

Benefits to the Town of Westport From The WESTPORT COMMUNITY GARDENS AND THE LONG LOTS PRESERVE

1. ASPETUCK LAND TRUST GREEN CORRIDOR

The Aspetuck Land Trust Green Corridor connects environmentally healthy properties containing ecologically valuable flora and fauna in Fairfield County. These properties safeguard our land, wildlife and water sources for future generations. The southern part of the Green Corridor in Fairfield County is highly developed residential land, presenting a challenge to conservation efforts.

The Long Lots Preserve will allow the Green Corridor to expand into this environmentally challenged suburban area.

2. CONNECTICUT AUDUBON SOCIETY

The Connecticut Audubon Society (CAS) protects Connecticut's birds, other wildlife and their habitats through conservation, education and advocacy. CAS manages 21 wildlife sanctuaries encompassing more than 3,300 acres of open space in Connecticut and educates over 100,000 children and adults annually. Albeit on a smaller scale, The Long Lots Preserve initiative will mimic Audubon's Smith Richardson Wildlife Preserve, Westport's largest private open space at 75 acres. CAS has spent a half-million dollars restoring the Smith Richardson sanctuary in Greens Farms, planted over 3000 native trees and shrubs, installed educational signs, and led many community tours and classes. All these benefits would be realized at the Long Lots Preserve. The Connecticut Audubon Society has already committed to donate \$1,000 in seed money.

The Long Lots Preserve will leverage CAS restoration success in Westport and provide wildlife habitat and sanctuary to resident and migrating birds.

3. POLLINATOR PATHWAY

The Pollinator Pathway is a grassroots movement focused on establishing pollinator friendly habitat and food sources for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinating insects and wildlife along a series of continuous corridors. The pollinator pathway has gained nationwide momentum.

The Long Lots Preserve will allow the pollinator pathway to expand into this environmentally challenged suburban area.

4. TOWN OF WESTPORT PLAN OF CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT

One of the goals of the Westport Plan of Conservation Development is to preserve and enhance open space and create meaningful connections to, within, and between open space areas.

From the Town of Westport Plan of Conservation Development:

"Open space helps protect natural resources; provide flood storage, wildlife habitat, and tree canopy; enhance overall community appearance; and enhance the quality of life of residents and visitors. Westport residents value the preserved open space areas that add to the overall beauty of the community and want to: maintain the open space areas we have, add more open space areas as opportunities arise..." and "Preserving open space will help make Westport a more sustainable community by retaining natural spaces and sustaining environmental health." Westport 2017 Plan of Conservation and Development, Section 5.1.

The Long Lots Preserve will help achieve the goals of the Town of Westport Plan of Conservation Development.

5. EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The educational opportunities presented by this project are unlimited. Located adjacent next to an elementary school this initiative strongly support multiple parts of the Next Generation Science Standards. Additionally, this is a wonderful hands-on opportunity to help school-aged children understand basic scientific environmental concepts. Biodiversity, photosynthesis, food chains, food webs, water cycle, nitrogen cycle, carbon cycle energy pyramids and soil composition are just a few important real world concepts on display here.

If so inclined, Long Lots Elementary School would be able to integrate any component of the Long Lots Preserve in to the curriculum it currently uses or uses in the future. The same holds true for Staples High School. High School students would be able to use this property to enhance its environmental curriculum providing real-world experience in invasive species, native plantings and ecological succession.

Support for using preserve initiatives such as this for educational purposes can be found in this article from edutopia.org. [Using Nature to Engage Students in Learning](#)

The Long Lots Preserve will offer ample opportunity to enhance the educational curriculum of the Westport Public Schools.

6. VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

There are always citizens looking to engage in activities that they feel will bring about a positive impact in their community. We are lucky to have a significant number of these citizens in the Town of Westport.

The Long Lots Preserve will provides local, tangible volunteer opportunities for those individuals and groups looking to make a positive impact on our environment.

7. AESTHETIC ENHANCEMENT

As this property has been unmaintained by the Town since its purchase around 2004, it has accumulated trash. Much of the trash comes from the parking lot and adjacent elementary school.

Representatives from the Westport Community Gardens have been removing trash from this property for 17 years. Most notably, a truckload of garbage was removed during the last town cleanup day in Spring 2021.

The lack of maintenance of the property has allowed the invasive vines and weeds to proliferate, compromising the natural beauty of the forest.

The Log Lots Preserve will enhance the overall aesthetic of the area by replanting the property with flowering trees, shrubs and wildflowers. This will compliment the ongoing trash removal by Westport Community Gardeners.

8. REMOVAL OF INVASIVE SPECIES

The area proposed for the Long Lots Preserve is currently overrun with non-native, invasive plants.

Dominating much of the landscape are invasive, not-native vines including Porcelainberry, Barberry, Mile-a-Minute, Bittersweet and Wineberry. These vines are carpeting the area, overtaking the trees and becoming problematic for some of the adjoining properties. Representatives from the Westport Community Gardens have been cutting the vines from trees for over 10 years at no cost to the town.

Additionally, non-native and invasive trees established on the property include

Tree of Heaven and Norway Maple. These trees inhibit the growth of their native counterparts. Tree of Heaven is of particular concern to the State of Connecticut as it is the primary reproductive host of the spotted lanternfly, *Lycorma delicatula*. This insect is noted for its adverse effect on a wide variety of trees and other plants in Connecticut. Places where large amounts of tree-of-heaven grow are potential points of establishment for populations of the spotted lanternfly. There is a stand of at least 5 of these trees in Phase 1 of the project. The Southwest Conservation District, having toured the property and having provided initial site planning and design, suggests "Removal of Tree of Heaven should be a priority."

Other invasive plants dominating the landscape include garlic mustard, mugwort, multiflora rose, Japanese Stilt Grass and purple loosestrife.

The Long Lots Preserve will methodically remove these invasive species while planting native species in densities that will keep the non-natives from proliferating. Ultimately, the goal is to plant large populations of native flora to out-compete the non-natives. This will benefit the local ecology and adjacent property owners who are adversely affected by the aggressive nature of the vines.

9. BENEFIT TO THE WESTPORT COMMUNITY GARDENS

The Westport Community Gardens has served residents of the Town of Westport for approximately 17 years. Membership has grown from the original 30 members to approximately 120 members who are town residents or town employees. Members and their guests grow plants including fruit, vegetables, flowers, herbs and grasses. In addition to managing this town land in an environmentally responsible manner, significant quantities of fresh food grown here is donated to those who are food insecure through the "Grow-A-Row" program.

The proposed preserve surrounds the gardens on three sides. Part of the attraction of the gardens is that it is relatively secluded and it provides measures of peace and tranquility to its members and their guests. Growing food, flowers and herbs is dependent upon pollinators such as bees, butterflies and moths.

Natural areas such as the proposed preserve afford the habitat necessary to support populations of pollinating insects. The Southwest Conservation District notes about the area surrounding the gardens: "At the current state, the border of invasive plants is not attracting pollinators, but rather deterring them as they are not supporting a source of food or habitat."

The land surrounding the gardens has been compromised by tree cutting and dumping.

The Long Lots Preserve will aid in the pollination of Westport Community Garden plants and will strengthen the Westport Community Gardens overall. Establishing an ecologically rich preserve would enhance the functionality of the gardens by increasing habitat for pollinators. Protecting the area around the gardens will continue the viability of the gardens as a town asset.

10. PROPERTY VALUES

Substantial information supporting the claim that minimally used open space increases adjacent property values is available from private, not-for-profit and public sources including the State of Connecticut.

The Long Lots Preserve will subsequently increase adjacent residential property values by preserving and protecting this town property.

11. SUPPORT FOR THE WESTPORT TREE BOARD MISSION

The Westport Tree Board promotes the planting, maintenance, restoration and survival of desirable trees and shrubs on Town property. It is also tasked with educating the public. This project clearly aligns with the Tree Board's mission.

In addition to planting and preserving trees, educational signage would be posted during Phase 1 of the initiative, describing the benefits of native planting and non-native plant removal. Consequently, in a July 15, 2021 letter from the Tree Board supporting this preserve initiative, they write "The Tree Board supports the protection of trees and we applaud your efforts."

The Long Lots Preserve will support the Westport Tree Board's mission to support native tree planting and protection as well as to educate the local population.

12. SUPPORT FOR WESTPORT'S DESIGNATION AS TREE CITY USA

Westport has been designated as a Tree City USA by the Arbor Day Foundation. As noted in the Arbor Day Foundation's communication to the Town of Westport received on April 7, 2021, "Residents of Westport should be proud to live in a community that makes planting and care of trees a priority." Included in the Arbor Day Foundation's requirements for such designation is "a community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita" and "an annual Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation."

The Long Lots Preserve will provide an excellent platform to support Westport's continued designation as a Tree City USA.

13. SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE WESTPORT'S MISSION

Sustainable Westport's mission centers on becoming a Net Zero community by the year 2050. Attaining that goal involves reducing the environmental impact of our community. Sustainable Westport supports approaches to community living that are economically viable, of social benefit and environmentally responsible.

One of the pillars to reaching their overall goal is that our community should be responsible stewards of natural resources.

The Long Lots Preserve will support Sustainable Westport's mission by implementing an environmental stewardship program that is economically viable, socially beneficial and environmentally responsible.