

**2003 Request For Nominations
11 Most Endangered Historic Places
National Trust for Historic Preservation**

Name of Site:

**Original Site of the 1969 Woodstock Music and Arts Fair, former Yasgur's Farm
acreage, Bethel, New York**

Application From: The Woodstock Preservation Alliance
C/O Ms. Joanne Hague, Board of Directors
P.O. Box 216,
Olyphant, PA 18447

January 20, 2003

WPA Mission Statement and Purpose

The Woodstock Preservation Alliance is an assembly of people working together to perpetuate the Spirit of Woodstock. The Mission of the Preservation Alliance is to preserve the historic site of the original 1969 Woodstock Festival as an open field where all people are welcome to celebrate peace, love and music.

The WPA is a grass-roots organization in its purest form. We accept *no* direct donations or dues from anyone. We have no funds, whatsoever. We are *not* a not-for-profit organization, and we have absolutely no financial stake in the outcome of this struggle. No one is paid, and no one wants to be. We only want what is right for this important and historic icon of American history.

Purpose:

- To approach and interact with the owners of the property and with government agencies in order to ensure that they are aware of the historic nature of this land, and to persuade them to keep this land free of any structures and return it to it's natural state.
- To actively campaign for the building of the Performing Arts Center at a location other than the original 37.5-acre site.
 - To increase public awareness that this land may be built on.

COVER SHEET

DOCUMENT: Application for Nomination to America's 11 Most Endangered Historical Sites

PROJECT: The Original Woodstock Site

LOCATION: New York State Route 17B, Hurd Road,
West Shore Road, Bethel, Sullivan County, NY

SUBMITTED TO: National Trust for Historic Preservation
Office of Communications
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036

APPLICANT: The Woodstock Preservation Alliance
PO Box 216
Olyphant PA 18447

January 20, 2003

Table of Contents

Section 1: Nomination Form	7
A) Summary of Key Point Issues	8
B) Sites History	9
C) Sites Reputation and Attraction to Tourists	10
D) Importance of the Site and the Preservation Issues it Represents	11
E) Description of the Threat and What Possible Steps Can Be Taken to Eliminate the Threat	12
F) The Significance of the Threat	13
G) Viable Solutions that Would Save the Site	14
H) The Major Players	15
I) Opposition to Preserving the Site	16
J) How Listing the Site as one of <i>America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places</i> can Help Save the Site	17
K) How the National Trust Can Alleviate the Threat	18
L) The Value the National Trust Can Add to Saving the Site	19
M) Additional Comments	20
N. Contacts	21
a. The Woodstock Preservation Alliance	22
b. The Gerry Foundation	23
a) Bethel Town Officials	24
Appendix 1:	1-1
A) Statement on the Historical and Cultural Significance of the 1969 Woodstock Festival Site (<i>from the draft Environmental Impact Statement prepared by Dr. Michael Wm. Doyle, Ph.D., for the Gerry Foundation</i>)	1-3
B) Letter Received from Dr. Michael Wm. Doyle, Ph.D.	1-23
(<i>Assistant Professor and Director of the Public History Internship Program, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana</i>)	
Appendix 2:	2-1
A) Letters Written by The Woodstock Preservation Alliance	
a) Alan Gerry	2-3

b)	Governor George E. Pataki	2-5
c)	Jacob Gunther, New Your State Assembly	2-7
d)	Sullivan County Visitors Association	2-9
e)	Town of Bethel - Joint Lead Agency for the Bethel Performing Arts Center	2-10
B)	Letters Received by the Woodstock Preservation Alliance	2-15
a)	Gerry Foundation, Inc., <i>Denise Frangipane, Program Officer</i> ...	2-17
b)	Lisa Law with Release Authorization for Photographs	2-19
c)	Michael Wadleigh, Director, documentary "Woodstock"	2-21
d)	Wavy Gravy	2-23
C.	Public Support Letters (<i>Received by the Town of Bethel during periods of Public Commentary</i>)	2-25
D.	Editorials	2-115
a)	A Time Like Never Before	2-117
	<i>(The River Reporter 3/21/02)</i>	
b)	Woodstock Project Curiosities	2-221
	<i>(Times Herald-Record 4/20/02)</i>	
c)	Woodstock Should Not Be Sterilized	2-223
	<i>(Sullivan County Democrat 6/21/02)</i>	
d)	Editorial	2-225
	<i>(Sullivan County Democrat 6/25/02)</i>	
e)	Disappointed, Preservationists Weigh In	2-227
	<i>(The Towne Crier 9/23/02)</i>	
f)	A Last Chance for Bethel to Make the Right Choice	2-229
	<i>(Sullivan County Democrat 9/10/02)</i>	
g)	Woodstock Site a Historical Landmark	2-231
	<i>(Daily Gazette 1/5/03)</i>	
E)	Letters to the Editor	2-233
a)	Re: Woodstock Pleas Come To Late	2-235
b)	Woodstock, Deception, and "Killing the Goose that Laid the Golden Egg"	2-237
F)	Public Service Announcements	2-243
a)	"You Don't Have to Settle for Half a Loaf"	2-245
	<i>(Times Herald-Record 4/10/02)</i>	
b)	"Would You Build a Shopping Center Where Washington	

Crossed the Delaware?"	2-247
(<i>Times Herald-Record</i> 4/25/02)	
c) "Killing the Goose that Laid the Golden Egg"	
2-249	
(<i>The River Reporter</i> 10/24/02)	
d) "Preserving the 1969 Woodstock Site"	
2-251	
(<i>Times Herald-Record</i> 10/25/02)	
G) Press Releases	2-253
a) Woodstock Preservation Alliance Favors 634-Acre Bethel Performing Arts District, Opposes New Gerry Foundation Plan for 38-Acre '69 Woodstock Site (6/14/02)	2-255
b) Woodstock Preservation Alliance Statement on the Current Performing Arts Center E.I.S. (9/5/02)	
2-259	

Appendix 3:	3-1
A) Petition Document (as submitted to the Town of Bethel)	3-3
a) Letter to the Bethel Joint Lead Agency	3-5
<i>Impact of the Performing Arts District on the Site of the 1969 Woodstock</i> <i>Music Festival - 9/12/02</i>	
b) Letter to the Bethel Joint Lead Agency	3-9
<i>Submission of the Petitions in Support of NOT developing the 37.5 acres of</i> <i>the original Woodstock - 9/12/02</i>	
c) Petitions Submitted 9/12/02	3-11
Including Petitions Previously Submitted 5/02	3-241
d) Addendum Petitions Submitted 10/8/02	3-349
e) Addendum Petitions Submitted 10/21/02	3-401
f) Online Petition FAQ Sheet	3-435
g) Summary	3-441
h) Petitions Signed Subsequent to the Comment Periods.....	3-443
 Appendix 4:	 4-1
A. Visuals (Disc Included)	4-3
a) Credits	4-23

SUPPLEMENT: BOOK 1

**The Original Woodstock Site and the Performing Arts Center
As Seen Through The Media** (a chronicle of newspaper articles)

2003 Request for Nominations

11 MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES 2003 NOMINATION FORM

SITE INFORMATION

Name of Site The Original Woodstock Site

Address NY State Route 17B, Hurd Road, West Shore Road

City/State/Zip Sullivan County, Bethel, New York

Date Built _____ Ownership (choose one) Public Private

Owner Name Alan Gerry Gerry Foundation

Owner Address One Cablevision Center, PO Box 311, Liberty, New York 12754

Owner Phone 845-295-2440 Owner Fax 845-295-2444

Historic Designation National Historic Landmark National Register
 State/Local Designation
(choose one or more) National Register Eligible Other (explain)

NOMINATOR INFORMATION

Name of individual/group nominating site The Woodstock Preservation Alliance

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Phone 570-489-1216 E-mail Thewpa@thewoodstockspirit.org joann110@aol.com

RELEASE AUTHORIZATION

This form must be signed in order for the nomination to be considered.

We undersigned hereby gives to the National Trust for Historic Preservation a non-exclusive license to use, and to allow others to use, in whole or in part, in whatever manner the National Trust may desire, including (but not limited to) use for publicity, audiovisual presentation, and/or promotion, all photographs, videos, and other materials submitted to the National Trust in connection with the 11 Most Endangered nomination. The National Trust is hereby given permission to make any editorial changes and/or additions to the materials referred to herein as it may deem necessary or desirable for production purposes. The undersigned hereby agrees that it has the authority to grant these rights, that it has obtained any such rights necessary from third parties, including with-out limitation, models, creators, photographers, writers and producers, and that it will hold harmless and indemnify the National Trust from and against any claim brought against the National Trust from third parties that may arise out of the violation of this paragraph.

Release authorized by _____

Signature Print or type name and title

A. Provide a brief overview in 200 words or less summarizing the major key points 2 through 13 below.

The Woodstock Preservation Alliance, a grass-roots, "non-registered", not-for-profit lobby group is seeking the acceptance of the 38 acres in the Town of Bethel, Sullivan County, New York State, known worldwide as the Original Site of the 1969 Woodstock Music and Art Fair, "3 Days of Peace and Music". The 38-acre parcel of what was the farm of Max Yasgur played host to between one quarter and one half of a million people from August 15-17, 1969. The Woodstock site is a unique global landmark of considerable cultural and social significance and is inseparable from the "Woodstock Generation Spirit" of activism, equity, community, ecology, balance and the desire for a better world that played out on that 38 acres. The landmark is now slated in the Spring 2003 for development and commercialized greed through the Gerry Foundation's change in plans for the Bethel Performing Arts Center that now place the Core Activities buildings on the top third of the site and steel security fencing on its perimeter. Site owner, Alan Gerry has shown little regard for the preservation of this property and only seeks to exploit its meaning for the purpose of profit. It is the desire of the WPA, to have the Gerry Foundation see the benefits of having the Woodstock Site remain free from development and obtrusive security fencing, allowing generations to come and experience the natural beauty and meaning of this special place. The National Historic Trust's Preservation Online magazine is now in the process of producing an article that chronicles the Alliance's struggle to save this unique, cultural and historically significant living landmark. We hope that through the National Historic Trust, this travesty will be averted by acquiring qualified legal, political and preservation counsel.

B. What is the site's history? Has it been nominated or been named to other endangered lists?

The remaining 37.5 acres known as the "Original Site of the 1969 Woodstock Music and Art Fair" is the primary festival property that played host to an audience estimated between one quarter and one half of a million people from all over the United States and abroad, on August 15-17, 1969, in what is universally known as "Woodstock".

What was originally developed as a venture to raise funds for a recording studio in Woodstock NY, became the largest and most significant of the "be-in" gatherings during the 1960's. The original site, located in the Catskill foothills in the Town of Bethel, Sullivan County, New York, was part of the 630 acre farm of local dairy farmer, Max Yasgur. Following an injunction that pushed the festival from its original location in Wallkill NY, it was suggested to Woodstock Ventures by White Lake local Elliot Tiber, to approach Max Yasgur for use of his property. Festival promoter Michael Lang was immediately sold on the site shown to him by Max Yasgur. The 38 acre site at the corner of Hurd and West Shore Roads (a portion of the several hundred acres leased for camping etc), was, and still is, of pastoral magnificence. A large flat plateau for concessions, progressing towards a gently sloping alfalfa field that created a natural bowl or amphitheater. There was a rise at the bottom, perfect for a stage, and a lake in the background.

Over the next three days of the festival, what was to be a commercial venture with maximum attendance of 200,000 eventually was deemed a "free concert". Word had spread about this event so far and wide, that festival promoters could not contain the hundreds of thousands that made their way to the site. In addition, it is estimated that over one million did not make it, creating the largest traffic back-up in New York State history.

The crowd was treated to some of the top names in music of the day (Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, The Who). They also faced torrential downpours, mud, hunger and insufficient basic amenities such as toilets and shelter, in what was deemed by the state governor as a disaster area. Out of circumstance, the crowd, mainly comprised of middle class youth, endured the conditions through the counterculture's practices of caring, and sharing of all available resources, with those around them. What was seen as a dismal failure financially, was also seen as a significant cultural success for the disenfranchised youth of the late 1960's. A social experiment in communal living for three days that came to define those youth as the "Woodstock Generation". [This spectacular historic event, and its unparalleled social meaning, was captured and chronicled, in the 1970 Academy Award winning documentary, "Woodstock", directed by Michael Wadleigh.](#) Woodstock and Yasgur's farm has since remained iconic images for peace and common struggle. ---

In the years after the festival, the site remained much as it had prior to Woodstock. Following Max Yasgur's death in 1973, his wife Miriam sold off most of the original farm.

The final 38-acre "festival site" was sold in 1981 to Louis Nicky and June Gelish. It remained an undeveloped pasture for the following 15 years, with many visitors coming each day to roam those hills made famous by Michael Wadleigh's 1970 Academy Award winning documentary "Woodstock". The site was also host to yearly August pilgrimages, and impromptu Woodstock reunions, set up and run by those in attendance. In 1997, Liberty, New York cable billionaire Alan Gerry approached June Gelish to purchase the property. Mr. Gerry was successful in having his Gerry Foundation (GF) procure the original 38 acre festival site, along with over 1400 surrounding acres. His vision was to create a Bethel Performing Arts Center (PAC) on 650 acres of that property, which would include several music performance pavilions, theatres, performing arts school, music museum and marketplace. Hailed as a civic champion in Sullivan County, Mr. Gerry immediately hired architects and submitted an environmental impact statement. As well, in what was a taste of things to come, the Gerry Foundation placed wooden split-rail fencing around the site, dug trenches and placed large concrete blocks on the perimeter to prevent anyone from driving onto the field. Visitation was limited to daylight hours, stadium-style lighting was installed for night illumination and 24 hour live security and surveillance cameras were implemented to ensure that there would be no trespassing on this now "private property".

From its inception, the Gerry Foundation assured all that the legacy of this historic landmark would be preserved through the placement of all buildings onto the adjacent farmlands, leaving the Woodstock site in as natural a state as possible. These assurances were changed with the final proposal that placed the "Core Activities Buildings," which includes a museum, concessions, operational facilities and a marketplace on the top third of the upper plateau of the site. Other modifications to the site include asphalt pedestrian walkways that cut across the festival bowl. Additionally, the site's proposal indicates a steel security fencing system (most likely chain-link) encompassing the area. These plans were approved in November of 2002 and groundbreaking is planned for the spring of 2003.

Although the Woodstock Preservation Alliance has been in favor of a performing arts district, it has attempted to work with Town officials, Gerry Foundation staff, and utilize the appropriate tools of petitions, media releases, etc. to garner support, though to no avail. The site has not been nominated to or placed on any other endangered historic sites list. This will be the WPA's first experience in developing such a proposal. It is encouraged that all supporting documentation be reviewed, as the WPA's efforts to preserve this significant landmark have been tireless and ongoing.

C. How well known is the site? Is the site a tourist destination and open to the public?

The site itself is known world-wide as the place where 500,000 people gathered for 3 days of peace and music. The site (i.e. original 38 acres) is also referred to as "Yasgur's Farm" and "Woodstock" itself. The images of the site and the festival itself are thought to be indelibly connected with the struggles and ideals of the 1960's. The splendor of the pasture setting for the festival was forever made part of cultural imagery through WPA and nomination supporter Michael Wadleigh's (please see support letter in supporting documents) 1970 Oscar winning documentary. As well, supporter Lisa Law's famous photos of the site that have been featured at the Smithsonian Institute brought the historic relevance and beauty of the site to the wider public. Most who listen to popular music know about Woodstock from the song by Joni Mitchell of the same title and made famous by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young.

For the past 33 years, the site has attracted visitors from all over the world. From Canada, to Norway and Japan, visitors are drawn to the site. A site which has not been promoted by the state and locality. There are no signs on highway 17B to tell you where to go to find the site, but people still find it. Thousands every year come to see where it all happened and visit a concrete memorial that is placed at the corner of Hurd and West Shore Roads, and it is this corner that is open to the public during daylight hours. Unfortunately, the site itself is not open to visitors, and those who venture onto the field are often asked to leave by GF security. As the more commercialized versions of the original Woodstock have taken place in 1994 and 1999, interest in the original site has grown, and as the Gerry PAC comes into fruition, more visitors will come looking for the site as shown in Wadleigh's film, only to be bitterly disappointed once development is completed.

D. Why is the site important? What preservation issues does it represent? Why should people care?

The Woodstock site, in its original, undeveloped state, is important inasmuch as it is a tangible reminder of the cultural, historical and socially significant event that occurred there in 1969. Although, the event has been debated and analyzed numerous times, the site has come to symbolize the social and political climate of the late 1960's, the divisiveness of the United States over issues such as the Vietnam War, sexual liberation, freedom of speech, personal expression, and so on.

The site is also important for the success of the planned performing arts center. In communications with Mr. Wadleigh, simply put, history was made on that land. The feelings of peace, brotherhood and connectedness, that others will want to experience when coming to see the site as it was in the documentary, will be lost when the site no longer resembles what others remember it to have looked like. Man-made structures will look obtrusive or unnatural. Blacktop and cement will replace a beautiful rolling hillside. Advertising signs and storefronts will commercialize the area itself. Electrical towers and infrastructure will be evident, as well as the fumes from the congestion of cars coming to the area in a short period of time for events. Essentially, the feeling of "Getting back to the Garden" will be lost and virtually impossible to reclaim. The success of the performing arts district is hinged on the legacy of Woodstock. Current plans for exploitation is not preservation. The desire for its patrons to experience the freedom and rural garden will not be achieved with concrete buildings and chain link fences.

This natural setting, a living testimony to a time and ongoing ideals of peace, stands in stark contrast to the historically preserved battlefields of the country that remind us of a country's use of force to maintain and promote its ideals.

Why should anyone care? People's values and beliefs are often represented through the tangible things we possess and keep - mementos and symbols. There are battlefields to reflect on the cruelty and aggressiveness of mankind. There are the walled memorials with names that allow us to reflect on senseless sacrifice. There will be the eventual memorial to 9-11 that will allow reflection on terror. Where is the place to reflect on peace? Where is the place to reflect on the ideals that unity is better than divisiveness? Where is the place to celebrate hope? It is in nature. In a pasture. Something not man-made and with no need for intervention or modification. It already exists on the Woodstock site.

E. Describe the threat in more detail. What possible steps could be taken to eliminate the threat?

The original Woodstock site is the planned location for the construction of the "Core Activities" buildings for the Bethel Performing Arts Center. Although the concert bowl is expected to remain untouched, except for a permanent stage close to where the original sat, one third of the upper plateau will be developed with permanent structures. The Gerry Foundation has attempted to justify the placement of building on the site by stating that concession structures were there in 1969. In reality, concession booths and structures were temporary 2" X 4" and tree branch construction, or tents, which were removed following the festival. This is in no way comparable to the permanent concrete structures planned. The unique character of this natural, tranquil, setting will be forever altered with this type of development. In addition, the steel security perimeter fence will be contrary to the image of freedom that will be expected from this landmark. Although concerned with retaining the natural aesthetic appearance of this property, unabashed commercialization by the owner is of great concern in preserving the "unmaterialistic", simplistic, counterculture ideals encapsulated by the site. What has been disturbing to the WPA, is that \$15 million dollars of the project has been underwritten by Gov. George Pataki with public funds. This was done however at a time when Mr. Gerry had stated that he had no intentions of building on the site itself.

Light pollution has also been cited by local residents due to the presence of the existing light towers at the site. *(See Supplement 1, Item 56, Page 106)* Although, GF plans to remove these towers and replace with ones of reduced size, the nighttime lighting of the site when venues are not operating, will be intrusive to the peacefulness of this rural setting. In addition, developments of the Woodstock site will not only jeopardize the landmark, but may well place the success of the entire PAC venture into question. Given that there are several other performing arts centers in the region competing for patronage, exploitation of the only draw to that venue is short-sighted and ill-guided.

The WPA sees that the threat to this site could be eliminated through the use of alternative acreage, adjacent to or within the vicinity of the Woodstock site, to place the needed development on. As, stated, there are over 1500 acres purchased, 650 slated for the performing arts center. There is adequate space to find alternative locations for the development. The Gerry Foundation cites that other locations are on solid bedrock, which will make development too costly. Given the nature of the region's topography, the same can be said for the geological makeup of the Woodstock site. It, too, has its fair share of solid bedrock under the layer of topsoil. This argument from GF does not seem to have much credibility.

F. How significant is the threat?

The threat of development is imminent. The Town of Bethel has accepted the Gerry Foundation's PAC proposal, which includes the development of the Woodstock site. It has been clearly stated several times by Bethel Town Supervisor Allan Scott in local papers, that ground is expected to break in the spring of 2003. Uncertain of how that will translate into the initial development phase, it is probable that the security fencing may be erected in those places and will obstruct the traffic from construction equipment. Hence the allure and draw of the original site will have begun its transformation.

G Describe a viable solution that would save the site.

As stated in the response to question 5, the Gerry foundation has over 1500 purchased acres surrounding the Woodstock site that are viable alternative locations to building directly on the property itself. The Woodstock Preservation Alliance has had contact with the landowners and the Town of Bethel, to try to impress upon them that alteration and development of the site is not a "local" issue, and historic nature of the landmark is one that is hinged upon having it remain free and open as possible. We have also impressed upon them, that an investment in re-developing the layout for the PAC is a worthwhile investment of time and resources. Without a re-thinking of structure placement in the venue, the project itself may be jeopardized.

The Gerry Foundation understands that groups such as the WPA want the PAC to be a success, and as socially conscious activists who carry on the "Woodstock Spirit", we would be a valuable asset to the promotion of a venue that has appropriately preserved this unique landmark. Our desire to have open discussions with the Gerry Foundation to express our concerns in a productive, cooperative manner, and develop solutions that will meet everyone's needs, has never yielded any results. We would like to think that viable solutions could be achieved through dialogue. This is where the National Historic Trust could be of assistance.

H. Who are the major preservation players?

Applicant: **Woodstock Preservation Alliance (WPA)**: A non-registered grass-roots organization dedicated to lobbying for the preservation of the Woodstock site as an undeveloped, open green space as a living monument to peace and music, for visitors to enjoy, for generations to come.

<http://thewoodstockspirit.org/>

Friends of Yasgur's Farm: A non-structured informational website that works in conjunction with the WPA to create awareness of the current PAC issues.

<http://wayneg.homepc.org/>

Woodstock Nation Foundation: A group who desires the site to remain free and has engaged the Gerry Foundation in legal litigation over the validity of property's sale to Mr. Gerry.

<http://www.woodstocknation.org/>

I. Who opposes preservation of the site?

Owners: Allan Gerry and the Gerry Foundation: Although they will defend that they are indeed preserving the site, it is more obvious that they wish to use the Woodstock site as a draw to the performing arts center in what can be seen as a profit-making venture. Alan Gerry has said that he visualizes the project as creating a Branson-style entertainment Mecca. This is very contrary to the spirit of the Woodstock site.

Town of Bethel, Council and Planning Boards: The town is eager to get construction underway at any cost. The town has struggled economically for decades and views this development as positive for themselves and the county. This is a town which was embroiled in debate over the idea of placing the statement "Home of the Original 1969 Woodstock Festival" on the town sign. Historically, Bethel has rejected and distanced itself from the memory of the Woodstock festival. In 1971, they turned down Max Yasgur's offer of selling the site to the Town as a tourist spot for one dollar. Seeing how the town of Woodstock NY has prospered from an event that did not take place in their town, the people of Bethel are more than happy to capitalize, now, on the legacy of Woodstock and develop property that they are ambivalent about at best.

J. How would listing the site on the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places List help save the site?

The WPA, as earlier stated, is a grass-roots organization made up of volunteers from many walks of life. We do not collect dues and have no access to qualified legal consultation. One of the goals for this application, aside from the obvious promotion of awareness, is that we may attract funding and qualified legal council to assist us on an ongoing basis. It is difficult to compete with a corporation whose resources far outweigh those of our volunteer assembly.

Secondly, the WPA has had to deal with biased, incorrect, reporting of the facts in the media. It is hoped that having the site placed on the list, fair and accurate information about the issue can be brought forward to the public who can then make up their own minds. Through our campaigning, we have found that a great number of individuals, both in the general public and connected with the original festival (e.g. Photographer Lisa Law, Hog Farm leader Wavy Gravy, Woodstock film director Michael Wadleigh) were completely unaware of the planned development on the site. Although the WPA has made many attempts to have the issue expressed in the media, the preservation issue remains almost unknown. That seems to suit the Gerry Foundation just fine.

K. Other than listing the site, how can the national Historic Trust Alleviate the threat?

Aside from merely listing the site, the National Historic Trust could assist with professional and knowledgeable guidance in making the outcome our preservation attempts more positive. Through the provision of legal council or the recommendation of qualified pro bono council, our preservation attempts could hold more weight and even enter into the playing field with the Gerry Foundation. In addition to the site's listing on the Endangered List, we would hope to receive guidance in applying to have the Woodstock site granted status as a national landmark in the registry.

L. How has the National Trust been involved to date? What value can the National Historic Trust add to saving the site? What role, if any is there for the National Historic Trust if the site is put on the list? Other than placement on the list, is there another role for the National Trust?

To date the national Historic Trust has not been formally involved with this issue. In December 2002, the WPA was contact by Liz Benjamin from "Preservation Online", the website of Preservation Magazine put out by the National Historic site. A story is being written for the magazine that follows the efforts to save the original Woodstock site. Although the article is still pending release, the WPA hopes that the Historic Trust continues with its interest in this issue so that responsible reporting of the facts can be brought to a wider audience.

We have outlined our desire for the National Trust to assist in enabling the WPA to acquire qualified legal and preservation counsel and we see that as more of a possibility should the site's nomination be accepted. We would also hope that the National Trust would assist the WPA in opening doors to dialogue with the Gerry Foundation, the Town of Bethel and the Sullivan County Visitor's Association to ensure the landmark is appropriately preserved and that the venue itself promotes the spirit of preservation for the site and its meaning.

M. Provide and additional comments/ recommendations.

The Woodstock preservation Alliance has provided substantial supporting documentation that we hope will add value to our application submission. In the various Appendices, you will find documents such as The Statement of Historical Significance from the draft Environmental Impact Statement prepared by Dr. Michael Doyle, Ph.D., for the Gerry Foundation. Dr. Doyle also submits a letter to the WPA outlining his concerns with the changes made in the development plan which places structures on the site itself when Dr. Doyle's team was assured that this would not occur. This can be found in Appendix 1.

Other additional support materials include public support letters sent to the Town of Bethel during the periods of Public Commentary. (See Appendix 2, Section C) There are also notable support statements from those closely associated with the Woodstock event and the site on which it happened. Letters from Woodstock Documentary director Michael Wadleigh, prolific photographer Lisa Law, whose Woodstock photos have been features at the Smithsonian, and Wavy Gravy, icon of the 60's counterculture and philanthropic champion of current social causes are found in Appendix 2, Section B.

All statements made by the Woodstock Preservation Alliance to the press (i.e. editorials, public service announcements etc.) pertaining to the preservation struggle are also found in Appendix 2.

We have also added the petition document gathered in support of preserving the site. That can be found in Appendix 3, and photos that show the magnificence of the Woodstock site and its history are found in Appendix 4. (Photos are also on disk included)

Finally, we have also compiled a chronicle of newspaper articles that recount the story of the Woodstock Site, from the sale of Yasgur's Farm to the current plans of the Gerry Foundation, and the opposition to it. This can be found in Supplement, Book 1.

We at the Woodstock Preservation Alliance hope that the National Historic Trust find the application document(s) thorough. Nominating the Original 1969 Woodstock site in Bethel, NY to the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places List, will certainly carry us further in our struggle to preserve this unique landmark.

Any further questions and/or comments can be directed to either Ms. Joanne Hague at the number cited at the top of the document, or, to the WPA Board of Directors directly via email at TheWPA@TheWoodstockSpirit.org. We encourage the members of the selection committee to visit us at WWW.TheWoodstockSpirit.org.

Sincerely,

Ms. Joanne Hague for the WPA
Board of Directors

CONTACT INFORMATION

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