

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Virtual Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 19, 2021, Virtual Meeting, 7 P.M.

Zoom Participants/Attendees (in bold)

Regular (voting) members: **Dale Chayes, Bob Farra**, Zanna Gruber (Chair), **Joe Holmes, Aaron Moore, Bruce Rachman, Laurie Ullmann, John Watlington** (Vice-Chair), **Joe Will** (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) members: **Jon Campbell**, Andy Gatesman, Josh Haines, **Everett Kenerson, Philip Keyes, Gary Kilpatrick**, Mel Lima, Jim Salem, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT) President)

Opening

John opened the meeting at 7:01 p.m. with eight voting members, Dale, Bob, Joe H, Aaron, Bruce, Laurie, John and Joe W, present. John read the script provided by the Town for remotely-conducted open meetings.

John welcomed Everett, steward-to-be of Stoneymeade.

Regular Business

Review and approval of December 15 minutes

Approval of the minutes was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously by roll call.

Citizens' concerns

For information purposes: The Acton Agricultural Commission has been interested in putting a Conservation Restriction (CR) on the Morrison Farm lands, prompted in part by recent consideration of locating a dog park there. Town Manager John Mangiarotti would not be comfortable with bringing such a CR proposal to Town Meeting. Rather he would prefer to see some disposition of the buildings as he does not want the Town to own buildings for which there is no use. The Ag Comm then is considering possible ownership of the house, by possibly a "Friends" group within, say, a one-foot envelope of surrounding land. The house would be made weathertight and preserved much like the historic houses along the Minuteman National Park trail. The house would be maintained as an iconic example of a depression era farmhouse, with low budget with outside funding. Essentially, nothing would change. The possibility would remain of the Town finding some use for the barn. The Ag Comm would go to different Town committees for feedback on the idea. The Ag Comm has scheduled a site walk of Morrison Farm for Saturday, January 30, at 10 a.m. Per Susan, the ACT wholeheartedly supports the idea.

Susan also told of the January 31 wildlife tracking walk at Nashoba Brook that the ACT is sponsoring. The ACT is limiting the sign-up list to 12 guests because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

New/Special Business

Neighbors "take" on possible trail link with Carlisle

Bob walked the proposed trails with Steve Tobin and Steve Spang of the Carlisle Trails Committee. One challenge to complete a loop would be a huge wetlands section. Could some of the Robbins Mill Conservation Trust property be used? That would require an easement. Besides Bob, there are two other trustees for the Trust. The trustees will discuss this next Monday. Another aspect is to solicit neighbors' feedback. Bob will have this done within a couple weeks. He will report on the easement request and neighbors' feedback at the February LSC meeting.

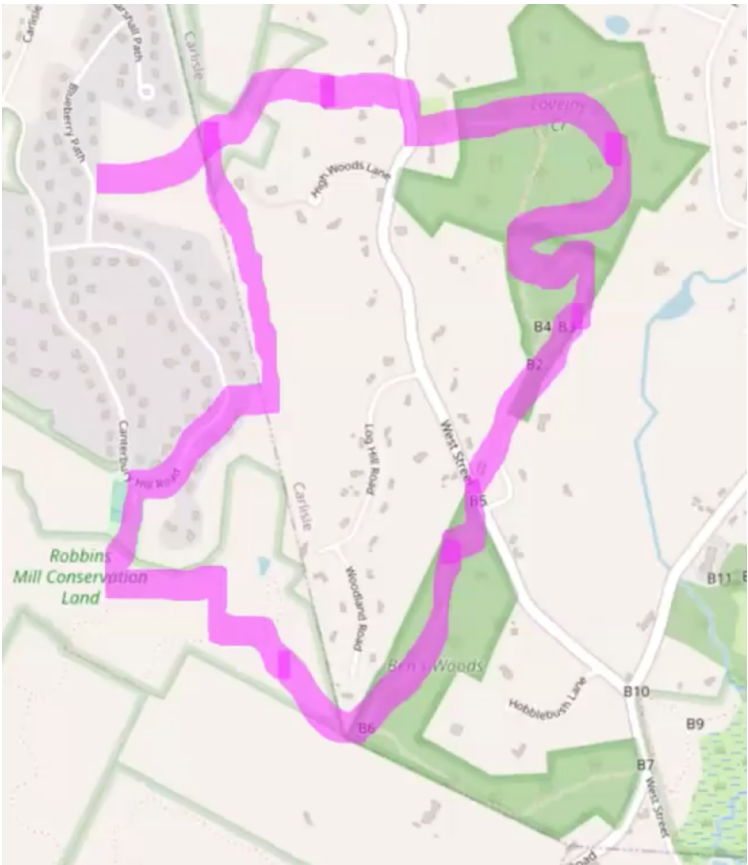
Bob shared the following images. He will also e-forward the images to the LSC.



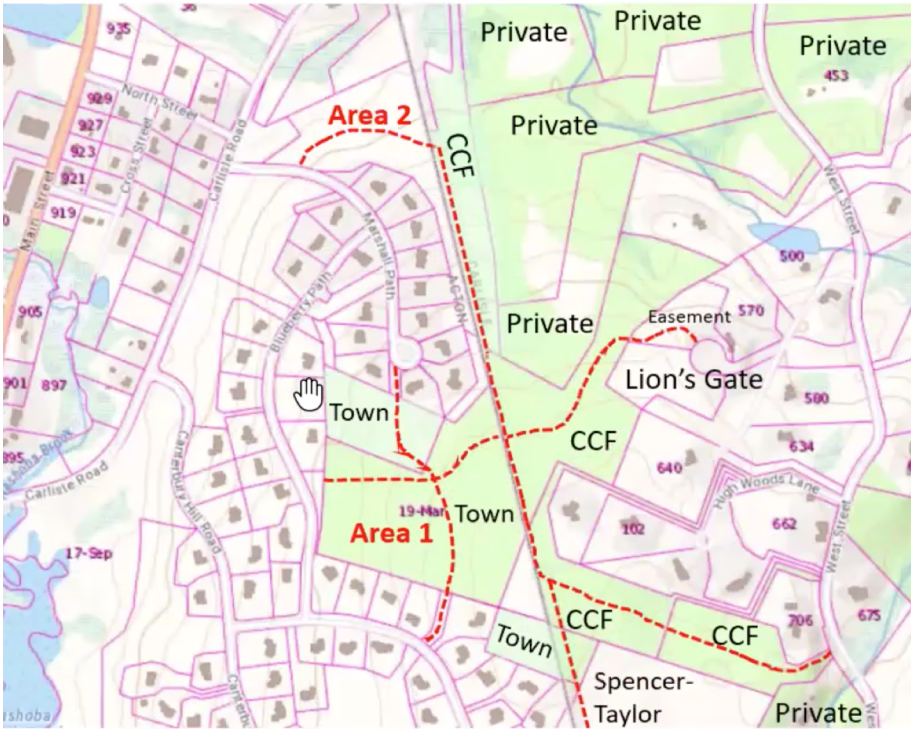
Easement site



Purple shows a possible loop. At the upper left in the top image is what the image below refers to as “Area 1”.



Possible Future Trail Connections, Acton-Carlisle (North)



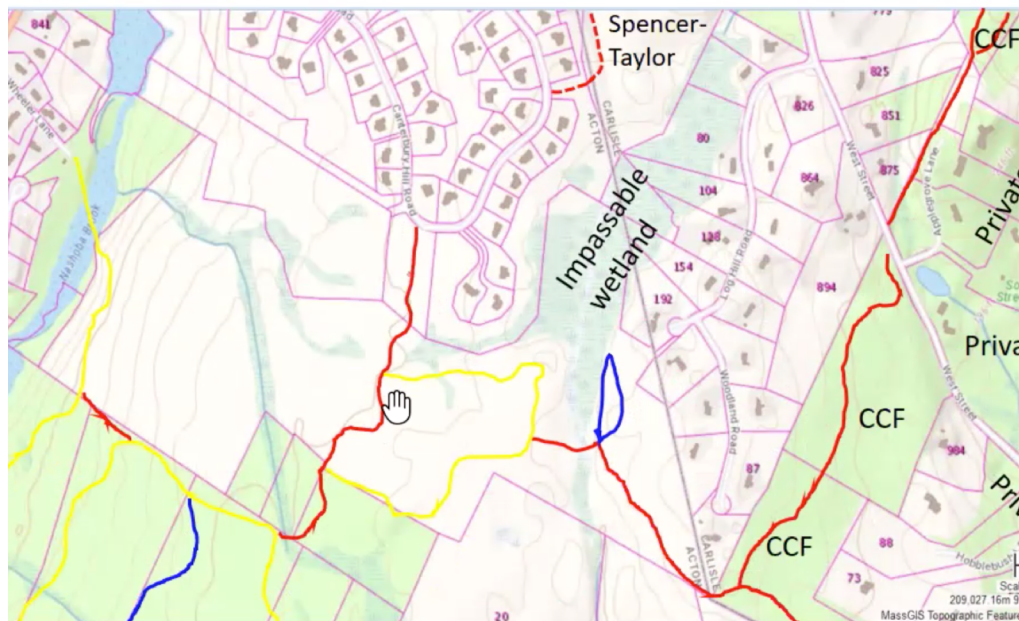
Dashed lines: potential trails

The first large image on the previous page shows a possible loop trail. Beginning at Blueberry Path in the upper left (see Area 1 in the bottom image) and traveling clockwise, the trail crosses into Carlisle, proceeds east, then south to cross back into Acton at the eastern point of Acton's Robbins Mill Conservation Land (CL). It follows Robbins Mill trails to the CL entrance at Canterbury Hill Road. It then follows Canterbury Hill Road to the site of a possible easement over Robbins Mill Conservation Trust property. It closes the loop by following the gas pipeline north along the Acton-Carlisle boundary.

The bottom image on the previous page shows three entrances to the Area 1 portion of the loop trail, one from Marshall Path, one from Blueberry Path (where there could be public parking), and one from Canterbury Hill Road. (The path from Marshall Path in Area 2 to the loop trail would be another possibility.)

The image below shows existing trails. The proposed loop would exit the Robbins Mill CL at Canterbury Hill Road (the north end of the red trail), proceed northeast along Canterbury Hill Road to the easement (the red dashes) from Canterbury Hill Road to the Town line. Parking for public in general would be best provided at the Robbins Mill Recreation Area (at the north end of the red trail).

Existing and Possible Future Trail Connections, Acton-Carlisle (South)



Eagle Scout projects (Morrison Farm, Guggins Brook, Nashoba Brook)

In 2020, seven Eagle Scout projects were completed. Tommy Vaille built a boardwalk and bridge at Guggins Brook CL. Nathan Wolfe built a bunch of bog bridges on the high side of Nashoba Brook. As mentioned in Laurie's monthly report, Sam Cluett completed boardwalk ramps to aid getting on and off the southern Nashoba Brook bridge at each of its ends, with thanks to Bruce for helping to get some beautiful work done. Aiden Watson built 150-200 ft of bog bridges at Guggins. James Dyer also built about 150 ft of bog bridges at Guggins. Great thanks to Jon (now Scoutmaster for Troop 32) for his help with Tommy's, Aiden's, and James's work. Adam Arthur put together kits for 30 nesting boxes along the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT). He had fellow scouts install them, and they have five-year maintenance plans.

For 2021, Bettina and Bruce described scout projects that included more boardwalk work at Guggins, rebuilding of a fence and a Community Garden gate at Morrison Farm, along with planting of a couple more apple trees in the Pam Resor Orchard. (Bettina will share with the scout advice from John on fencing

material.) Another scout may be doing a boardwalk at the Arboretum. And still another is planning to do a bunch of boardwalks and bog bridges on the Assabet River Blue and Green Trail.

Community Preservation Act (CPA) Update

Because the 2021 Town Meeting is delayed until June, the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has slowed down its process. There have been two evenings of project presentations with three more evenings to come through the end of February. CPC deliberations will begin and probably end in March. Open Space is asking for \$400K but because the requests total about \$1M more than what is available, there is good chance that Open Space will receive less. Right now, there seems to be no Open Space action on the Wetherbee woods near the Wetherbee CL. Rather, Open Space appears to be working with Boston Area Gleaners in negotiations related to Stonefield Farm in South Acton, possibly aiming for an Agricultural Restriction on the land. (Clerk's note: For more information on the Gleaners' efforts re Stonefield Farm, visit the Gleaners' site: <https://www.bostonareagleaners.org/growthegleaners.html#learn-more.>)

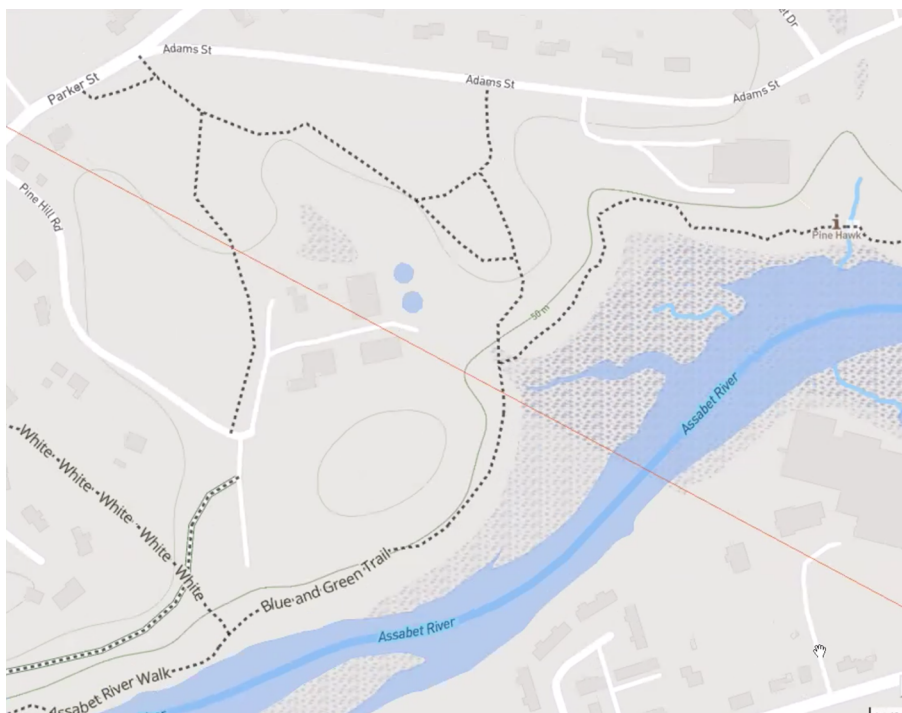
Also, it was noted that the Historical Commission's bridge/trail project at the Pencil Factory in the Nashoba Brook CL is now planned for two years with a first-year CPA request of \$44K to pay for permitting and design. The second year's request will be for \$250K for actual construction of the bridge and the accessible trail from the BFRT to the Pencil Factory kiosk. It was noted that one can cross from the BFRT to the Nashoba Brook trail "for free" on an informal trail about 50 yards south of the Pencil Factory.

Land Stewards' Field Guide

Jim Salem had shared the "Cape Ann Steward's Field Guide" with the LSC and suggested that the LSC might want to create something similar. Jim was unable to attend this meeting so this will be deferred to next month. John suggests that the LSC might want to form a subcommittee with Jim on it to pull together such a document for the LSC. It could include updated (e.g., to include how to deal with encroachment) versions of current LSC documents relating to trail maintenance and stewards' responsibilities as well as more information on invasives. Anyone interested in being on such a subcommittee should let Jim know.

Assabet River Blue and Green Trail (ARB&G)

Joe H shared this map of trails along the Assabet River.



After sharing some information about the trails shown dotted on the map, Joe suggested that there should be a parking lot where (top left on the map) the dotted trail meets Parker Street west of the intersection with Adams Street. He would like to visit the site with Tom Tidman to get Tom's thoughts on it. In the meantime, he would like to hear LSC members' thoughts on this, the trails in general, and their blazing.

Discussion points:

- The trail extensions (to Town streets) are great. The 8-ft wide trail used heavily by ATVs is not good as a pedestrian trail. In addition to vehicle use, it is barren and seriously eroded. Breaking a pedestrian trail away from the ATV trail to minimize pedestrian use of the ATV trail would be good.
- The ATV trail needs base maintenance as far as having water bars put in.
- Phil agrees with the observations about the ATV trail. It is not good for mountain bikers either. Phil does trail design and would be happy to meet with Joe about rerouting and providing alternatives.
- Joe would like to meet with anyone interested in rerouting the trail. He'll meet offline with Phil and John.
- As for blazing, the ARB&G trails suffer from overblazing.
- Joe would like to develop an ARB&G map that could go on the Acton Trails website and give folks one more place to visit, particularly during the pandemic. But how to color the trails, particularly the main trail?
- The map should use standard trail colors.
- We should stay away from standard trail colors. Note that right now there is no loop trail, so there would be no yellow trail.
- Use alternating blue and green dots for the main trail.
- Joe plans to discuss the issues with the mapping team.

LSC Annual Report

Bettina is putting it together. She shared a draft with a few people, who provided feedback. Although the Committee is very comfortable with Bettina writing it, it might be appropriate for the Committee to review the draft before it goes out the door. The report is due January 30. Bettina will send the LSC the current version following this meeting. Committee folks can comment on it. Bettina will use her good judgment.

Additional Regular Business

Covid19-related issues

Keep picking up those masks!

Parcel issues

- Grassy Pond: Newtown Road entrance boardwalk repair
 - Folks who were to check this have been unable to do so yet. It can be done in the next couple months.
 - The wooden railing along Grassy Pond's parking lot on Nagog Hill Road has been replaced with small boulders. If necessary, and if the parking lot enlarges, they could be replaced with larger boulders.
 - The Grassy Pond meadow along Nagog Hill Road is receiving its "bi-decade" cleaning by several folks. Joe H is working on the corner of the parking lot. Jim Snyder-Grant is clearing around the meadow in a counterclockwise direction. Another volunteer is working in the other direction.
 - The number of cars parked in the parking lots for both Grassy Pond and Nagog Hill CLs has been "amazing" during the pandemic. Also, judging by the huge number of alcoholic bottles that are discarded at the lots, a significant amount of alcoholic consumption is occurring. Also, possibly, drug sales. One can email the police re the alcohol consumption, possibly asking that they drop by these lots a little more frequently over the next couple months. One needs to go to the police station to report any behavior that could be considered criminal.
 - As Grassy Pond steward, Gary should be notified of any Grassy Pond issues.
- Parcel repair needs
 - For the Town's 2022 budget, Bettina needs to put together the lumber needs of Natural Resources (NR). Lumber prices have skyrocketed. Normally NR's budget can handle this, but with the Town freeze on

spending, every penny requested is highly scrutinized. (That's why some Eagle Scout projects require more fund raising than in the past.) Bettina would like to get a good idea of what repairs will be coming up so she can give good input to the 2022 budget.

- It was noted that many Eagle Scout projects, once in place, have to be maintained by the LSC.

- Laurie reminded the LSC that the long boardwalk near the Stone Chamber at Nashoba Brook is in serious need of repair. A lot of its lumber can be reused but a lot also has to be replaced.

- Bettina will email the entire committee, asking every steward to list any major boardwalk repair they see coming up for their parcel over the entire 2022 fiscal year.

- Morrison Farm: Agricultural Commission plans

- This was moved to Citizens' Concerns early in the meeting to take advantage of Susan's time-limited presence at the meeting.

- Morrison Farm/Ice House Pond: Brookside 280' trail

This is an old CPA-funded project that will extend the present "trail to nowhere" from the Ice House Pond parking lot along the pond to a pond-side point on Morrison Farm land where it will connect with the Morrison Farm yellow trail. Tom Tidman has put the project out for bid. The trail should be completed this coming summer. Joe H traced the location of the trail using the Morrison Farm map. John notes that this trail should satisfy folks who have been asking for a bog bridge over at least one of the two wet crossings along this future trail route. It was pointed out that there used to be a "wonderful" connecting trail from the Ice House Pond to the Acton Post Office. It is believed that the land under the house built at the north end of the Morrison Farm woods is private to the brook's edge. Asking homeowners about passing over their private land has been discussed. If some committee member wants to follow through on this, s/he is to let the LSC know how it goes.

- Nashoba Brook (and elsewhere): Beaver trapping

This was added to the agenda when the USGS at Nashoba Brook filed for a beaver trapping permit when beaver activity affected the water levels. (The USGS data are used to inform FEMA and that information is shared across the state.) There has also been problematical beaver activity at Grassy Pond and on Fort Pond Brook by the new twin schools and on the Jenks land. In the latter case, Josh Haines is to let the LSC know if a beaver deceiver is needed there. Right now, in general, there is a lot of beaver activity and beavers don't have many predators (other than the USGS). Unfortunately, NR has to hire trappers when beavers create a risk to the public. In general, Acton tries not to interfere with beavers, particularly on CL.

- Great Hill

The state has certified the vernal pool next to the Great Hill playing field. Send Bettina an email if information is needed on other vernal pools in Acton. There is nothing new to report on the trail over private property from the east side of the playing field to the newly-acquired parcel (formerly the Magoon land). John checked his possible alternative trail during the height of flooding in this winter season and it is passable, so there is an option.

- Robbins Mill

Frodo and Dale looked at the big blowdown off Carlisle Road. Dale feels comfortable with clearing it — with some help. Bob told of having a professional tree cutter come in the clear a similar blowdown that was completely uprooted. When the tree was cut close to the root, the entire root ball fell — impressively — back into its original place. Bob cautions one to be wary of this when cutting near the root ball.

- When the ground is unfrozen, Bettina has a Robbins Mill sign for the Carlisle Road entrance.

- Bulette/Town Forest

Andy Gatesman is moving to Boxborough so Bulette will need a new steward. Also, we lose a sawyer. We could ask Andy to post signs that Bulette is looking for a new steward. Many thanks and much appreciation for the work Andy has done.

- Heath Hen Meadow

Jon, Bettina, and two volunteers met to take measurements of the HHM boardwalks as Bettina is working on a Mass Trails grant that would replace the boardwalk . . . to be submitted by February 1.

Website issues

There are no website changes this month.

- Abby Beilman, an Acton resident majoring in natural resources and political science at Clark University, is an intern for the Town over her winter break. She will type up all the information shown on the panels along the Trail Through Time (TTT). Once typed, Bettina will forward the Word file to Peg Sestrich so she can create a TTT tab on the Acton Trails site and close the old TTT link.
- Vivian Birchall who worked in Acton’s Land Use Department for about a year, has joined Acton TV. She and Bettina are planning to do a virtual walking tour video of the TTT for Acton TV.
- The TTT, with Linda McElroy and Bettina, should be featured on Boston’s Channel 5 “Chronicle” show sometime soon.

Maps update

- On the Nashoba Brook map, Joe H added a dotted line for the trail linking the Nashoba Brook Pencil Factory site and the BFRT.
- The same map does not show the connecting trail from the BFRT to the stone chamber. That’s intentional to help control the number of visitors to the stone chamber.
- The same map shows a black dotted trail paralleling a blue trail to the east of the Pencil Factory site. Laurie questions the need to show that trail as it adds nothing to what is accomplished by the blue trail. There is a big blowdown on the trail that Laurie has left there. In general, such unofficial trails can be a touchy subject as some folks prefer some unofficial trails to official trails. There are a lot of unblazed, unofficial trails in Town. Some we are trying to get rid of; others no. One way to discourage trail use is to let blowdowns accumulate, or to drop trees across each end of an undesired trail. This unofficial trail is a mess.
- Something to fix: If one clicks on “Improve this map” at the lower right in a map screen, any suggestion you make goes to Jim Snyder-Grant.
- On the Morrison Farm map, Joe H added a dotted line for the trail linking the causeway to the BFRT.
- Significant home renovation is occurring on the Conant home on Main Street. There apparently has been a lot of trespassing on this private property (that abuts Nagog Hill on one side and Nashoba Brook on the other), so the Conant family had to put out the word to discourage trespassing. Joe H has removed some of the informal trails shown on the Conant property, but other folks may be doing additional trail editing.

Next month’s (February 16) agenda

Send any agenda items to Joe W and Zanna Gruber.

Evaluate meeting

John did a great job. Thanks for stepping up.

Adjournment

Adjourning the meeting was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously by roll call at 8:22 p.m.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, February 16, at 7 p.m.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft Meeting Minutes of December 19, 2020