Dear Chairwoman Emmons,

I am writing in regards to the 60-acre parcel of land adjacent to the State Office Complex in Waterbury, which currently is owned by the state and utilized as a cornfield. This parcel is proximate to Randall and Elm Streets in Waterbury, and any efforts to mitigate the impact of future floods in Waterbury rely on the Town having ownership of the land.

Since Hurricane Irene in 2011, the Town has worked diligently to identify and implement flood mitigation projects. While there has been active and successful work to harden municipal infrastructure, we have been unable to implement any flood storage projects, which would serve the public good by actually reducing water levels in the Randall and Elm Street neighborhood, and much of South Main Street.

We have engaged with SLR International Corporation to develop an understanding of the hydrology of the Winooski River and its main tributaries in Waterbury. The cornfield is an obvious site where additional flood storage can be created. The last three floods have left substantial, and very obvious, deposits of silt in the center of the cornfield. This serves as an eternal symbol to the residents of Waterbury, who have watched while their homes flooded, yet simultaneously the cornfield grows in elevation as the alluvial deposits have accumulated. SLR's hydrologic modeling suggests eliminating these deposits would lower flood levels in the immediate area substantially – up to 1 foot. Additionally, lowering the elevation of the land would provide further benefits. In short, we believe a capital project could provide several feet of flood relief to much of Waterbury.

If the Town owned the parcel, we would seek to quickly advance a project to lower the field, reducing flood risks for hundreds of residents and businesses. Furthermore, the height of the field causes backflow pressures that interfere with the operation of our gravity fed storm sewer system. Effectively, this means that areas of downtown flood through our storm sewer system, while the river remains some distance away. Lowering the field would simultaneously abate this problem.

I am happy to answer any questions, and I thank you for your service to the people of Vermont.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Thomas Leitz", written in a cursive style.

Thomas Leitz
Waterbury Municipal Manager