

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Monday, May 18, 2020, Virtual Meeting, 7 P.M.

Attendees (in bold)

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

Associate (nonvoting) members: Andy Gatesman, Josh Haines, Philip Keyes, Gary Kilpatrick, Nan Towle Millett, **Aaron Moore**, Jim Salem, **Sherman Smith**, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), **Jon Campbell** (Acton resident), **Dean Charter** (Acton Board of Selectmen LSC liaison), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT) President),

1. Opening

Bruce opened the meeting at 7:01 p.m., with a quorum of 6 voting members present — Dale, Bob, Zanna, Joe H, Bruce, and Joe W.

Note: Voting member Laurie Ullman joined the meeting shortly thereafter, was present until the meeting adjourned, but did not participate in any voting due to virtual-meeting technical problems. Any roll call votes cited in these minutes involved the 6 voting members mentioned in the preceding paragraph and exclude Laurie.

Bruce read the script provided by the Town for remotely-conducted open meetings.

2. Regular Business

Review and approval of February minutes

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

(Note: The March and April meetings were cancelled due to Covid-19.)

Citizens' concerns

None

3. New/Special Business

Covid-19 issues

- promoting conservation lands, or not?

To promote more opportunities for folks to get out on Acton Conservation Land (CL), Joe H urged that we publicize some of the CLs that are not apparent from the Acton Trails website. Specifically, Joe mentioned the Caouette-Simeone and Wright Hill parcels, the Anderson land, and Morrison Farm as being not promoted in the way the rest of our parcels are. They could be listed on the website, there could be official maps made, some blazing and trail marking needs to be done, and they could become part of the challenge of earning the “I hiked Acton Trails” sticker and sew-on patch. Bettina pointed out that Wright Hill has recently been added to the website list and Morrison Farm will be next. She also acknowledged that she has updating the “I hiked Acton Trails” challenge on her “to do” list. And Joe said that the mapping team (Joe H) should be working on preparing pdf maps for these sites.

- posters on conservation lands

Dale has no particular problem with the posters per se, but he is concerned that they appeared without the LSC knowing anything about it. Per Bettina, the signage was an order from the Acton Board of Health (BoH) and when the BoH so orders, it wants action immediately. Bettina had a group that could do this within 24 hours, likely much faster than would have happened had she asked stewards to do the posting. That's not Dale's issue. The issue is not notifying the LSC that this was to happen. Not sending, say, a two-minute email to tell the Committee what was happening strikes Dale as "poor form." (In the "bigger picture," Dale suggests that "Social distancing is the worst possible thing we could be doing right now. Physical distancing and social bonds are the critical parts of this puzzle. These mean one should look out for your friends but don't get close to them. Social distancing means blow off your friends when they need moral support. To a lot of people, this is a real issue.")

- how to engage volunteers safely

Joe H has successfully run two volunteer work projects, allowing no more than four people (including himself) to be involved. Also, the stewards could set up a project, such as cutting trees or brush, and then have a family group do follow-up work — only one family at a time. Bettina has had several work days at the Arboretum with volunteers (usually fewer than 10) who were easily able to spread out, and there have been no problems with safety directives. It would be possible to work with scouts on more-or-less solo or small-group projects like pulling garlic-mustard, but team-effort projects, like corduroying or building boardwalks, would be difficult. So, it would be perfectly possible to have a volunteer work day for small numbers. Just organize it and explain the guidelines. If help is needed with guidelines, run the project by Bettina.

Mountain bike pump track

Bruce shared a proposal from Nathan Kleinschmidt, a student at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School and a member of Boy Scout Troop 1, for building a pump track (with the help of fellow scouts) as his Eagle Scout project. A pump track is a trail that is designed to provide practice and help improve skills in mountain biking. Nathan would like to build it in one of three parcels. One parcel (70 Quarry Road) is municipal land. The other two parcels are Town Forest land, and all three are part of Wills Hole/Town Forest. Use of Town Forest land would require approval of the Conservation Commission and the Board of Selectmen (BoS). Use of the municipal-land parcel would require approval of the BoS only. In any case, it would be helpful to Nathan if the Committee would support a pump track as Nathan has proposed. Discussion points:

- It would have been nice if the LSC could have had an in-person presentation of the proposal.
- Dean has had "a little back and forth" with the boys. A stumbling block is that the municipal parcel is a backup site for a dog park. The dog park people have been pursuing a dog park for 3 or 4 years now and this request could create some conflicts . . . but maybe not. The dog-park people currently are focused on another location, but there has been no decision made on that yet. Another consideration is what changes would have to be made to the parcel, e.g., Extra fill would be brought in. How would that impact the site? A pump track is doable, but it will take some work. There is no assurance that the boys will still be boy scouts when this would be approved. Then, once a pump track is established, there would have to be maintenance. The scouts doing the building are likely to move on. It would not be good to establish something and then after, say 18 months, end up with piles of fill back in the woods. Obviously, a decision has to be made by the BoS. The LSC can let the BoS know that the LSC supports a dog park on the municipal parcel.
- The New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) is behind this pump track. The LSC's Phil Keyes (steward of Spring Hill) is its Executive Director. There's an Acton Mountain Biking

Association that the boys are part of. And mountain biking is not a “flash in the pan.” It’s here to stay and it’s quite popular.

- A pump track would require machinery to bring in materials, but if the track were to disappear back into the forest, the materials would be subsumed in very short order.
- A pump track would be preferable to a dog park. It would leave the trees.
- The scouts prefer the two Town Forest sites because their topography is better for a pump track. What would be the procedure for approval of Town Forest land for a pump track?
- At some point in time, the Conservation Commission took over authority for Town Forest lands. Compared to CLs, rules for Town Forest land are a little more relaxed as to what could be allowed. If the scouts want to use Town Forest land, they would need approval of the Cons Comm and then the BoS. The municipal-land site would require that they simply go directly to the BoS.
- What the scouts want to do doesn’t take much land nor does it do much to the forest. You wouldn’t know that a pump track is there unless you’re looking for it.
- From the pictures shown to us, it’s hard to tell how big the pump track is. It would be nice to get some kind of a comparison for an idea of how large it would be. Also, how many people are interested in this?
- Apparently, there is a mountain biking team at the high school with about 50 members, and it keeps growing. This has the backing of the bike shop, the NEMBA, and volunteers. One could say that upwards of 100 people would want to use it.
- The scouts’ information says that a pump track would use between a quarter acre and a half acre.
- Who would be liable in case of an injury on the track? It would be the same thing as riding a mountain bike in a forest, so it would be personal liability.
- You could put up signage, “Use at your own risk.”
- A pump track seems to be in same category as a dog park and could be opposed for the same reason we were opposed to a dog park. It’s on the main (yellow trail) loop of the Wills Hole/Town Forest parcel. There would be significant detrimental impact on all the people using the forest. Also, if there would be a lot of people using the pump track, there would be a lot of trash left.
- In the Scouts’ proposal, the pump track would not be on any existing trail. It would be between the yellow trail and Quarry Road.
- It would be next to the yellow trail in any of the scouts’ preferred parcels.
- Is there another part (of Wills Hole/Town Forest) where the pump track could be located that would not be on the main loop and wouldn’t affect the current public use of the parcel? For example, there is land next to Quarry Road on the other side of the pedestrian pathway; also, there is the northeast portion of Wills Hole/Town Forest, on the east side of Quarry Road.
- Use of the municipal-land parcel would not be as restricted as would be use of such an other site.
- The parcel that is general municipal land could become CL sometime down the road, suggesting that CL should be included now for consideration for a pump track.
- A pump track seems to provide more a recreation activity than a conservation activity. It is a bit difficult to understand how the LSC is in a position to make a recommendation for something that is more a recreation activity.
- We have mountain biking (and hiking) in all of our CLs so a pump track is not an unusual use. A key difference, however, is that the LSC keeps things natural. We don’t create an activity by changing terrain. In our parcels now, the mountain bikes ride on natural trails. We create the trails, but we are not moving things around to give the trails special features.
- Building something off a trail is very different from building it on a trail.
- It looks like this is a Recreation Department issue. Does it make sense to talk with Rec folks and wonder if it’s more in their turf than ours.

- Nathan (and others) presented the concept to the Recreation Commission in 2019 and were told of various sites in town they could consider. They were to think about it and come back to the Rec Comm. Recreation has no idea what has been done since then. Joe W shared the current proposal with the Rec Dept before the most recent Rec Comm meeting and the Rec Dept did not put it on the Rec Comm agenda.
- A motion was made (and subsequently withdrawn) that the land stewards support the general concept of a pump track in Acton but recommend that a location be found that is not immediately adjacent to our yellow trails. The pump track could be on CL but just not right next to a trail.
- A project such as a pump track probably could not be on bona fide CL because that would be a “change in use” and would require a 2/3 supporting vote of the Massachusetts legislature.

It was moved and seconded that the LSC write a letter to the BoS stating that the LSC is in favor of a pump track at the 70 Quarry Road location.

Roll call vote: Zanna yes, Dale yes, Joe W no, Joe H no, Bruce yes, Bob abstain. The motion was approved 3-2 with 1 abstention.

Joe W, Joe H, and Bob stated that they support a pump track, but not at this location.

After further discussion, it was decided to write a letter and present it first to the LSC at its next meeting.

More bog bridges?

There is no Town money for wood until the Town budget is unfrozen.

Parcel names

Joe H is concerned that the Caouette-Simeone farmland has never been given a formal name. He hasn't done background research related to the eight things to consider in the Naming Guidelines, in particular whether Acton Conservation Trust should be involved, so he suggests that we put this off until a future meeting. Bettina pointed out that the Town is in the process of having signs made, and the signs do use “Caouette-Simeone” but otherwise are a bit different from other signs. This topic is tabled until the next meeting.

Garlic mustard and other invasives

This is on the agenda because of an email on invasives sent by Jim Snyder-Grant. There was no discussion, except for the observations that garlic mustard is doing very well; it's not going away . . . and the garlic-mustard pesto that Dale made is not going away in the refrigerator either.

live blue Service Corps interests

All volunteer groups right now are on hold because of the state of emergency. Bettina will let the LSC know of developments.

4. Additional Regular Business

Parcel Issues

- Bulette trails blazed into the Anderson section?

With more people using trails these days, it seemed to Joe H that it is time to clear the trails for this relatively unknown parcel. Joe and Bruce did the clearing. Joe H so notified the Committee about a month ago and several folks, including Bettina and Tom Tidman, have hiked the trail. Joe's question is whether he should blaze the trail (red) in from Arlington Street (across from the Church of the Good

Shepherd) to the Anderson-section loop trail. (The loop itself should not be blazed because it is not yet clear where the yellow trail will actually be once the Bulette and Anderson parcels become one.) Tom was interested in access to the parcel from a future parking lot that would be further along Arlington Street. Joe has marked the parking site and the access trail and has so notified Tom. So, a final access trail is something still “in the wind”.

It was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously by roll call that the access trail from Arlington Street to the loop on the Anderson part of the Bulette CL be blazed red.

- Camp Acton driveway

It was filled and nicely graded as best they could. Its more passable and people are happy.

- Great Hill parking lot on Main Street (Communication with Tom Tidman and Town Engineer)

John Watlington says that the pothole is still there. Joe H has discussed this a couple times with Tom Tidman. Fixing it needs input from the Town Engineer because of water issues. However, the Town Engineer’s position is vacant, everything in Town Hall is on hold, and the Town has been having a tough time finding a candidate.

- Guggins Brook hemlock threat

Dean gave a general background on problems with an invasive insect — the *hemlock woolly adelgid* — that is severely damaging hemlock forests. He gave the migration history to the point where the woolly adelgid is now uniformly distributed throughout Massachusetts. It doesn’t spread terribly fast, and if you have one hemlock in your yard, you can prevent damage. If you have a forest, you can’t stop the woolly adelgid. Cold weather can slow it down. The demise of a hemlock forest can allow water temperatures to rise and consequently affect fisheries. Essentially, there is no good news, only bad news, and there is nothing one can do about it. In Acton, there is a notable hemlock grove in the Jay Lane area.

- Heath Hen Meadow gunshots nearby

Someone who lives not far from Heath Hen Meadow (HHM) reported hearing gunshots. Police investigated and found that the sounds were coming from private property in Stow. Natural Resources regards it as a police issue and is not acting on it as there is no need to alarm people walking in HHM CL.

- Morrison Farm yellow trail update and question

Joe H suggests that this is sort of a fait accompli. He had emailed the Committee describing how he felt the yellow trail in the meadow should be moved. Enough people said they would support the move, and now Natural Resources has mowed it. Using the Morrison Farm map, Joe reviewed the move.

It was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously by roll call to support the trail relocation.

Joe also took the opportunity to point out that within a year or so, the new pathways from the Ice House Pond parking lot into the Morrison Farm property should be completed. It looks like the yellow trail could become a bigger loop than it is now, including the new path along the Pond. So, it seems advisable to not complete the current blazing plan, and finalize a plan that will take the new trails into consideration.

- Nashoba Brook south bridge structural integrity

This is an issue of Laurie’s, who is attending this meeting but is unable to be seen or heard. Bettina suggests that this may be about the bridge access at either end. Scouts are designing these with Bruce and Laurie, and will be building same as an Eagle Scout project.

- Robbins Mill lumbering

Per Bob, it has decreased quite a bit. There has been nothing for the past month and a half and it is unclear whether it will resume. It could have been facilitated by an ATV, but any path used by an ATV is unclear. There is no ATV in the neighborhood. Also, trash left at the Carlisle Road entrance has decreased. The Town picked up some of it, and Bob is unsure of what to do going forward to proactively prevent trash dumping. Bettina has heard dirt bikes in the vicinity and suggested the direction from which the sounds seemed to originate. Bob has seen people riding dirt bikes off of Marshall Path (further north off of Carlisle Road). Tom Tidman has been thinking of changing the entrance to the CL from Carlisle Road and perhaps use boulders to impede illegal wood theft. Bob is supportive of this.

- Wright Hill kiosk

Jim Salem had brought this up. Per Bettina: We can't have a Wright Hill kiosk unless it's on Central Street. We can't put one on the Fochtman easement. We could possibly put it on conservation-restriction land. We would have to talk to Susan about that to make sure of what the conservation restriction says.

Online maps new feature(s)

There is an access trail to Spring Hill CL off of Jay Lane. There is a municipal parking lot on Strawberry Hill Road, at the foot of Jay Lane. Joe H has now marked that parking with a "P". (It is already so marked on the pdf map.) He notes that this parking lot is significant because it's on the Bay Circuit Trail, so Bay Circuit hikers can use it. Does the LSC want a kiosk or sign here? Not now. Joe H also noted that when one enters Spring Hill on this trail, there is a sign of a color different from that of other such signs.

Next month's (June 16) agenda

Nothing said now. Send in agenda items.

Evaluate meeting

Thumbs up!

5. Adjournment

At 8:27 p.m., it was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously by roll call to adjourn the meeting.

The next (virtual) meeting will be Tuesday, June 16, at 7 P.M.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft Meeting Minutes of February 18, 2020
- "Acton Pump Track" PowerPoint slides submitted by Nathan Kleinschmidt