

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, August 28, 2013, Town Hall, Room 126, 4 pm

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe, Tom Arnold, Bob Guba, Nan Towle Millett, Bruce Rachman, Jim Snyder-Grant (Chair), Laurie Ullmann

Associate (nonvoting) member present: Joe Will (Minutes)

Nonmembers: Roxie Rachman

Jim called the meeting to order at 4:07 pm.

Review and approval of July minutes

Bettina pointed out that “Recreation Commission” on page 4 should read “Recreation Department.” The minutes as corrected were accepted unanimously.

Officer elections: Chair, Vice-Chair, Clerk

Chair: Jim, incumbent and only nominee, abstained from vote but won unanimous vote of others. Jim accepted “with humility and excitement” and “hope(s) to do an even better job this year.”

Vice-Chair: Dave Cochrane, incumbent and only nominee, won unanimous vote.

Clerk: Joe, only nominee, abstained from vote but won unanimous vote of others.

Follow-up on trail at Sachem Way

Jim has built the trail that LSC voted last month. The trail connects the Acton Housing Authority (AHA) Sachem Way development to Wills Hole/Town Forest. The trail is one of the last pieces the AHA has needed in place to gain a Certificate of Occupancy that allows people to move into the new Sachem Way housing. The portion of the trail on AHA land is about 80 yd long.

• Question: Do we want a kiosk at the trail entrance at the end of Sachem Way? Ultimately, the LSC decided “No” by unanimous vote. Related discussion:

- We have permission for a kiosk, but we don’t have to put one in.
- AHA would pay for the kiosk. They might pay for other signage.
- Kiosks are located where people are allowed to park. There is no parking available to the public at this trailhead. Therefore the trail is essentially for a limited number of people.
- We should have a Wills Hole/Town Forest sign.
- We could have a “You Are Here” map along with a Quick Response (QR) code.
- We could have actual maps.
- There is no “center” or “office” to the Sachem Way development, so there is no place to put maps.
- The LSC could ask the AHA to give maps to residents when they move in.
- We could include Sachem Way information on current map and make copies.
- Jim has already done a mock up map showing Sachem Way and an approximation of the trail.

Actions: Bob will walk the trail to generate the coordinates with his differential Global Positioning System (GPS) device. Bob will give the data to Jim. Jim will work with the LSC mapping group to turn the data into a map. Jim will contact Peggy Liversidge about blazing the trail. Jim will work with Joe on other development issues.

Follow-up on trail maintenance equipment

In an email, Linda McElroy had written, “the TTT (Trail Through Time) has tools that are stored either with me or in one of Norma Wu's little sheds (at Wheeler Lane). These could be lent to any steward needing to borrow tools. We would just need a way to keep track of who has what.” Subsequently, she listed one each of a garden rake, a mulch fork, a regular shovel with grip handle, a pole shovel with extra long pole, loppers, clippers, medium weight tamper, folding saw, trowel, and bulb hole digger; two wheelbarrows, and several pairs of work gloves, and indicated that she has much of the above, but most of it could go to Norma's sheds.

Points made in LSC discussion:

- Linda's list is from memory, but she will update it when she is back in town.
- Norma has given permission for LSC to use her sheds.
- One shed measures about 2 ft by 4 ft and is 5 ft tall.
- Combination locks may be the best way to lock the sheds. Should make sure Norma is okay with this.
- There would be no room for a lawnmower.
- Some CPA money bought part of this LSC equipment.
- We should ask Linda how the equipment was purchased. Equipment purchased w/tax dollars should be labeled as town property.
- At present, hardly anyone ever asks for LSC tools. Based on emails and this discussion, all stewards now know that they can go to borrow them. Another model would be to distribute the tools to stewards.
- At present, LSC tools are used in work projects, like by students.
- Bettina would use them every week at the Arboretum. Right now she brings her own tools to use and lend. There is no shed at the Arboretum because of a likelihood of vandalism.
- Jim summarized: It's okay to keep tools in Norma's shed. Let's publicize it, get locks, and set up some sort of tool sign-out system.

8th Grade Work Day projects, Friday 09/27 (raindate: Monday, 09/30)

(Tom didn't get the email on this project.)

Ideas/discussion re projects:

- Wood chipping normally at several places (as done already in past years)
 - chipping last year at Camp Acton didn't work; poison ivy came back. Spraying poison ivy last year didn't work either. Nothing else comes to mind for Camp Acton.
 - Not enthusiastic about wood chips at Guggins Brook. Reason: Bog bridges are coming to Guggins and chips don't make sense with bog bridges. Jim has sent info on bog bridges to Bob, but Bob needs design drawings to pursue further.
 - Wood chips look pretty good at Grassy Pond. There could be another layer on the Newtown Road access to Grassy Pond. (Bob pointed out that that trail needs maintenance. Ann Shubert will go back there when she has time.) Maybe chips could be used at Nagog Hill or Pratt's Brook.
- Linda will take some crews. Laurie will help supervise them.
- Some crews could work at Iron Work Farm.
- Some crews could work with Bettina at the Arboretum..
- Could students do general clean up of parking areas? Not a good idea. Such work is not practical with so many teenagers. Bob says stewards should do this.
- Tom suggests a short email to all stewards to give them a last shot to get projects. In particular, we could emphasize wood-chip possibilities with Elan Riesman (Nagog Hill) and Theresa Portante-Ryan (Pratt's Brook).

Action: Jim will email all stewards to remind them of this workday opportunity and highlight the wood-chip possibilities at Nagog and Pratt's.

High School volunteer projects (ongoing)

For upcoming High School Volunteer Fair (students are looking for volunteer hours) we need to send a signup sheet w/description of work. This has been low yield in the past. It's sometimes not possible to read what students write on the signup sheet, especially email addresses. Nonetheless, can we identify some projects that students could take on, on their own? Note that these should be single jobs, not "events."

- The Canoe Launch needs ongoing Japanese knotweed maintenance. Bettina usually gets students to help with this and can take care of finding the students this time. (She has used interns this summer.)
- Bruce needs a sign placed in Camp Acton.
- Robbins Mill trail work is a possibility.
- Students could remove the white vertical percolation pipes that developers at Robbins Mill placed in the ground and never removed.
- Aside from the Volunteer Fair, stewards could seek high school student volunteers on their own. The contact would be Melissa Dempsey (mdempsey@ABSchools.org) in the Counseling Office. Stewards could make a poster for a wall in that office. Melissa could also post volunteer opportunities on the school website.

Action: Jim will write up something for the High School Volunteer Fair.

Mowing: Revisiting Town vs. volunteer assignments

- Town will mow access to Wetherbee.
- Aboretum: Joe Holmes has volunteered to take care of the Billings Trail.
- Grassy Pond: Jim will talk with Ann Shubert about taking care of plants abutting Newtown Road entrance trail to the boardwalk. If she doesn't want to do it, Jim will seek help elsewhere. At Grassy Pond's Nagog Hill Road entrance, Bob has removed the Japanese knotweed right by the road on the left when facing the parking area.
- Wills Hole/Town Forest: Vegetation by the Captain Handley Road parking lot and access trail is okay right now, but needs work about every three weeks. Joe can't do it so Jim will seek help elsewhere. Also, the map box at this entrance usually has ants in it. A handful of Borax will take care of the ants.
- Camp Acton: Bruce mows at Camp Acton every 1.5 months with self-propelled mower.
- Guggins Brook: Access from Central Street not mowed yet. Bob wouldn't take a heavy mower there as it would get stuck where the stream floods.
- Nagog Hill: Mowing the small meadow is the Town's responsibility.
- On private owner encroachment on conservation land at Nagog, Jim will talk to Tom. When a permitted project occurs on or near wetlands, Conservation Commission often requires a line of boulders placed to mark the edge of the wetlands. Perhaps something like that could be done re encroachment on Conservation land.

Actions: See Grassy Pond, Wills Hole/Town Forest, and encroachment bullets above.

Volunteer appreciation event and/or committee barbecue

There will be an event for the LSC and associated people on Saturday, 09/28 (day after the 8th Grade Work Day), 4-6ish, at either Bruce's place (1st choice), Linda McElroy's back yard (2d choice), or the Common House at Half Moon Hill (Jim's place, 3d choice).

Action: Jim will send out emails to get commitment of location and for folks to "save the date."

Robbins Mill trails

- Jim has 5 replies in favor of walking the proposed trail this Saturday, 08/31, beginning at 10 a.m. and meeting at the Canterbury Hill playground. The walk will do the short version, just the proposed loop.

If people want to spend more time, Jim will stay longer to show other possible trails.

- We now have a draft from town counsel of a one-year renewable license for crossing Scoutland. Once we have a crossing plan that we like, we send it to Bill Klauer for presentation to the Scoutland Board of Trustees. The expectation is for a five-year renewal period. Why five years? Not known, but bye and bye we can push back on that and ask for a longer period.
- (Unrelated to above) Bruce is taking over working with scouts on their projects from Bob; Bob is Consultant Emeritus and will do all kiosk work. Bruce (and Roxie Rachman) had to leave the meeting at this point, but did not escape the LSC rendering of “Happy Birthday.”

Meadows at Guggins - maintenance goals and mowing policy

Two topics:

1. What to do about the small inner meadow? Jim and Bob are “at extremes” on this and have tried to find middle ground. Bob says mow the grass every 2–3 weeks. Jim doesn’t like power mowers and has been cutting it down once a year with hand tools. Another problem: There are lots of invasive plants and goldenrod. Also, we should try to save as much of the milkweed as possible. Handcutting, not power mowing, would allow for saving milkweed, but much more frequent cutting is needed to keep invasives down and to reduce the goldenrod dominance. This fall Jim has pulled the stuff that’s been neglected.

Tom: The small meadow is a nice little area, and butterflies are a good idea. Keep the plants down and you’ll get more variety of birds. Letting it fill in over time is not a way to go, and you would get woody plants. Keeping it mowed is a good idea, but how frequently? Don’t know, but keep the non-trail area down to 18 inches.

Bob: Would mowing every 6 weeks work? Goldenrod is fairly new. Goldenrod gets dense and close, and the ground underneath stays bare. At the other end are things like raspberry spires, which eventually decay after cutting. We should attack the goldenrod. Keeping everything down close is a good way to go.

Jim: For a year he’ll execute a compromise plan and then review the results with Bob (in 12 months). The compromise plan is to cut down the trail access every three weeks and cut down the whole meadow every 6 weeks. More details of the plan are in DocuShare here:

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-39386/Gugginsinnermeadowplanidea.pdf>

2. We will discuss the outer meadow at Guggins Brook (near Central Street and Half Moon Hill) at a future meeting.

Actions: Jim will include progress notes on the inner meadow in his parcel reports. Jim will prepare for a discussion of the outer meadow.

Hear any reports on conservation parcels

- Wetherbee: Bob borrowed Jim’s (the town’s) weed wrench. Should we wait for a cool day to pull up the little oaks? Tom would help for a little while, not for a whole morning. Laurie will be able to do a morning’s work.
- Stoneymeade: The blue birds are gone for the season. They may have had 3 fledglings – a great result.
- All parcels: Bob remarked on a “nice” email from college kids who said they walked all of Acton’s trails. We could explore coming up with three or four categories of trail types and do a matrix for all trails on all parcels.

Evaluate this meeting

A reminder to try to tackle agenda in order of priority. Any item requiring a vote will have high priority. Meeting today was well-organized as we got through the whole agenda.

The next meeting will be at 4 pm on Wednesday, September 18.

The meeting adjourned at 5:24 p.m. by unanimous vote.

Documents that serve as background for these discussions can be found at
<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-5640>

They are titled:

00 - agenda as posted

01 - draft LSC minutes for 2013 07 29

02 - Officer Elections

03 - Sachem Way followup

04 - relevant excerpts from emails re: tools at end of Wheeler Lane

05 - 8th grade community service day request

06 - fall high school volunteer fair

09 - Robbins Mill Trails - invitation to walk

10.1 - Guggins Inner Meadow Plan Idea

10.2 - email re the two parts of agenda item 10 about Guggins meadows