

DRAFT: TO BE ACCEPTED AT MAY 21, 2026 ANNUAL MEETING

**Westport Land Conservation Trust
Annual Meeting May 22, 2025 5:30pm
At the Westport Grange - 931 Main Road, Westport, MA**

Westport Land Conservation Trust (WLCT) President Tina Schmid welcomed everyone and is happy to get out of the rain! This is our 53rd annual meeting. Tina thanks everyone, as our work is possible due to all of you.

Tina Schmid asked for a motion to approve the 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes. Motion to approve the May 23, 2024 Annual Meeting Minutes made by Spinner Findlay, seconded by Paul Schmid. All Approve.

Tina Schmid remarked that her three years as president have gone by quickly! She stated that WLCT has updated our bylaws to allow for a 3-year term for president. She is happy to announce that Steve McGuinness will be the new WLCT president. Tina gives thanks to Trip Millikin for all he has done over the years. Our staff, led by Ross Moran is tremendous. We have dedicated board and committee members. Thank you all, for all you do. Tina expressed how incredibly rewarding it is to see all the people out on our properties. WLCT protects habitat which will likely be lost if it is not protected. Tina shared some highlights of 2024. We've been able to expand Westport Woods Conservation Park as we have acquired three more properties and it now comprises over 350 acres. The Conservation Commission land added another 37 acres, adding more preserved habitat and land for public access. We partnered with the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture to close on an APR on Mouse Mill Road. Our stewardship committee has been very busy. We hope you have seen the native plant garden at Westport Woods Conservation Park. Hundreds of native plants and their cultivars were planted. Interpretive signs are in place at Dunham's Brook and Herb Hadfield Conservation Areas. Tuesday Trail Team has been very busy planting, blazing trails, building bridges, and so much more. They gave over 2,500 hours of service. Our Community Connection programs offer a full calendar of events. We hosted or co-hosted 127 programs of all sorts throughout the year. Lastly, Tina thanks a few outgoing board members. Thank you to Valerie Bassett who got us started on Land Connection, and it has come a long way. Her passion for connecting people to the land has helped us take these public programs to the next level. John Patterson, thank you, for your passion serving on the board and also chairing the Land Preservation Committee. He has an eye for detail and we are very thankful. Steve McGuinness is excited for his new role and will be absolutely terrific. Please welcome Steve.

Steve McGuinness spoke about how Tina's three years went so quickly. Steve recognizes and thanks our board, staff and volunteers. Steve recognized Valerie Bassett's six years of service. As the founding member of the Land Connection Committee she shared a vision for engaging and inspiring the next generation of conservationists through connection with the land. As a neighbor she also serves as an ambassador for the property and so much more. We are grateful for Valerie's service.

Steve next recognizes John Patterson for the last six years of service as a director and Land Preservation Committee member, and most recently as chairperson for the last three years. John has a passion for the preservation of Westport's unique natural resources, including farming. His work on land preservation is detail-orientated and he strategically thought through each project as it benefits WLCT and the public. We are grateful for John's leadership.

Steve also recognized Tina Schmid, our now retired president. Tina has served on the Board of Directors since 2013. She has served on just about every committee, sharing her wisdom, experience and strategic leadership. During Tina's tenure 980 acres have been preserved, including the iconic Westport Woods. 695 acres have been preserved with a CR or APR, including, Santos Farm, Berry Hill Farm, Otter Rock Farm, Walt's Farm, and many more. Tina chaired the 1,000-acre campaign, smashing the goal of raising \$10 million dollars by raising nearly \$18 million. Our endowments have gone from \$150,000 to over \$5 million in long term funds for WLCT. WLCT launched the current strategic plan that calls for inspiring the next generation of conservationists, including expanding staffing to achieve this new strategic goal. Tina did fantastic work partnering with our community to inspire all to generously give to the many land preservation projects, endowments, and operating. She is a staunch advocate of WLCT and always a gracious ambassador. Tina inspired many with her thoughtfulness, wisdom, and we have tremendous gratitude for everything she has done. Steve welcomes our Executive Director, Ross Moran, up to speak.

Ross Moran thanks everyone for attending today. We like to share our successes. We want to thank the many people who make our work possible. We are able to make an impact on our community because of all of our board, committee members, staff: Pam Turick, Nate McCullin, Charlotte Greeson, Aaron Teixeira, Elizabeth Hubert, interns, volunteers, including Tuesday Trail Team, our members and the Town of Westport. We own such a diverse array of properties and we are funded by the generosity of members primarily, so thank you.

The last year was exciting and it has been an honor to be a part of so many projects here at WLCT, but my favorite is most certainly Westport Woods. To think we have gone from 82 acres and construction of a small park for all to enjoy, to over 340 acres with soon to be miles and miles of trails is so exciting!

For those who don't know, our work in land preservation focuses on strategic areas for conservation that support robust natural resources, but also support our community's public health. Habitat and contiguous forest promote cleaner air, cleaner water, and biodiversity. Farmland preservation saves the ability to produce food locally, but we also have enhanced many farms before being sold. We cover crop fields to restore soil health. And we have installed drainage systems to support healthy runoff. We have removed hazardous materials from properties. Public access also provides the opportunity to recreate in the forest, at the shoreline, and in the river, all of these are a result of preserving land for future generations.

In the next year, we will continue to focus on our strategic plan goals for each pillar of our work: The first pillar is Preserve – We are currently negotiating the potential to preserve approximately 139 acres of land with 3 projects encompassing active farmland, rare species habitat, and new public access. These projects are on Main Road, Sodom Road, and IN the river! We have some great projects.

The second pillar is Steward – Miles of new trails will be added. We are enhancing the visitor experience with new signage. We are expanding access by adding more to the accessible trail at Westport Woods. Tuesday Trail Team helps care for around 33 miles of trails.

The third pillar is Connect – We offer a year-round calendar of events with something for all, including a brand-new summer performance series- Natures Stage, at Westport Woods. We will continue to expand our audiences, and hope to create greater connections with our local school-aged youth. Inspiring the next generation is crucial to our work!

The fourth pillar is Grow – Thanks to many of you in this room, and in our community, we have been able to grow our staff team to meet the need to provide high quality experiences on the land. In the recent past, very generous estate gifts from engaged supporters have boosted our long-term funds to provide fiscal health. In the next year, we will continue our efforts to grow our membership with the goal of cultivating the next generation of conservationists. There's always a lot going on in the world but the people in this room and community are passionate about this town and we are lucky to have that. Please continue to encourage your networks to become members, we appreciate everything you do. Thank you all. Ross introduced our Treasurer Patti Cerilli.

Patti Cerilli thanks everyone for joining us today. 2024 was another great year thanks to many of you in this room. In 2024, we continued our strategic growth to meet our goals for the five-year plan, with tremendous growth in our long-term quasi-endowment funds, including significant growth in our Legacy Fund. In addition, you and our wonderful community helped WLCT meet our operating goals, fundraising goals for special projects, and expand long-term funds which is really spectacular for our future organizational health. Each year, WLCT focuses on sound financial management to maximize the tremendous generosity we receive from the community. WLCT's core finances are made up of three focus areas: Operating costs- Primarily comprised of our day-to-day needs of staff, property stewardship, and connecting with the public. Conservation Projects- All land preservation projects at WLCT have an expense associated with them for diligence, acquisition, long-term care or stewardship start-up. And Long-term accounts - 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.

2024 was another spectacular year for WLCT's work with the following highlights: Our pre-audit 2024 revenues and expenses are shared on the third page of your program this evening. I am not going to review each one, but instead share some highlights. WLCT completed the fundraising to fully fund the Sodom Road Conservation Project at \$765,000+ allowing us to purchase 3 parcels of land to expand Westport Woods- with \$300,000 coming from a lead foundation and the state Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. The \$765,000 represents land acquisition costs, due diligence for acquisition, start-up stewardship costs, and a contribution to our Stewardship Endowment for long-term property care. For those who don't know, we have a formula for funding land acquisition projects that includes funds to be raised for long term care. These funds are deposited into our Founders Stewardship Endowment. Each project where WLCT acquires land has this component. All of our long-term funds are described in the Annual Meeting brochure with their balances on the fourth page. As mentioned before, strong responses from our membership

and community to our annual fund operating allowed WLCT to fully fund our operating, including the purchase of new equipment to create greater efficiency and safety. 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 grew the staff in 2023, but remained focused on foundational growth in 2024. Our program expenses continue to be the majority of our expenses, including stewardship, land preservation and land connection. The WLCT Board of Directors converted the Donna O'Connor fund in 2023 to the Legacy Fund recognizing Ms. O'Connors giving to WLCT long-term fiscal health, and launched the Legacy Circle recognizing donors who support WLCT in their estate planning. Since 2023, we have been able to expand the Legacy Fund from \$220,000 to over \$1.3 million. This will help support WLCT's operating administration and emergency capital projects in the future. Lastly, our investment committee meets quarterly to assess these growing quasi-endowments, and thoughtfully manage their growth. We are grateful to the investment committee members for lending us their combined decades of experience in the field. Overall, we had a great year and we continue to look at our needs ahead. 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 committee for providing wonderful guidance!

The Governance report is given by Tom Boreiko, in for Ann Squire.

Tom thanks everyone for attending today and enjoys serving on the 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, I am stepping in for Ann Squire, Chairperson, to offer this year's nominations for the board of directors. Over the years, we have been blessed to have so many dedicated volunteers. Thank you to many of you who have dedicated your time to serving our community. For those who would like to get more involved, please get in touch with Ross Moran, our Executive Director.

Today, we are nominating one new member to serve an initial, 3-year term as a Director on the WLCT Board of Directors. We nominate for your consideration, Don Swift for Board Member at-large. Don has served on the Investment Committee for over two years. Don has been in Westport for a decade and currently serves on the board of the Westport River Watershed Alliance. Don has a tremendous passion for the diverse array of resources and admires WLCT's work in preserving such special places. He sees land stewardship and preservation as a key component to maintaining the river's health. He greatly appreciates WLCT's strong team, mission-focused drive, and exceptional execution. He is retiring and looking forward to more time outdoors. *Tom Boreiko makes the motion to nominate Don to the board. Tim Vanech seconds. All approve.* Tom notes that there are also two proxy votes for Don.

In the past year, the WLCT Governance Committee and Director Geoff Swaebe, performed an extensive analysis of WLCT's bylaws and determine the need to update various sections to meet a more modern-day standard. For example, we have become accustomed to virtual and remote meetings and adjusting bylaws to meet the reality of the electronic world also allows people more access. In addition, we amended articles to meet modern day operating standards. All of these changes are designed to ensure WLCT continues to function at its highest capacity.

Ross will review these changes in summary now, and we will take any comments or questions from the floor after his review. Ross thanked Geoff Swaebe for reviewing our bylaws and recommending changes. The bylaws have been posted, printed and a summary is available as you walked in. Changes include remote participation, and many updates including better defining committees and putting boundaries on what they can do. An Advisor can be elected for 3 years, and leadership was better defined. Ross asked for questions. Ross noted that our committee, board and lawyer have reviewed these. *Tom Boreiko makes a motion to adopt the proposed bylaws as written to be the new amended and restated Westport Land Conservation Trust, Inc.'s Bylaws from this day forward. Seconded by Michael Rosow. All approve.*

Tom thanks everyone and introduces Board Member Kate Neave.

Kate Neave thanks everyone 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 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:

Henry and Susan Ashworth – Henry and Susan were passionate supporters of WLCT's work. Preserving the Town's natural resources and rural character all for public enjoyment were so important to Henry and Susan. We'd like to say a special thank you to them for thinking of WLCT long-term with a significant contribution to WLCT's Legacy Fund.

James Bartlett

Aileen Crawford

William Glaser

Robert Huff

Marjorie Mello

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.

Kate turned the meeting over to Steve.

Steve McGuinness asked for a Motion to end the meeting. *Motion to end the meeting made by Kate Schmitt, seconded by Tim Vanech. All approve.*