

# WLCT Strategic Plan 2022-27

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2022

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Westport Land Conservation Trust, Inc.





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# WLCT Strategic Plan 2022-2027

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*Berry Hill Farm, a 2022 WLCT Land Preservation Project*

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# A message from our leadership

To the Westport Community,

Since 1972, we are honored to have supported the preservation of over 5,000 acres of the best of Westport! Five years ago, we launched a capital campaign to intensify our preservation efforts and it was a tremendous success. WLCT raised over \$17 million dollars to protect almost 1,000 acres in that time including the

transformation of the St. Vincent de Paul Camp into Westport's first community park and the permanent protection of the iconic Santos Farm on Main Road. While we are thrilled at the success of the campaign, there is more to be done and the next five years are crucial.



In 2021, WLCT launched an effort to establish a new five-year strategic plan guiding our pace of preservation, creating a plan for sustainable growth, and reaching new heights for connecting people to the land. Westport is a desirable place to live and a boom in real estate development is threatening our special natural resources and farmland. The community has identified the need to conserve working farmland, water resources including streams and brooks leading to the river, and prime habitat. We remain focused on partnering with willing landowners to preserve these key resources.

WLCT's land preservation efforts have flourished, resulting in over 1,600 acres of WLCT-owned land of which 690 acres have been acquired and opened to the public in the last ten years. We are committed to responsible stewardship of these resources balancing their ecological significance with public enjoyment. Our stewardship program has grown with additional staff, the Tuesday Trail Team volunteer group and a strong financial foundation of endowment support from the campaign. In the next five years, it will be crucial for WLCT to maintain this stewardship program growth as we seek to connect more people to these landscapes.

Recently, WLCT has expanded our programming and opportunities to encourage connection with the land. In 2020, WLCT launched a Land Connection Committee to focus on providing more opportunities to explore and learn about the land. The next five years offer an opportunity to use Westport Woods Conservation Park as a core learning resource for the community and a launching point for these efforts. New partnerships, and a goal to expand programs will be crucial in the next five years as we seek to inspire the next generation of conservationists.

We are excited to serve the Westport community and for the future of WLCT. This strategic plan articulates our goals for the next five years as we strive for continued preservation and a deeper connection to the land. We appreciate your support and encourage you to get out and explore all Westport has to offer!

Sincerely,

Trip Millikin (*former WLCT President*) & Tina Schmid (*WLCT President*)



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# Commitment to community

As one of the few surviving coastal farming communities in Massachusetts, Westport is a special place. All who live, work, visit and recreate in our coastal landscape treasure its bountiful resources. Generations of families have farmed the land, fished the waters, and cared deeply for the connection Westport has provided its people. In 1972, the Westport Land Conservation Trust (WLCT) was founded to preserve these resources for the enjoyment of future generations.

Today, our commitment to preserving the best of Westport is as strong as ever thanks to the Westport community. WLCT, supported by the Town, the community, and many others has protected more than 5,000 acres of forests, water resources, and farmland. Entering our 50th year, WLCT's work continues to evolve to meet the demands of a community eager to preserve its beauty, conserve the bountiful farmland, connect to the land, and steward these resources in a responsible way.

WLCT's commitment to the Westport community in the next five years is the following:

1. Preserve the best of Westport with a focus on protecting vital ecological resources, contributing to the local economy, preserving the community's long-standing agricultural heritage, and ensuring the conservation of critical resources in anticipation of continued climate change
2. Connect the community to Westport's unique natural resources through interactive programs, recreation, and education to encourage a sense of ownership and inspire the next generation of conservationists
3. Steward Westport's unique natural resources through responsible land management, consultative management of restricted land, capacity building partnerships with our local community, and exacting and strategic fiscal management



# What does WLCT do?



## WHAT

- **Preserve the best of Westport**
- **Connect the community to Westport's unique natural resources**
- **Steward the land for habitat, people and climate resiliency**



## WHY

- **Legacy:** For the enjoyment of future generations
- **Health:** Clean Air, Water, Land and Food
- **Fun:** Outdoor exploration can build community
- **Ecology:** Preserve unique resources that other communities have lost
- **Climate:** Conserve and Steward resources for a more resilient Westport



## HOW

- **Land Acquisition:** WLCT purchases land
- **Private Land Easements:** Conservation Easements or Agricultural Preservation Easements in perpetuity on private land
- **Programs & Events:** WLCT hosts programs and events to inspire a greater connection to the land
- **Fiscal Management:** Provide operational stability to ensure long term fiscal health
- **Stewardship:** WLCT actively stewards land utilizing innovative best practices balancing habitat and people

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# Strategic Focus 2022-2027

WLCT's efforts to preserve the best of Westport accelerated over the past two decades and remain the primary focus of our work. Today, Westport is no longer a "hidden treasure" and the community seeks to preserve its iconic landscape with a balance towards smart, strategic growth. WLCT has partnered with various community members, organizations and Town governing bodies to identify characteristics that embody the "best of Westport." We will continue this steadfast focus in the next five years while also launching new initiatives.

Since the beginning of WLCT's last strategic plan, the organization has preserved an additional 1,000 acres of which over 500 is owned and managed by WLCT, including Westport Woods Conservation Park- our new flagship resource. This has required growth in our Stewardship program and inspired a vision for the next five years to increase people's knowledge and appreciation of these special resources. We believe we are at a critical juncture for Westport's future, and it is essential to connect the next generation to a legacy of environmental stewardship inspiring them to be the region's next conservationists.

**With these ideas in mind, WLCT has a vision for the next five years that includes:**

1. **Preserve** the best of Westport with heightened focus on unprotected resources, an active pace of conservation and continued collaboration with the community and key partners
2. **Connect** more people, including a more diverse range of people to the land, through new innovative programs/events, interactive spaces, expansion of access and future youth programming
3. **Steward** WLCT's 1,600 acres of fee-owned land through increased resources and efficiency with a continued focus on balancing native habitats with active public use and agricultural viability
4. **Grow** our capacity to provide high quality service to the Westport community by expanding our annual operating revenues, executing new fundraising strategies, and recruiting new partners or volunteers to serve at varying levels across the organization



# Goals & Actions

**GOAL: PRESERVE** the best of Westport with heightened focus on unprotected resources, an active pace of conservation and continued collaboration with the community and key partners

## ACTIONS:

- Conduct outreach to at least six landowners each year through individual conversations and landowner workshops
- Identify key funding sources for specific projects including new state and federal funds intended to create climate resiliency, improve infrastructure, and others
- Collaborate with the Town of Westport, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources and others to preserve prime agricultural soils and working farms for future food production
- Further refine farmland preservation model to continue the conservation of working farmland while also facilitating its continued private ownership and contribution to the local agricultural economy
- Facilitate a conversation with Town officials as it relates to conservation priorities set forth in the Town's Master Plan
- Build relationships with key funders to grow financial capacity to maintain a high pace of land preservation
- Create a communications strategy to elevate WLCT's land preservation "story" to achieve greater public understanding and support of our vision





# Goals & Actions

**GOAL: CONNECT** more people, including a more diverse range of people to the land, through new innovative programs/events, opening of the Westport Woods Learning Center, expansion of access and future youth programming

## ACTIONS:

- Increase the Land Connection Committee to at least 10 members to facilitate growth in ideas, volunteerism, and management of learning center docent program
- Increase WLCT staffing capacity to one full-time equivalent employee dedicated to connecting people to the land through directed endowment funds
- Provide a comprehensive public program/event calendar to be finalized in the last quarter of each year for the subsequent year which includes at least two monthly programs and an annual public signature event
- Initiate a new school and youth visit program to Westport Woods Conservation Park using existing relationships with local schools and after-school/youth programs, including the Fall River Public Schools
- Further collaborate with diverse local and regional partners (including Westport Watershed Alliance, Buzzards Bay Coalition, Westport Historical Society, and more) to offer programs on WLCT properties and heighten WLCT's presence during partner programming
- Develop a volunteer docent program to serve as hosts for the Westport Woods Learning Center with a three day per week operating schedule
- Collaborate with the Town of Westport's disabilities commission and other appropriate parties to identify opportunities to expand access for all persons to the land connection program





# Goals & Actions

**GOAL: STEWARD** WLCT's 1,600 acres of fee-owned land through increased resources and efficiency with a continued focus on balancing native habitats with active public use and agricultural viability

## ACTIONS:

- Increase the stewardship program's capacity by creating at least two new partnerships with local organizations or institutions that can provide volunteers or interns
- Create recommendations for public access and environmental stewardship priorities on new acquisitions
- Continue to refine and grow the Trail Team model with new engagement tools and efficiencies
- Establish a new "property ambassador" volunteer model
- Create a communications strategy that articulates and illustrates WLCT's stewardship program efforts while utilizing the website as a foundational tool
- Create two new opportunities to expand access for all persons on WLCT properties
- Create and complete management plans for Herb Hadfield Conservation Area, Westport Woods Conservation Park, and Dunham's Brook Conservation Area
- Establish formal, long-term goals for various WLCT active and fallow agricultural fields



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# Goals & Actions

**GOAL: GROW** WLCT capacity to provide high quality service to the Westport community by increasing annual operating revenues, executing new fundraising strategies, and recruiting new partners or volunteers to serve at varying levels across the organization

## ACTIONS:

- Create an organization-wide recruitment strategy emphasizing a vibrant BOD/Committee/Membership that is a reflection of the communities we serve with a focus on cultivating the next generation of leadership
- Recruit at least five new members to WLCT committees each year and elevate qualified candidates to the Board of Directors
- In year one, create a projected fiscal growth plan incorporating targets for annual revenues, endowment growth and exploring other revenue opportunities
- Grow the WLCT membership by 20% over the next five years
- Increase the annual operating revenues by a total of 5% annually
- Raise \$1,000,000 for a community connections endowment to support the necessary staffing for WLCT's Land Connection goals
- Create a formal Legacy Giving program for planned giving
- Refine WLCT's major giving strategy and focus on increasing the total number of individual annual gifts over \$1,000 by 50%
- Create an annual event or slate of programs to more deeply engage our members





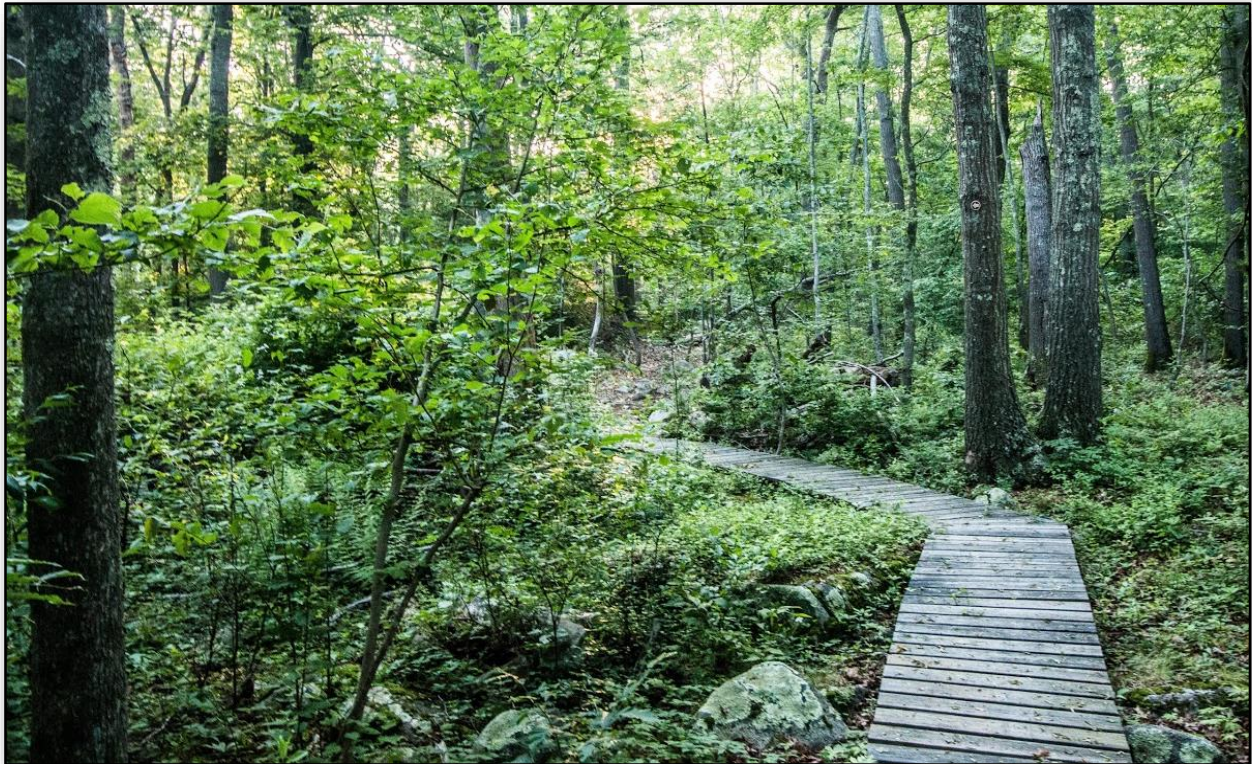
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# THANK YOU!

Thank you for all you do to preserve the best of Westport! WLCT is honored to be the facilitator of the Westport community's connection to the land. The preservation of Westport's special places is all made possible by your support and generosity. We thank you in advance for your continued support as we embark on the next five years.

As a community, we will continue to preserve land, connect people to the land and steward these resources for the betterment of Westport. The preservation of farmland will ensure locally produced food. The conservation of forestland and wetland resources will support clean air and water. Public programs and events will ensure a connection to the special resources that generations have preserved. And stewarding these resources with innovative land management strategies will ensure their vigor for future generations.

Let's continue to work together to ensure a thriving Westport and a future full of conservationists!



**Special thanks to the WLCT Strategic Planning Committee:  
*Trip Millikin, Charles "Spinner" Findlay, Kate Schmitt & John Patterson***