

**Vermont
Housing &
Conservation
Board**



58 East State Street
Montpelier
Vermont 05602

TEL 802 828 3250
FAX 802 828 3203
WEB www.vhcb.org
EMAIL info@vhcb.org

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July 7, 2016

Seth Gardner, Chair
East Montpelier Selectboard
East Montpelier Municipal Office Bldg.
40 Kelton Road
East Montpelier, VT 05651

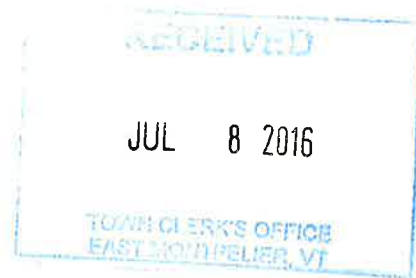
Dear Mr. Gardner,

I'm writing in my capacity as the director of the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board about the proposed conservation of the former Lyle Haven/Drake Road farm parcel now owned by Fairmont Farms and a trail easement to the Cross Vermont Trail. In recent news stories there appears to be some confusion about the Board's role in communication through the Vermont Land Trust with your community. To the extent that the Board has contributed to this confusion please accept my sincere apologies.

Over many years, VHCB and the Town of East Montpelier have had a strong partnership in the conservation of 12 parcels totaling 2,120 acres. VHCB has provided more than \$1.68 million in federal and state funds for these efforts prior to the Lyle Haven proposal. We also worked many years ago with the Housing Foundation, Inc. in the purchase of the former Sandy Pines mobile home park and upgrading of infrastructure at that park. We also provided some feasibility assistance to a group that was looking to develop elder housing in town, although that project has not yet come to fruition.

As you know, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board met on June 16th to consider the first phase of the Lyle Haven proposal. At that time it was our understanding that the community was quite supportive of this conservation effort and particularly the trail easement. VHCB has worked over numerous years with the Cross Vermont Trail Association with a goal that they will be able to re-create a right-of-way through East Montpelier connecting Montpelier and the former rail bed to the East. East Montpelier Trails, Inc. also contributed equally to this project. It was our understanding that the Town was on board with this effort and that the committee that oversees your conservation fund voted to recommend \$6,000 towards this effort. The Board's consideration and agreement to fund this proposal was based upon that understanding.

It appears in a follow up discussion with your Town Administrator that the Selectboard felt you did not have sufficient time to consider this request. I have advised the Vermont Land Trust that it is critically important to provide sufficient notice to any community so they can let us know of their concerns about conservation efforts. I also had the opportunity to speak with Jean Vissering, the Chair of your Planning Commission. Ms. Vissering advised me that the



Commission is currently working on how to strengthen the village and make affordable homes possible.

We understand that a future application for protection of additional farm parcels owned by Fairmont Farms, closer to the village, may pose issues of whether the conservation or development is the best strategy for the entire parcel. I've asked our Agricultural Director, Nancy Everhart, to attend a future planning commission meeting. As we have with other communities, we will be sensitive to concerns of the town that we are conserving the right parcels consistent with the Town Plan.

Overall, we believe our efforts with East Montpelier to conserve more than 2,000 acres of your working landscape in perpetuity will have long-term public benefits for agriculture, for climate change, for recreation, and for your community's well established trail system. VHCB's funding is limited and highly competitive. Town support is an important consideration in our deliberations. We hope the Selectboard would reconsider its decision so that our partnership can remain strong.

I'd be happy to meet with the Selectboard at a mutually convenient time but certainly will do all that I can to make sure we are in close communication with your planning commission and that decisions affecting the town are brought to you in a timely manner.

Sincerely,



Gus Seelig
Executive Director

Cc: Bruce Johnson, East Montpelier Town Administrator
Jean Vissering, Chair, East Montpelier Planning Commission
Richard Hall, Fairmont Farms
Britt Haselton, Vermont Land Trust