

Westport Land Conservation Trust
51st Annual Meeting
May 18, 2023 at 5:30pm
Westport Grange #181

41 members present

Executive Director, Ross Moran, welcomes everyone to the Westport Land Conservation Trust's 51st Annual Meeting. Our work in the past year has not been possible without everybody present.

Pass to Tina Schmid.

Welcome, everybody, to our 51st Annual Meeting. We're so grateful you could come, and we're so grateful for all of your support. It really makes us the organization that we are.

First: some housekeeping. Our clerk, Kate Neave, is not here today, so Steve McGuinness will be filling in. We're going to start off by voting on the minutes from last year, May 19, 2022. Do I have a motion? *Tim Vanech makes a motion to approve last year's Annual Meeting Minutes. Trip Millikin seconds. All approve.*

President's Report:

What a past year it has been. Incredible! I just wanted to share some highlights with you. First of all, we have a very strong membership. And, in fact, our membership count is 700 memberships. That is a 40% increase from four years ago! We put on many programs this year. We partnered with various organizations; the Westport REC department, Westport Historical Society, WRWA, New Bedford Whaling Museum, The Trustees, New Bedford Boys & Girls Club, all in an effort to further connect with the community and to foster the next generation of conservationists here in Westport.

We have an incredible partnership with the Historical Society at Mill Pond where there's a lot of opportunity to learn about the mills in that area. Today, over at Westport Town Farm, is a mishoon burn, which you can learn more about. Stewardship is so much a part of what we do, and we had many special projects this year, but one of the highlights is what's been going on at Westport Woods. A new accessible path has been put in for wheelchair and stroller accessibility so everyone can easily access nature, the woods, and open space just as everybody else can. We have a new outdoor classroom, new components to the Children's Discovery Garden, and a lot of new native plantings.

Westport Woods Conservation Park

Now, land preservation is such an important part of what we do and, this year, one of the most exciting things is that Westport Woods has gone from being 82 acres to 140 acres! The initial acquisition was from the Diocese of Fall River St. Vincent de Paul location. Then we added a parcel which was 9 acres. Then we added another parcel which was about 20 acres. And then that connected us to 20 acres we already owned, so that's how we've gone from 82 acres to 140 acres. Right now there are three miles of trails at Westport Woods. Starting in the fall, there will be a lot more trail work (Thank you, Tuesday Trail Team, in advance!). We will end up with 6 miles of trails, so it will double the experience for visitors.

Berry Hill Farm

Another major, exciting project we had this year was Berry Hill Farm. I feel especially attached to that because my family has been buying blueberries from Berry Hill for 30-40 years. Bob Peirce took the farm over from his parents. Bob decided that he wanted to retire, so, with the help of the Town, the Manton Foundation, and many of you, the Land Trust was able to acquire it, put a restriction on it for agricultural focus, get an RFP to vet different farmers who might be the right ones to own the property, and, about a month ago, resold it to Adam and Carissa Davenport of Town Farm Tonics. They produce tonic using berries that they have purchased. Now

they're going to grow the berries and expand into blueberry tonic! And we'll be able to buy blueberries from them, as well as blueberry vinegars.

Kirby Brook Coldwater Fishery Resource

Another very exciting land conservation project was a wonderful donation from Steve Fletcher and Michael Walden; a Conservation Restriction (CR) on property off of Drift Road. Running through the property is 1,000 feet of the Kirby Brook Coldwater Fishery Resource designated by the state of Massachusetts. As recent as 2021, native trout were identified at the mouth of the brook just several hundred feet from this property. We have many more projects underway.

Community Connection Endowment

Last year was our 50th anniversary and, most of you know, we had a campaign for that. That campaign was really designed to support the vision of our 2022 strategic plan. It was very successful thanks to you, and thanks to a lot of other donors. The funds that we raised last year - or had committed for projects - plus the value of the land donations that were given totaled \$3.7 million. I really wanted to give a shout out and say THANK YOU to everyone who was involved. A lot of that really supported land preservation, but another major program this supported was the Community Connection Endowment. We applied for a grant to the Manton Foundation and we were awarded \$500,000 in the spring. It was a 1:1 matching grant used to create an endowment to support our program of connecting our community to land, to nature, and to the Land Trust. The purpose of this was to support staffing of one individual, as well as program expenses. I'm extremely excited to announce today that we have raised our part of the \$500,000. The next time you see the financials for next year, it will be close to \$1 million.

Staffing Update

I wanted to welcome Charlotte Greason our new Communications and Development Coordinator. You may know Jennifer Dubois, who is now a part-time consultant for us as well as other organizations. Mather Hoyt was in charge of our programming and worked part time. He is now an intern with the US Forest Service in Alaska! Liz Hubert has helped us out a lot on a part-time basis. Thank you for being with us for 10 years! Nate, thank you for stewarding our land and doing stewardship activities. Pam, our Office and Accounting Administrator, could not be here tonight. Our Executive Director, Ross, is here. Thank you so much for everything you do.

Pass back to Ross.

Executive Director's Report:

I wanted to thank everyone for everything they do. Last year, we launched a new 5-year strategic plan based on the pillars of our organization: preserve, connect, steward, and grow. These are the obvious things that we do. Our hallmark has always been preservation. We've supported the protection of over 5,100 acres here in Westport. Stewardship has slowly become a hallmark of what we do. We're lucky enough to have Brendan join us, who was our first, real full-time Stewardship Manager and Nate has taken it to a whole different level. We're doing all this great work, and one of the things we identified when doing the strategic plan is to tell our story. Even though we're a small organization, and we've done a lot here in Town, there are still people in this Town who have no idea what we do or why we do it, so our goal over the course of the next five years is to do a better job telling our story and opening our doors. This year we've done a lot more programming. Our *Land Connection Committee* has grown significantly in the last year and now offers a calendar of events with 32 events throughout the year.

There's a mishoon burn right now at Town Farm which we're so thrilled to partner with the Westport Cultural Council, the Watershed Alliance (WRWA), and the Sheehan Family Foundation. What is a mishoon? It's a traditional, indigenous, Wampanoag canoe where they burn out a log over the course of, potentially, 7 to 10 days. They're doing it faster this time! The lead artist, Anawan, is a Wompanoag tribe member, and the

supporting artist, Andre, is a Nipmuc tribe member. Both of them just bring tremendous cultural experience to it. The act of burning the canoe is really awesome, but the atmosphere they create around it is really amazing. It's things like this that we want to host because it creates an opportunity to have conversations with people about the land, and to help people interact with the land. Those are just some examples of things that we really want to focus on as we continue to tell the story of our organization.

We also have this really spectacular place called Westport Woods, where we've been slowly building this campus now for three years! We've built an accessible pathway, we have a learning center that is setup very much like a classroom. We've slowly started bringing people into it this year, but the hope is, over the next year or two, that we can do more. We want folks to be welcomed in, and to understand why it's important to get out on the land and embrace it.

Land preservation isn't going away at all. In fact, we're probably in one of the most active times over the last 5 to 6 years for land protection. We've done well over 1,000 acres in the last 6 years, which is pretty amazing. We have a few projects leftover from *last* year that we're closing *this* year. We had an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) that is going on a property off of Mouse Mill Road and Gifford Road. An APR is the same thing as a CR but focused on agriculture. The farmer owns about 34 acres or so, and is going to continue to own it, but they have decided to preserve it so it can forever be in agriculture. We have a Conservation Restriction off of Sodom Road that is being donated on a 75 acre farm. We also have another Conservation Restriction off Horseneck Road, about 43 acres closing in the very near future. And then we have some that are coming up, and I can't quite say what it is! Potentially another 20 acre piece that has tillable soil we can reactivate and get a farmer on. In our process of saving farmland, we have discovered this huge demand for local agriculture. We'll continue to focus on that as an organization, and do our best to consult with other communities who are finding that they have the same thing as us; farm land is greatly threatened because it is the easiest and the most valuable land.

Stewardship

We have some really spectacular projects that, unfortunately for Nate, happen all at once! We were commiserating about the fact that the month of May is all Stewardship Special Projects. One of those was that we created an outdoor classroom at Westport Woods last year to engage our schools, and work with partners like WRWA and others. There's also a need to have it a little bit closer to the schools. For a few years now, Dunham's Brook Conservation Area, which has a 14-acre corn field, has had a tricky entrance that's gotten worse over time. Unfortunately it has become such a huge challenge to farm that land effectively so we applied for a state grant through Mass Wildlife to return that field to a more natural state. Starting this spring we're creating a meadow/shrub space in there that will attract rare species. We're really excited to share this 14-acre restoration project. On top of that, Nate is working with a few folks to create better habitat on some small fields we own across town. Lastly, Tina alluded to us expanding the trails at Westport Woods. One of the series that

we offer this year as a program is actually a “behind the scenes” program I host looking at new trails, and getting a preview of them. That will be exciting in the fall.

Land Preservation

We got 224 acres under agreement last year. 86 of those closed. Then we’re working on closing some of the projects I talked about before. We hope to put another 60 or so [acres] on top of that. If we can close all that in two years – almost 300 acres – that would be great!

More than anything, I encourage you to join one of our programs this year. We now offer a whole variety of them. Thank you very much. I’ll pass it off to Patti who will talk briefly about the numbers.

Pass to Patti Cerilli

Treasurer’s Report

Now we’re going to get into the financial business! I’d like to walk you through the summary for the annual report. These numbers are preliminary. We are currently going through our audit. We’re not anticipating any major adjustments to these numbers. Financially, our operating budget is not as big as you would think given all the work that we are doing. We received a significant amount of contributions last year at \$1.2 million, which is 74% of our revenue. That is then followed by our Annual Fund. We significantly rely on the Annual Fund because that helps support all of our operations. We raised \$284,000 last year, which is *great*. That’s about 17% of our income, and it keeps growing. After that, we had our Membership Drive which brought in \$65,000, about 4% of our revenue. We still want that to keep growing. And then the \$75,000 remainder was grants from the state and such for special projects. One of them is BayCoast Bank for the internship we’re able to offer every year. That’s an overall picture of the basic income side of it.

The bulk of our spending is on land acquisition, which is where we want to be spending our money. Our Management, General Operating and Fundraising expense percentages are very small; 12 and 5%. That means all of the money collected is going right back into the land and the programs. That’s a summary of the year.

We had a number of restricted funds. Community Connections Endowment is \$438,011 and will be growing thanks to Tina’s nice announcement today. Founders Stewardship Endowment is now at \$1.5 million, which we draw from for some of our operations. This year has been a very big year for the Land Trust. We’ve accomplished a lot, work very efficiently, and stay within budget for the year.

Pass Kate Schmitt.

Governance Committee Report

Good afternoon, everyone. As you can tell, we are an enthusiastic bunch. We really like working with each other. I have the great pleasure of serving as the chairperson for WLCT’s Governance Committee. Our job is a fun one; we get to recruit members of our community to serve on our various committees and, eventually, the Board.

Today, we are nominating three members to serve an initial, 3-year term as Board Members At-Large on the WLCT Board of Directors. We nominate the following for your consideration:

- Meryl Moss for Board Member at-large

Meryl has served on our finance committee for over two years and recently joined the development committee in the past year. Meryl is an avid trail user and her husband Randy was a founding member of the trail team!

They have a great passion for Westport and all that makes it special. Meryl is a retired executive who continues to coach executives through private consulting.

(Kate Schmitt) I now move to nominate Meryl to the board, do we have a second?

Seconded – Patricia Cerilli

All in favor, please vote yes,

All opposed, please vote no,

- Geoff Swaebe for Board Member at-large

Geoff has served on both the trail team and stewardship committee for over a year. Geoff first engaged with WLCT when he embarked on a meadow restoration effort on his property. Geoff brings a great passion for the outdoors and fantastic ideas for our work. Having spent much of his life in cities, Geoff appreciates the importance of connecting with nature and WLCT's goal to preserve these special places for future generations.

(Kate Schmitt) I now move to nominate Geoff to the board, do we have a second?

Seconded – Trip Millikin

All in favor, please vote yes,

All opposed, please vote no,

- Pam Wilde for Board Member at-large

Pam has been an avid trail team member and volunteer in the office for years. In the last year she has served on the Stewardship Committee working on several important projects. Pam grew up with an appreciation for farms in Rehoboth and believes deeply in the importance of open space, connection to it, and maintaining these places for future generations.

(Kate Schmitt) I now move to nominate Pam to the board, do we have a second?

Seconded – Kate Neave

All in favor, please vote yes,

All opposed, please vote no,

Thank you everyone and we are excited for the three of you to join the WLCT BOD! Now I turn this over to Steve.

Pass to Steve McGuinness

Recognition of Members Lost

Thank you for joining us today. We are lucky to have a community that embraces the mission to conserve Westport's special places. At the heart of that community is our staff, our volunteers, and our members.

Everyone contributes in unique ways, but together we create a powerful force that helps connect people to the land.

Sadly, each year we also lose members of our community who were valued volunteers and supporters. Today we briefly want to recognize a group of members we lost since the last annual meeting. Let the following individuals also represent any others that we may have missed.

I will ask for a brief moment of silence after reading the list. In the past year, we lost:

Mrs. Calla Guild: so many knew Ralph and Calla for their tremendous effort to preserve Adamsville's unique and historic character including Grey's Grist Mill. Calla and Ralph also donated a property off of River Road to WLCT preserving pristine marsh. Calla cared deeply about Westport's special landscapes.

Mrs. Nancy Stropp Marion: Nancy had a deep passion for Westport Harbor, and all that surrounded it. Growing up there, and raising family in the summers in the harbor was so important to Nancy. She believed in the many special places Westport has to offer, but especially the unique waterfront.

Mrs. Judy Swan: Judy was the wife of former board member Henry Swan who both had a deep passion for Westport's unique character and working way of life. Judy volunteered for WLCT and supported Henry's work serving the organization for over ten years. Judy and Henry lived on Westport Point and were tireless advocates for preserving special places in Town.

Like so many others who came before, we will deeply miss the friendship, thoughtful dedication and generosity of these members. We will now take a brief moment of silence.

(Silence-10 secs)

Thank you. And now, I would like to pass the agenda back to Ross.

Pass back to Ross.

That's the end of our meeting. We wanted to provide some highlights and hopefully tease enough for you to come join us on something throughout the year. We're always available to answer questions if you have feedback.

Valerie Bassett made a motion to end the Annual Meeting. Lucy Mooney seconded. All Approve.

Our bylaws require that we elect our Executive Committee at a Board Meeting so we invite our Board to convene now. The Board of Directors meeting was opened. In attendance, Tina Schmid, Steve McGuinness, *Tim Vanech, Patti Cerilli, Kate Neave, Philip Burling, Valerie Bassett, John Patterson, Spinner Findlay, Trip Millikin, and staff.* The Board of Directors voted on the slate of officers

- *President (2022-25) Tina Schmid*
- *Vice President (2024) Steve McGuinness*
- *Vice President (2024) Tim Vanech*
- *Treasurer (2024) Patti Cerilli*
- *Clerk (2024) Kate Neave*

Kate Schmitt made a motion to elect the slate of officers, Kate Neave seconded. All approved.

Geoff Swaebe made a motion to now adjourn the Board of Directors meeting. Pam Wilde seconded. All approve.