



Waltham Land Trust, Inc.
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A non-profit organization dedicated to preserving our community's natural resources through open space advocacy, education, acquisition, and protection.

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Position Regarding Waltham High School a white paper published in May, 2018

A large number of land trust members and city officials have sought an opinion from the Waltham Land Trust about the proposed sites for the Waltham High School

Our core responsibility at the Waltham Land Trust is to protect the City's open space. Like everyone who weighs in on this issue, we want the best for Waltham's students, and regret that conflict has arisen as important community needs compete for scarce resources. But as the sworn protectors of Waltham's open space, we must be guided by our mission -- to acquire, preserve or restore land in a way that balances conservation and access, maximizes the natural value of the land, reduces habitat fragmentation and permanently protects and conserves Waltham's natural resources.

The Waltham Land Trust has been grateful for the strong relationship we have had with the City of Waltham and the Waltham School Department since our inception. In response to our campaigns and our partnership, the City has acquired over 135 acres of open space and hosted several miles of the Western Greenway Trail, including on the current Waltham High School property. For our part, the Land Trust has trained and mobilized teams of trail stewards who watch over and repair the City's open space assets. WLT brings Waltham's open space to its residents, and especially its youngsters, with myriad educational programs, walks, volunteer days, and collaborations with the City's network of non-profits and educators. Together we have been creating a legacy of conservation in Waltham.

Permanent protection of open space is the goal of every land trust. The Waltham Land Trust strongly opposes any development involving our protected lands. This is why the Land Trust joined with the Robert Treat Paine Historical Trust to oppose consideration of taking a part of the Paine Estate's woods, land that is already protected and is in fact a National Historic Landmark. WLT also opposes the re-purposing of Chester Brook Woods – land that the Waltham City Council's Committee to Acquire Open Space championed the preservation of just a decade ago.

Like most municipalities, Waltham has been slow to endow its open space acquisitions with the Conservation Restrictions and other statutory protections that ensure their preservation for generations to come. The current situation regarding the siting of a new high school highlights how critical Conservation Restrictions are to ensure that future pressures do not overwhelm past commitments to preservation. The Land Trust urges the city to act now to protect its open space acquisitions with Conservation Restrictions. It must also be stated that the Waltham Land Trust is deeply concerned about keeping the Waltham Field Station, our headquarters and Waltham's great historical and agricultural landmark, as a farming and food resource for the city in perpetuity.

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The Waltham Land Trust can only recommend that the city's infrastructure needs be met on land that has already been developed and can be re-used. This applies to re-use of the existing high school site, other convertible sites in the city inventory, or acquiring other property.

We have been told that the partially-developed Stigmatine campus could address the WLT's concerns: development within a constrained building envelope, structured parking to minimize land use, located in ways that maintains trail and wildlife corridors and the connections to contiguous parks and other open space. That does sound positive, but without a deeper understanding of the city's commitment to open space protection there, WLT is unable to endorse this location at this time.

To restate the Land Trust's long standing policy: If development must proceed on open space parcels, it should be permitted only after alternatives for re-use have been proven unfeasible and an open space parcel of comparable size and conservation value is protected in perpetuity. These developments should be limited in size, concentrated in area, built with the best environmental practices available and strategically located to maximize preservation of the site's natural resources.

For further information contact Sonja Wadman, Executive Director
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[The Waltham Land Trust board of directors includes a City Councillor and a School Department employee. Neither director attended the discussions or votes on endorsing this position.]