



# The 1969 Woodstock Site: A Long Time Gone?

The planning board in the Town of Bethel is weighing the cost of preservation against the promise of economic development at Yasgur's Farm, the site of the Woodstock Music and Arts Fair.

Recent meetings have attracted standing-room-only crowds, nearly equally split between those supporting plans to build a performing arts center, and those who feel the site should remain as open space.

Alan Gerry, a Sullivan County resident who made his fortune through Cablevision Industries Corporation, has launched plans to build a \$46 million performing arts center project, funded by the Gerry Foundation but including more than \$15 million in governmental support.

The Bethel Woods Performing Arts Center would be built on a 634-acre parcel of land which includes the 38-acre Woodstock site, and would feature a 4,000-seat covered pavilion, an interpretive center and a museum to tell the Woodstock story, permanent open-air farm market buildings, parking and infrastructure. Later phases of construction would create a 650-seat community theatre, formal concert hall, music school and conference center.

However, Artie Kornfeld, one of the original festival's promoters, wants to "preserve the Woodstock Nation."

In a statement read at a March 2004 planning board meeting, the man known as the Father of Woodstock urged the planning board to "Keep the buildings off the original 38 acres – it's gonna take away the magic."

The Woodstock Preservation Alliance (WPA) echoes

Kornfeld's sentiment. The grassroots group organized 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." According to Joanne Hague, the WPA has undertaken petition drives, letter writing campaigns, and public service announcements to increase public awareness that the Woodstock site may be developed. "Over the last several months," said Hague, "we have directed all of our focus to the articles and principles of good preservation practices – and our concern over the lack thereof."

Glenn Pontier, a spokesman for the Gerry Foundation, notes that the Woodstock site "is not significant because it grew alfalfa, but because of the event that was held on it." He maintains that Mr. Gerry wants to develop the performing arts center "for the people

of Sullivan County, but the WPA objects to any change to the field."

The Woodstock Preservation Alliance has support for their position from a leader in the field of historic preservation: Dr. Michael Doyle of Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. Doyle was hired to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement on behalf of the Gerry Foundation, and "concluded that the site was of major significance on the local, state, national and even international levels."

According to Doyle, "It is a staple of good preservation planning that no new permanent structures should be erected within unaided eyesight of a historic site where alternate locations may be found within a reasonable distance."

Doyle continued, "I think the concept of the proposed Bethel Woods Performing Arts Center is sound. If done in the most sensitive fashion, their project can preserve a site of major historical importance while contributing to sorely needed economic development of Sullivan County."

In a document submitted in April to the Bethel Planning Board, the Gerry Foundation, and State and Federal agencies, the WPA

outlined its argument for the preservation of the central and most important part of the 1969 Woodstock Festival site as a place of national historical significance.

In this document, the WPA noted that "This unique piece of twentieth-century history, if properly preserved,

will serve as a living link to one of America's most studied and influential eras – the 1960s – while affording an enterprising local foundation the opportunity to create an engine of economic development for the Catskills region."

The Gerry Foundation, which has already significantly altered its plans in response to concerns raised by preservationists, has pledged to do "what law requires and morality demands."

In the meantime, Woodstock co-creator Kornfeld, 60s legend Wavy Gravy, Woodstock movie director Michael Wadleigh and the members of the WPA plan to continue their efforts to ensure that the Woodstock site remains in its nearly pristine, historically significant condition.

*For more information about the Woodstock Preservation Alliance, visit [www.thewoodstockspirit.org](http://www.thewoodstockspirit.org).*

