

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, July 18, 2017, Town Hall, Room 9, 7 P.M.

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Paula Goodwin, Bob Guba, Joe Holmes, Bruce Rachman (Chair), Jim Snyder-Grant, Laurie Ullmann, Joe Will (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) member present: Sherman Smith

Nonmembers:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), Janet Adachi (Acton Board of Selectmen LSC liaison), Tara Friedrichs (briefly) (West Acton resident), Carolyn Kiely (Quail Ridge resident), Corrine Losch (Acton Natural Resources intern), Terry Maitland (briefly) (Acton Conservation Commission), Kathie Watt (Acton Resident, Children's Discovery Museum staff)

Bruce called the meeting to order at 7:05 P.M.

Review and approval of June minutes

Approval was moved and voted unanimously.

Election of Chair, Vice-Chair, Clerk

Bruce was nominated for Chair, Paula for Vice Chair, and Joe W for Clerk. There were no other nominations. Officers were voted unanimously save for one nay Bruce vote.

• Great Hill, orienteering signage by Discovery Museum

Kathie explained the Discovery Museum's Orienteering Exhibit. See <http://discoverymuseums.org/exhibit/orienteering>

Three maps are available online for short (easy), medium, and long (difficult) courses that participants are challenged to follow. 12 orienteering markers with letters have been placed on trees in Great Hill and correspond to letters on the maps. The short and medium courses can be done entirely on existing Great Hill trails. It is intended that the signs will be moved and the maps will change every year.

The Discovery Museum got permission for the orienteering signage from Tom Tidman and Bettina, but the LSC indicated that it too should have been contacted early on this, or at least to have been informed of it. But if Tom and Bettina are "on board", then it's okay with the LSC.

Does the Discovery Museum have permission to use the private trail on the Mill Corner property? The Committee explained to Kathie the concern of the Mill Corner Homeowners' Association about public use of its trail by dog walkers. Bettina will give Kathie the name of a person to contact and expressed optimism that the Association would not discourage Museum guests as Museum guests would not be accompanied by dogs.

Bettina also mentioned that she and Corrine have been preparing signs re the private trail, and the signs should be going up in a month or so.

Bob asked about erosion at the Great Hill trailhead on the Discovery Museum property. Heavy water flow used to erode the trailhead, but erosion no longer seems a problem. Bob will have a look at this.

Spring Hill (housing) development

Jim had summarized this at the last LSC meeting, but not a lot of people attended that meeting. To allow or not allow this development will be a precedent-setting decision made by the Planning Board in a meeting occurring simultaneously with this LSC meeting. Should someone from the LSC speak at this open meeting? It's not necessary, as Planning Board members have in front of them a well-positioned letter from Jim.

06/22 meeting with Acton Water District (AWD) and Mike Callahan of Beaver Solutions

Jim used a map to review the Guggins Brook beaver situation — essentially one that causes flooding of the leaching fields of the Applewood Village condominiums in Boxborough. Mike (who developed the DVD that the LSC uses to help understand beaver behavior) and coworkers visited the Guggins Brook site, wrote a proposal for the AWD, and are now waiting for a response. Mike proposes to install a low pipe beginning where the water is deep enough, about 25 feet out from “Bruce’s bridge” on the yellow trail. He’ll put a fence on the upstream side of the culvert with the drain-end of the pipe on the downstream side of the fence (but the pipe will not go through the culvert) so the water will drain below the fence. Beavers would be “welcome” to build a dam on the upstream side of the fence.

Jim thinks the bid is for about \$1800. Jim inquired about this yesterday. The AWD had received the proposal and are now looking at it.

Mike will view the beaver/bridge situation at Heath Hen Meadow Thursday morning at 10.

PARCELS

• Nagog Hill stonewall exposed!

Bob gave the recent history re the mowing of the Kaminski land and its abutting Nagog Hill meadow. Currently the Nagog Hill meadow (that the LSC said the Kaminski's should mow but once a year) is a beautiful field with grasses about a foot high and no invasives. Bob has hosted two volunteer workdays to clear the stonewall north of the meadow and adjacent to the Nagog Hill yellow trail. As of last Sunday, the whole wall was stripped and John had cut down an abutting dead ash tree. Bob will be promoting another workday next Sunday. There is more cleanup to do. Long term, Bob has asked the Kaminski's if they are willing to keep invasives from coming back along the wall and also do some work on the west wall of their meadow.

Conservation Land (CL) field perimeters: How maintained and by whom?

There are several CLs with meadows, Nagog Hill, Grassy Pond, Stoneymeade, Heath Hen Meadow, and Jenks. How are their stonewall perimeters tended to?

At Grassy Pond's Newtown Road meadow, the south wall was cleared several years ago (and now has lots of vegetation again). Bob is proposing that it is time to clear the east wall and the street wall. He discussed this yesterday with Tom Tidman. Tom will check whether the town's long-armed street side cutters could be used to start on the street wall. Trees along the wall would have to be dropped into the field, not the roadway, and they are far enough back for this to happen. The LSC, w/volunteers, would clean it up.

At Heath Hen Meadow, selective mowing has cut back on buckthorn and the meadow is getting lots of grass. A meadow problem is keeping the overhead branches along the perimeter from interfering with the tractor.

At Jenks, Josh Haines's mower can't handle one section, so Josh is willing to operate the Town's heavy, heavy giant vac for mowing most of the trail. Bettina will see that Tom Tidman makes this happen. Hopefully, the LSC will get Town help with the perimeter of the Jenks meadow.

Stoneymeade would be a good place for the giant vac mower. Right now, we don't know what goes on there.

The LSC needs to revisit the idea of getting a mower smaller than the giant vac. Bob's mower is easy to use. Why not use it? Bettina will talk to Tom Tidman about buying a better field mower.

Sam Bell, retired Highway Department employee, has his own brush hog. He brushes out Littleton CL. Tom Tidman would pay him to mow some of our fields.

Bob feels some fields need mowing earlier after bird hatching, etc. Bob feels that the current management plan is not working.

Another meadow problem: Each year a meadow gets a little smaller. How to deal with this?

In general, how are meadows to be maintained and by whom? Bettina: We need a comprehensive list of whole meadows that need mowing, meadow pathways that just need the giant vac, periphery care of meadows, etc. To that end, Bettina has prepared a grid that is on Google Docs. After making sure that the grid lists everything (what needs mowing, how to do it, where to do it, when to do it), Bettina will put in what the Town does.

Bob remains concerned about stewards not reporting. He is willing to write a checklist for stewards to help stewards become aware of what's out there and what to report. Who will enforce such a reporting system? This could be a good job for the Vice Chair.

• Arboretum update

There is a lot going on.

- 1) The Town is still working on getting the well up and running. There is a 50-gal water tank and an electrical panel in the utility shed where the water will be turned on and off.
- 2) There is now an electrical conduit to the new kiosk's location. Bettina has met with a Scout on building the kiosk.
- 3) The new cedar arbor needs to be ordered to go next to the butterfly garden at, on the map, the top of the yellow trail.
- 4) With some hard work, the rain garden is looking really nice.
- 5) Bettina located for the LSC the Chinese garden and Chinese trail (connecting the rhododendron garden and the fragrance garden) on the Arboretum map. The Arboretum is working with the Chinese-American Civic Society on this. The Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council is helping with funding. Eagle Scout Jonathon Gong would like to build the bridge that jumps a small, intermittent streambed on the Chinese trail. He will work with Bruce to help design it, possibly copying the existing bridge right next to the small pond that's not far from the Arboretum parking.
- 6) Joe H is finishing the turnaround at the end of the bog boardwalk. The final item to be installed will be an information panel on bogs. Parking for the bog boardwalk is still being discussed.

• Canoe Launch: Mowing the Meadow

Joe H has been mowing this whenever it gets too high, every 3 weeks or so. Joe is "making a lawn" but should it be a meadow? He would like the LSC to tell him how frequently to mow it. Because it's where people come to get to the river, maintaining a 6-ft wide path to the river seems good. So Joe should just maintain a path and let the rest become meadow.

- Guggins Brook, moving Central St easement

The new sidewalk on the west side of Central Street has created a steep hill from the sidewalk to the Guggins Brook access trail. It is so steep that it is considered unsafe, and there is drainage at the bottom. Jim has talked with Tom Tidman about the possibility of steps, but Tom would like the trail to be accessible. Moving this end of the trail up towards the Half Moon Hill entrance on Central Street would accomplish this. Jim would have to get the Half Moon Hill okay on adjusting the easement (that was generated by the Half Moon Hill folk). However, this has to be done legally, which is a significant complication. Why not just let it happen? The easement is a written agreement; Jim would prefer a legally sustainable fix.

- Wright Hill

A future agenda might want to review Jim Salem's memo on parking on Wright Terrace for Wright Hill visitors. Should there be parking for 2 cars or for 3 cars? Also, Jim S would like LSC guidance on building the Wright Hill trail. He is planning to get holes dug this weekend for a sign at the Wright Hill cart path entrance from Central Street.

- Nagog Hill, to blaze and kiosk the new access trail to Nagog Hill from Skyline Drive?

Carolyn can advise on blazing. Bob and Bettina are meeting with her tomorrow and the three will walk the trail. Neighboring homeowners would be welcome to come along. Carolyn will take whatever is decided back to her Quail Ridge neighborhood board for its consideration and approval. Who will blaze, and who will build the kiosk? Right now, to build kiosks, the LSC needs more Boy Scouts than it has at present. If Quail Ridge has any carpenters, they would be welcome to help. The LSC has kiosk plans that it would share. For an example of what a new kiosk would look like, the kiosk at Robbins Mill is the LSC's newest. For the access trail, it looks like there is room for 5 cars in the parking. There is a sign there now, but it may not be within the Town easement.

Observation: On the map showing the Nagog Hill red trail from Hazelnut Street; the property lines need to be updated. The trail is in the right place. The lot lines are not.

- Nashoba Brook bridge update

Bob wants to finish the Nagog Hill stonewall clearing project first.

Bob has a new set of drawings with measurement fractions in fraction form rather than in decimal form (as had been the case). Bob has some minor issues to give to Bob Farra, who has collaborated on the plans, before releasing the plans "to the world". The bridge would be built in Bob's backyard. It will be assembled, taken apart, moved by flatbed truck to the site, and then put back together. It will be an 18-ft bridge located on existing footings a little way up from the present "jump over" bridge.

Bob has listed for Bettina what he needs.

- Robbins Mill/Scoutland update

There have been sightings of Scoutland Trustee Bill Klauer. Bettina needs to set up a time to meet with him. After Bill agrees to an easement, Bettina will give him an easement draft to revise as he sees fit. Bettina also wants to arrange a walk of Scoutland with Bill.

The Appalachian Mountain Club did a great job cutting the trail; it's still visible. Bettina and an intern will blaze the (red) trail.

Question from Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) folks: Did you take out the big tree that's across the trail yet? No.

Another BCT concern: Why is nothing being done about the observation platform that was to be built on Robbins Pond and was to be part of the BCT? The LSC has official plans for the platform. A developer was supposed to build it. Bob will send the plans to anyone interested. Bettina thinks that a dock license will be needed to build the platform (as was the case recently on Grassy Pond). A dock license costs nothing. It's just paperwork.

• Others (including Assabet River Trail work)

Corrine, Bettina, and some relatives did some work. Nobody got back to Bettina for the big workday.

Tom Tidman would like to know what the LSC feels about paving parking lots. Response: No lots have to be paved. Grading does work for a while.

VOLUNTEERS

• The New England Aquarium youth services program

Jim met with Lucy Inge of the Aquarium and they identified work to be done in August at Jenks and Guggins Brook. A group will be working at Heath Hen Meadow on August 2.

• DiscoverSTEM 2017

Paula will let anyone in the life sciences who is interested in participating November 6 how to sign up.

Brainstorming WildAware stories

A fisher and a porcupine were spotted on School Street. Turtle crossings. Coyote mothers with new pups; there are signs up in Camp Acton about aggressive coyote mothers with pups attacking big dogs. What to do when you meet coyotes. (Did such a story.) Coyote hazing. (Ditto.) A bear was sighted in the North Acton woods; in Carlisle as well.

August 15 agenda

No comments.

Evaluate meeting

“For he's a jolly good fellow . . .” (for Bruce for another year).

The meeting dissolved at 8:57 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, August 15, at 7 P.M., in Room 9.