

DRAFT

Westport Land Conservation Trust
Annual Meeting May 23, 2024 5:30pm draft Minutes
At the Westport Grange 931 Main Road, Westport, MA

Westport Land Conservation Trust (WLCT) President Tina Schmid welcomed everyone to WLCT's 52nd Annual Meeting. Tina thanked everyone for their engagement and making our work possible. Our Clerk, Kate Neave could not make it so Steve McGuinness is filling in.

Motion to approve the May 18, 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes made by Spinner Findlay, seconded by Valerie Bassett, All Approve.

Motion to approve the July 13, 2023 Special Meeting of the Membership Minutes made by Paul Schmid, seconded by Tim Vanech, All Approve.

2023 was a great year for conservation with 193-acres preserved. We started our Community Connections program supporting our strategic effort to connect more people to the land and inspire the next generation of conservationists. I will review some highlights from this effort. In July we hired Aaron Teixeira to lead our Community Connections program. He has organized dozens of new programs. We have strong partnerships with WRWA, the Recreation Department and Community Schools. We have a lot of exciting events, and many children have taken part in our programs. We have served nearly 3,000 people in 16 months! Tina congratulated Ross Moran, the Land Connection Committee and everyone who supported the \$1M endowment to support this.

We acquired a 21.3-acre parcel just north of Westport Woods, growing it to 142 acres. This has allowed us to create an additional 3 miles of trails. It was a great year for donations. A CR was donated for a 74-acre farm off of Devol Pond. A huge thanks to the anonymous land donor for conserving their farm. A family donated a 24-acre farm known as Half-Mile-In located off of Main Road. We plan on leasing the farm once we are finished restoring the property. Our stewardship team has been busy. We converted a 14-acre corn field into grassland habitat. We improved plant diversity in the Children's Garden at Westport Woods. The accessible pathway was also improved. And plants were labeled. We are celebrating 10 years of the Tuesday Trail Team! They contributed over 15,000 hours, and have planted over 1,000 tree and shrubs and thousands of perennials on various properties. They supported the construction of the Children's Garden, Woodland Path, Mill Pond micro-orchard, outdoor classroom, and much more. They blazed miles of trails across 11 public access properties. The new garden design around the office building is amazing, please visit!

A huge thank you Kate Schmitt, who is an outgoing board member. She and her husband Tom are great supporters of the land trust. Thank you for your contributions on various committees and on the board.

Thank you also our Board and Committee Members, and staff; Pam Turick, Nate McCullin, Charlotte Greeson, Aaron Teixeira, and Ross Moran.

Tina Schmid turns the meeting over to Executive Director, Ross Moran.

Ross thanks everyone for attending and for everyone who has shared their talents and support. We are grateful that we have an active community. We had a 28% increase in total for membership and annual fund. In 2023 we hired two new staff members as part of our five-year plan. Ross thanked each staff member, Pam Turick, Charlotte Greeson, Aaron Teixeira, and Nate McCullin. Ross also thanked Tuesday Trail Team.

We closed on 193 acres last year. We have a lot of people who believe in what we do. Westport Woods Conservation Park (WWCP) is now 142 acres and is growing. As a community we focus on land conservation and protect our land and water. What we do helps with contiguous forest areas as well. Saving and restoring healthy soil is part of our vision for stewardship and land conservation and improving quality of life in our community. We have a tremendous opportunity to expand WWCP. We are lucky that our town officials are so supportive. The Conservation Commission, along with the Messier and Sylvia families have been working with us to add more acreage to WWCP. We are looking at closing in August. It's really exciting to have such a large trail system in our future. Ross recognized that our selectmen and town are very supportive. There are 1.3 miles of tributary that lead to Adamsville Brook and critical habitat are part of this land. The Mouse Mill APR will be closing soon. We are working on restoration of Half-Mile-In Farm. Trail team, contractors and staff have been working on this property. It has the components of a great farm.

We wanted to create something for everyone to enjoy at WWCP. In addition to trails, we are creating a really great space to visit. Check the trails and garden if you haven't been in a while. We will host a nature camp in partnership with the town this summer. We are improving grassland habitat. We are working with the Westport River Watershed Alliance (WRWA) on a cover crop program to help prevent erosion and help the soil long term. The land connection programs are well attended. Ross recognized Aaron Teixeira for the outreach programs and Charlotte Greeson for her support in spreading the word. We want people to think about connecting with the land. Aaron is working with the community schools and we hope to expand on that. Ross thanks the whole team. We are eternally grateful to our community for supporting our growth and seeing the value of what we do. We want to inspire people.

Ross Moran turns the meeting over to Meryl Moss.

Meryl Moss gives the Treasurer's report. 2023 was an excellent year. Highlights include a 28% increase in membership and annual funds. Several bequests were received. Fidelity accounts have done well. Long term investment strategies are instituted for the future. All land preservation projects at WLCT have an expense associated with them for diligence, acquisition, long-term care or stewardship start-up. WLCT is in the fortunate position that our community has entrusted us with gifts to sustain several long-term initiatives, such as stewardship, connecting with the public, specific land preservation focuses, and more. These accounts are primarily held with Fidelity, and managed by our investment committee made up of professionals in the field. 2023 was yet another spectacular year for WLCT's work with the following highlights: 193 acres closed, of those 193 acres only one project required a market value purchase of \$70,000. The remaining projects were donations or conveyances to WLCT for various purposes and total over \$3.5 million in land interest gifted. This meant that in 2024, every dollar given for preservation was matched by seven dollars. WLCT completed the fundraising to fully fund the \$1,000,000 Community Connections Fund to support public programming far into the future. As mentioned before, strong responses from our membership and community to our annual requests allowed WLCT to fully fund our operating. WLCT prides itself on being an efficient organization that delivers high-quality work and service for our community in response to this generosity. On the operating expense side, we have grown our staff team to provide even greater service with high-quality stewardship, new public programs and events, and improved communications to provide more experiences for learning. In December the WLCT board of directors choose to create greater strategic focus to a former Fidelity account with a bequest from Donna O'Connor. The fund is now included in your list as the Legacy Circle Fund. This will serve as an important long-term fund to support the organization's operating and emergency capital needs. As you know, we are planning to be here forever! Two generous bequests were received this year and the funds were directed into this account to begin our efforts to grow it over time. Thank you to the staff for doing a great job managing our finances, staying on budget and remaining focused on supporting our growth. Also,

thank you to the Finance and Investment Committees for providing wonderful guidance! We are always on budget, and in conclusion, we had a great year financially.

Meryl Moss turns the meeting over to Tom Boreiko.

Tom Boreiko gives the Governance report for Kate Schmitt. Tom explained what the Governance Committee does. Tom thanked everyone on the committee for what they do. Tom thanks all those who have volunteered, and welcomed anyone to get involved. Tom read the two Board nominations: Ann Squire. Ann has served on the Land Connection committee and Governance Committee for over two years. Ann has a deep appreciation for Westport, having grown up in town, and as the owner of Country Woolens for 48 years! She wants to continue to connect future generations to the land, expressing her belief that “Nothing is more special than taking a walk in the woods, along the ocean or river and enjoying nature.” Ann couldn’t be here with us this evening. *Tom Boreiko makes the motion to nominate Ann Squire to the board. Valerie Bassett seconded. All in favor.*

Hope Sterling has served on the Stewardship Committee and the Tuesday Trail Team. Hope brings a background in commercial horticulture, spending most of her career at Sylvan Nursery. Hope became more involved with WLCT as a neighbor of Westport Woods, and is proud to be a part of its transformation. *Tom Boreiko makes the motion to nominate Hope Sterling to the board. David Deitz seconded. All in favor.*

Tom Boreiko turns the meeting over to Steve McGuinness.

Steve McGuinness thanks everyone for joining today. Steve thanks staff and volunteers. Sadly, each year we lose members of our community who were valued volunteers and supporters. Today we want to recognize a group of members we lost in the recent past. 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 recent past, we lost:

Susan Ashworth
Daniel Bellavance
Phoebe Chardon
Rayna Cipollini
Caroline Cody
Steve Hopkins
Larry Tittermore
Frank Wojciechowski

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

Steve McGuinness turns the meeting back to Ross Moran.

Ross Moran thanks Tina Schmid, Meryl Moss, Steve McGuinness, Tom Boreiko, Ann Squire and Hope Sterling. We are so grateful for everyone’s support.

Motion to end the meeting made by Woody Underwood, seconded by Geoff Swaebe. All approve.