



# WESTPORT COMMUNITY GARDENS AND THE LONG LOTS PRESERVE

Westport Sunrise Rotary • July 7, 2023





- Town acquired land in 2001 for new community garden
- Garden opened 2003
- Prior garden at “Nike” site (Bedford Middle School)
- Approved by all Town boards and Selectwoman Diane Farrell
- 30 Gardeners, then 60, 90, and now 120
- Soil like concrete
- Plastic fencing





# The Journey Begins!



- Clear the land
- Level the land
- Add water
- Thanks Kowalsky's!
- Thanks Westport Public Works!





Survey  
the land



Mark off the  
garden plots



Dynamic Duo:  
Lou Rolla and  
Ken Smith

We were supported by several local businesses including:

- Gilbertie's herb gardens provided plants (thanks Sal)
- Belta's Farm donated compost (thanks Greg and thanks to your most generous father James).
- Gault, Inc. contributed sand (thanks Sam)
- Daybreak Nurseries supplied soil
- A and J's Farm Market gave us a picnic table (thanks Al)

Financially:

- A small fortune was donated by the Green Village Initiative (thanks Dan)
- Chef Michel Nischan and his Wholesome Wave Foundation wrote us a substantial check to help us get started (Thanks Michel)
- The New England Grassroots Environmental Fund based in Montpelier, Vermont came through with a generous grant
- Anthropology held a fundraiser on our behalf as well

We have been financially independent since the gardens began.

Because of the combined efforts of these people and organizations, we now have a community garden with over 100 members who share the delights of gardening.

How fortunate are we? Very.

## With Sam Belta

Belta's Farm  
donated a large  
amount of their  
“black gold”  
compost to help  
the garden get  
started.



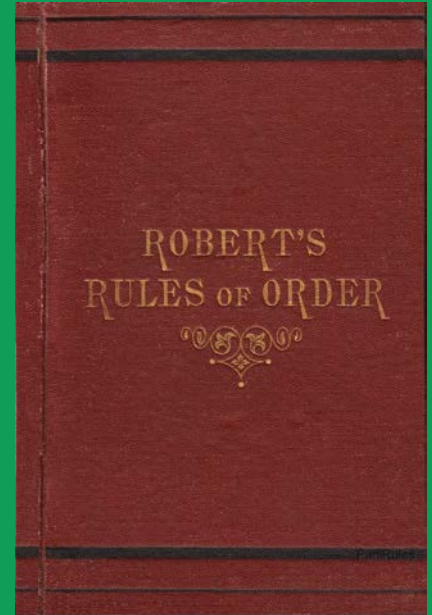
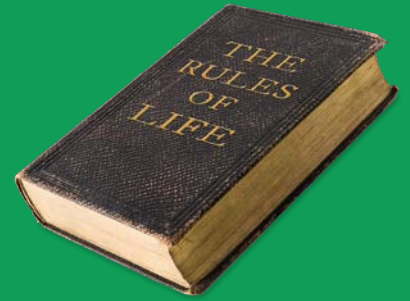
## Benefits to a Growing Population:

- Serving over 100 Westport residents (ages 5 – 95) and Town employees every year.
- Serves growing need for gardening space. Near several condo complexes while more apartment complexes being built (Westport Inn, Apartments next to gas station on Maple Ave and Post Road, former Kowalsky Construction property. Several more sites proposed.
- Quiet Recreation (good neighbors)
- Low cost to town, high resident reward
- Environmental Stewardship
- Support local businesses (Gilbertie's, Izzo's, Ganim's, Terrain)

We have rules clearly outlined in a contract which each member might read and then signs.  
(Work hours, maintenance standards, prohibited plants, no dogs, no smoking)

WE DO KICK PEOPLE OUT!

We have bylaws which govern the management of the garden.



# We are the best real estate value in Fairfield County!

- \$100 Clean up deposit (which you get back if you leave the gardens in good standing!)
- \$20 Capital Investment Fee
- \$25 Annual Membership Fee (for up to 400 square feet.)
- 6.25 cents per square foot!
- Comparison – Median square foot cost in Westport is approx. \$468 sq. ft.
- Includes a porta potty!



- Steering Committee runs the garden - 10 or 11 members

Mike Beebe - Work Days/Work Hours

Sally Kleinman - Weed Police

Amy Luett - Locks/Porta Potty/Wood Chips

Laura Riguzzi - Membership

Andrew Coleman - Treasurer

Laureen Haynes - Social Events

Pamela Davis - Contracts/Weed Police

Louis Weinberg - Chair

Toni Simonetti - Membership

Jeff Schorer - Fencing/Groundhog Slim

Eradication Program Manager

- Est. hundreds of hours of volunteer time running the show each year.



Watch out! Here come the weed police!



- Est. 8,000 community member work hours
- Approx. 4,500 emails sent/received in 2022



We take care of each other....

- If a member can not satisfy the contractual obligations due to medical reasons, we take care of them.
- If there are other extenuating circumstances that preclude a member from maintaining their plots or putting in work hours, we help them.
- Students are available for hire each year.



**Cris Singer**  
**Member since 2003**





# The Long Lots Preserve

# WHY?

- Town land neglected
- Garbage everywhere
- Invasive plants dominating area
- Adversely affecting garden
- Outcompeting natives
- Killing trees
- Little/no wildlife value
- Limited pollinator value
- Adversely affects neighboring residences



# Garbage everywhere!

## Invasives

- Mugwort
- Porcelainberry
- Mile-a-minute
- Bittersweet
- Knotweed
- Stiltgrass
- Garlic Mustard
- Wild Grape



And the  
infamous **Tree**  
of Heaven along  
with its  
insidious  
partner...



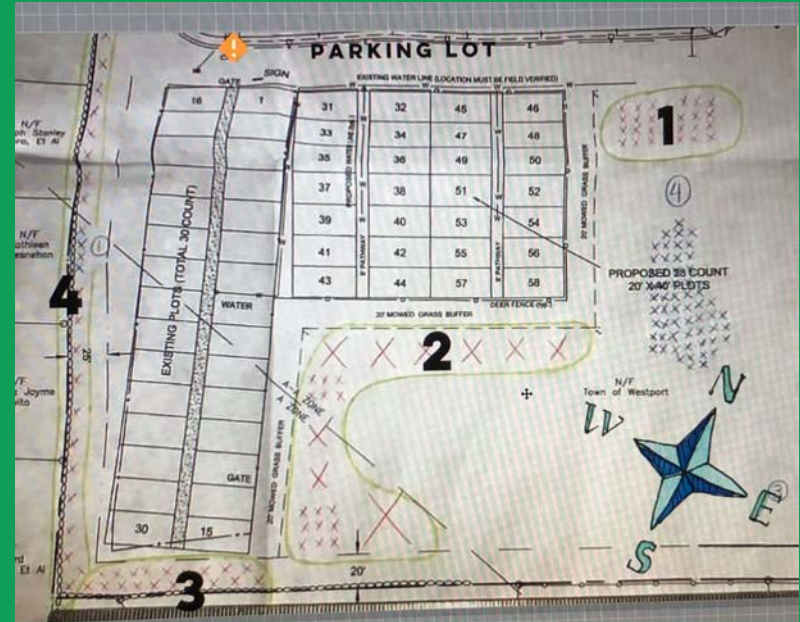
# THE SPOTTED LANTERNFLY!!!



So we came up with a plan!

We had the CT State Forester visit along with the Director of the Southwest Conservation District

- Surveys done of the land
- Accounting done of the plants
- Recommendations made
- Initial mapping done



We developed a Master  
Plan and had it  
approved by the Board  
of Selectwomen

EXHIBIT C

## **The Long Lots Preserve Master Plan**

April 21, 2022

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Long Lots Preserve is to ecologically enhance and protect town property immediately adjacent to, and surrounding, the Westport Community Gardens located next to Long Lots Elementary School at 13 Hyde Lane in Westport, Connecticut.

### **DETAILED BENEFITS OF THE PLAN**

Preserving and protecting this property will benefit the Town of Westport in the following ways:

1. Add to the Green Corridor supported by the Aspetuck Land Trust.
2. Compliment the Connecticut Audubon Society's Westport Smith Richardson Wildlife Preserve.
3. Contribute to the Pollinator Pathway, a national environmental initiative.
4. Support the Town of Westport Plan of Conservation.
5. Provide educational opportunities to Westport students.
6. Provide local, tangible volunteer opportunities for those individuals and groups looking to make a positive impact on our environment.
7. Aesthetically enhances this area.
8. Remove invasive species dominating the property.
9. Protect the aesthetic and aid the pollination of plants grown at the Westport Community Gardens.
10. Subsequently increase adjacent residential property values.

# Time to get to work!



# LET THE “FUN”DRAISING BEGIN

\$40,000 raised

- 200 + donors
- Matching funds from Sustainable CT
- \$3,000 Urban Forestry Grant

Local Businesses  
stepped up to the plate

May 2022

Robbie Guimond was  
the leadoff batter. He  
cleared Phase 1.



# Bartlett Tree Experts took out several Tree of Heaven



# AJ Penna and Son dug holes for the trees



Charles Stebbins, creator of  
CT Audubon's Smith  
Richardson Wildlife  
Preserve, provided guidance  
and expert manpower to  
help get trees in the ground.





Phase 1 Before



Phase 1 After

# Phase 1

## Trees/Shrubs/Wildflowers

- Tupelo
- Pin Oak
- Tulip
- River Birch
- White Pine
- White Spruce
- Serviceberry
- Viburnum
- Milkweed
- Butterfly Weed
- High bush Blueberry
- Summersweet
- Northern Bayberry
- Dogwood
- Bottlebrush Buckeye
- Native Honeysuckle
- Mountain Mint
- Bee Balm
- Golden Alexander

September 2022

Aspetuck Land Trust was the lead off batter for Phase 2,  
which is triple the size of Phase 1.

They cleared the densely overgrown invasives.



SIR Development came in and prepared the area for planting. They scraped the surface weeds away and dug the holes for tree planting.



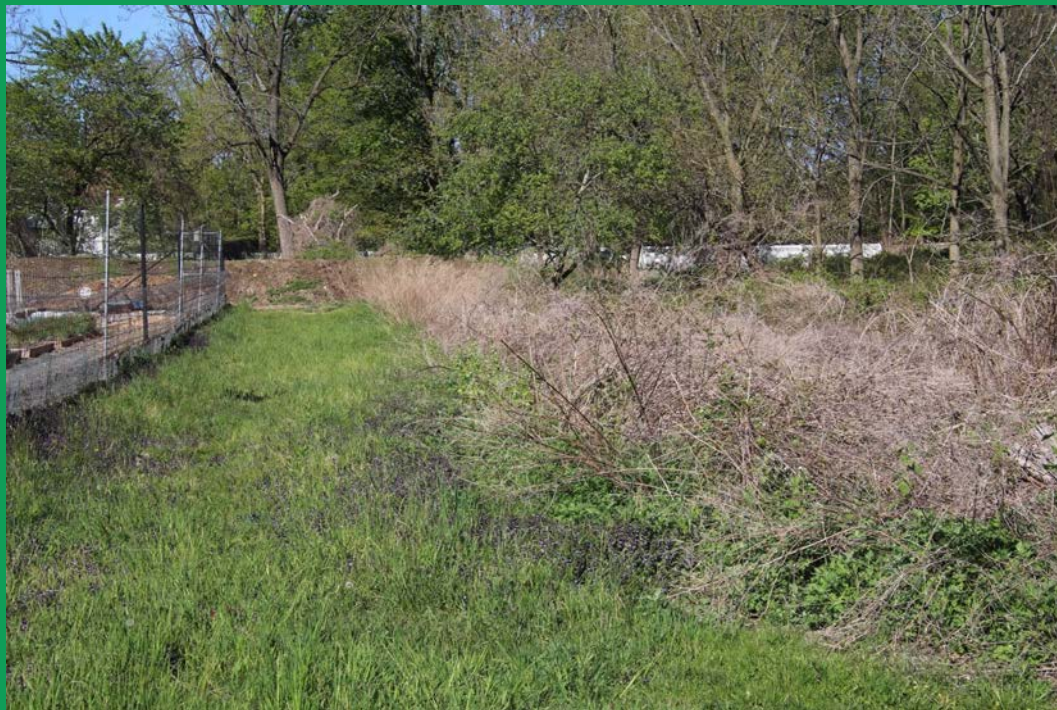
# September 26th 2022: Planting Day

70 native trees and shrubs arrived and were planted by over 20 community adults and children.









Phase 2: Before



Phase 2: After

## Phase 2

### Trees/Shrubs/Wildflowers

- Northern Red Oak
- Cranberry Viburnum
- Swamp White Oak
- Scarlet Oak
- White Pine
- Eastern Redbud
- Shagbark Hickory
- Serviceberry
- Riverbirch
- Arrowwood Viburnum
- Gray Twig Dogwood
- Summersweet
- Northern Bayberry
- Bottlebrush Buckeye
- Beautyberry
- Elderberry
- American Holly

April 2023

Phase 3 began  
AJ Penna and Son cleared  
the land and dug the holes  
for tree planting



A community volunteer prepared and leveled the soil



Gardeners, old and young,  
community volunteers and SLOBS  
showed up on planting day; getting 70  
native trees and shrubs in the ground.





# Phase 3

## Trees/Shrubs/Wildflowers for wet soil

- Witch Hazel
- Red Twig Dogwood
- Pussy Willow
- Black Willow
- Staghorn Sumac
- Swamp Sweetbells
- American Hazelnut
- Button Bush
- Common Snowberry
- Speckled Alder
- Gray Dogwood
- Weeping Redbud
- Sweetgum
- Winter King Hawthorn
- Swamp White Oak
- Pin Oak
- Sweetspire
- River Birch
- Summersweet
- Spice Bush
- Winterberry
- Sycamore



Phase 3: Before



Phase 3: After

## All three phases:

- Deer fencing
- Rabbit/Groundhog Fencing
- Corrugated Cardboard
- Woodchips
- Consistently Weeded
- Consistently Watered



# American Chestnut Tree

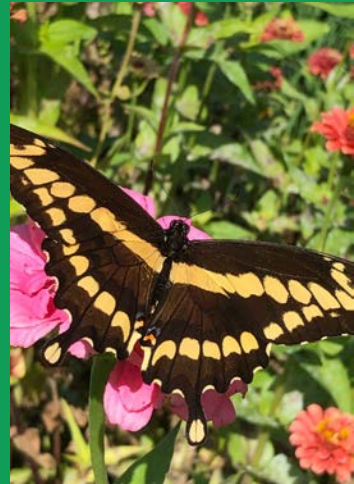
- Member of the Beech Family
- Produces fruit with edible nuts
- Native range covered the eastern United States into the midwest
- Most valuable tree for wildlife
- Chestnut blight (fungus) killed almost every one of the estimated 3 to 4 billion trees in the first half of the 20th Century
- The Long Lots Preserve has 4 “Revival” Chestnut trees (95% American Chestnut, 5% Chinese Chestnut)
- Plans for wild raspberry and blackberry bramble





The Preserve is already attracting some new inhabitants;  
pollinators birds and critters





Phase 4 scheduled to begin  
in September 2023

Ribbon Cutting in Oct.

# Detailed benefits of 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 3,000 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 to an elementary school this initiative strongly supports multiple parts of the Next Generation Science Standards.

Additionally, this is a wonderful hands-on opportunity to help school-aged children understand scientific environmental concepts. 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 will use in the future. The same holds true for Staples High School, the students would be able to use this property to enhance the environmental curriculum with 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 provide local, tangible volunteer opportunities for 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 complement 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.

**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 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.**