

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 19, 2021, Town Hall, Room 9; also hybrid Zoom, 7 P.M.

Attendees (in person in bold, remote in bold italic)

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

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

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Bob Mackin** (Acton citizen), **John Mangiaratti** (Acton Town Manager), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Bethany Nichols** (Acton citizen), **Bill Smith** (Acton citizen), **Bob Walton** (Acton citizen), **Tom Wolf** (Acton citizen)

Opening

John opened the meeting at 7:11 p.m.

Regular Business

Review and approval of September 21 minutes

Approval of the minutes was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously. In the minutes, the sentence “An LSC member cannot operate any power equipment without Town permission.” provoked discussion that occurred later in the meeting but is summarized here:

- Town rules are quite clear on chainsaw use, but not clear on other power equipment (e.g., a tractor, a drill, a power pole saw) that some stewards presently use without any special permission from the Town, or on non-power tools that could be dangerous, such as an ax or a machete. The concern is that this could be a liability issue for the Town, and Town rules should be clarified to better cover the wide range of things that stewards do.

Concerns from the public

None.

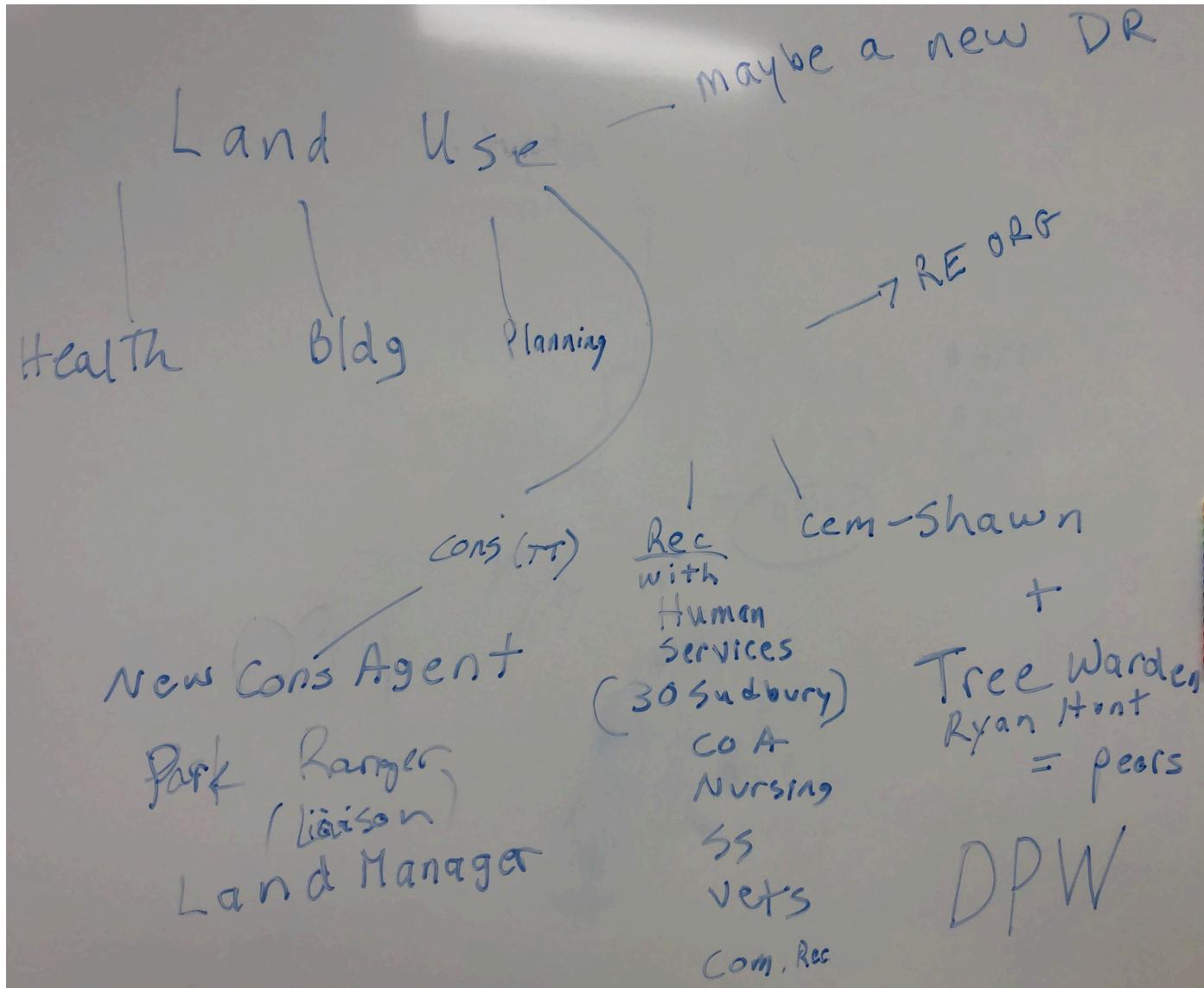
New/Special Business

Town re-organization re Natural Resources

Town Manager John Mangiaratti presented changes that will be occurring in Town management following the retirement of Tom Tidman, head of Natural Resources (NR) at the end of June, 2022. Bettina will also be leaving Town employ at that time. (The third member of NR, Fran Portante, is leaving next week.) NR covers Conservation, Recreation, and Cemetery. The Town began advertising today for a Conservation Agent/Environmental Planner (CA/EP). The target hiring date is early 2022 to allow that person to overlap with, to work with and learn from Tom. Recreation will become part of the Human Services Department. The Cemetery Department will join the Department of Public Works. Re the LSC, John would like to bring on an additional employee to support the CA/EP and be the primary contact in Town Hall for the work that goes on in town open spaces, doing what Bettina does now — both paperwork in the office and dirty work on hands and knees in the field. Bettina will be around to assist; in fact, she will become a member of the LSC (if approved by the Select Board!).

During the ensuing discussion, Bettina drew a white-board outline of the possible organization (see next page). Re that outline, the Land Use Department may or may not get a new Director. It could be the new

CA/EP. The Land Use Department oversees the Health, Building (DPW), Planning, and Conservation Departments. The CA/EP will oversee a "Park Ranger" or Land Manager (who would be the immediate contact for the LSC). Recreation would be part of Human Services along with a number of other groups. Shawn O'Malley, currently Cemetery Superintendent, will be Superintendent of Cemetery and Parks and will retain the current work crew that are very experienced landscape workers. Current Tree Warden Ryan Hunt (head of "Trees and Grounds") will retain his crew. Shawn and Ryan and their respective crews will be in "parallel" positions in the Town structure.



- While the quickly-sketched outline above is helpful, it suggests that the Town might want to consider developing an accurate and complete chart for the whole Town structure. It seems nothing like it presently exists.
- There was discussion about the responsibilities of the Tree Warden, actual vs. those described on the Town website: <https://www.acton-ma.gov/680/Trees-and-Grounds>. It was felt that current Tree Warden responsibilities re the lands stewarded by the LSC relate mainly to circumstances on the periphery of the stewarded lands, such as in parking lots, or near abutting private properties. In any case, the Town should perhaps clarify the description of Tree Warden relative to LSC-tended properties.

- There was discussion about the required qualifications for the CA/AP who has to work directly with the Conservation Commission on legal issues, something that Tom has been doing. (Clerk's note: The CA/AP job posting is no longer on the Town website.)
- There was discussion about meadow maintenance (notably meadow edges), in particular about skilled mowing required from Shawn's crew, that current mowing practices tend to avoid dealing with difficult situations, and that current cemetery-crew skills wouldn't be "absorbed" into a less-caring DPW structure. The Town is trying to document all current practices so that they are at least maintained. It will also look at supplemental contractors to tackle some of the "easy" jobs, recreation fields for example, to take pressure off of Shawn's crew so it can do more of the "specialty" work.
- Time line for this reorganization: Although John has the authority to reorganize at any time, this reorganization will be part of his projected FY2023 budget that would have to be approved by the Select Board and then at the 2023 Town Meeting. (Clerk's note: 2022 Annual town Meeting is May 16, Tom's and Bettina's last day is June 30, FY2023 begins July 1.)

Invasives (continued)

John continued his presentation on invasives . . . tonight's topic: Multiflora rose.

Rambler Rose ([Rosa multiflora](#))

Both a bush and a vine which will grow up and over anything.

Spreads mostly by root, but also by seed.

Regrows from root fragments or buried stems.

Repeated cuttings at ground level and/or pulling of roots required to kill.



Check: curved thorns, hairs on leaf stems

John shared the above PowerPoint screen. Additional points made:

- At this time if you find a rose in the woods, it's almost certainly multiflora rose.
- If you intend to pull, check for curved hairs to identify it. These are not found on any native rose.
- It can sprout from roots that are 3-4 ft away from where you might find it above ground.
- If you can, cut it first. That does a lot of damage. Then try to dig out the root cluster.
- If really feeling ambitious, try to follow some of the roots out from the above-ground plant.
- The thorns can bruise your skin.

John digressed to Asian bittersweet (see May, 2021, Minutes):

- Now is a great time to go out, find, and pull Asian bittersweet as all other leafy materials have died down.

Additional Regular Business

Parcel issues (with parcels in alphabetical order)

– Bulette parking on Arlington Street

The Town has just received permission to make a cut in the stone wall (required by the Scenic Road Bylaw) where the four-car lot will be built. Now the contractor can proceed with its construction.

– Camp Acton

Near Campsite 3, there is a cutover joining opposite sides of the yellow trail. It is well used and some people mistakenly think it is the yellow trail. We might as well blaze it blue, mark it with arrows (we have a wonderful supply), and show the trail in blue on maps. Jody can do it this week.

Blazing the cutover trail blue was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously.

– Heath Hen Meadow

Bettina is writing a CPA proposal to rebuild the bridge. She will be informing the CPC of this in a week as the CPC has asked to be informed of all recreation topics early, and then she will submit it formally to the CPC in November. In the meantime, Bruce has a plan to make a temporary repair to the current bridge after he fixes the boardwalk at Nashoba Brook, which is in far worse shape than the bridge. If the bridge would be CPA-funded, building it would occur in the Summer of 2022 (after the project is approved at the 2022 Annual Town Meeting).

– Nagog Hill

Dale reviewed the orienteering information he provided at the August 20, 2019, LSC meeting. Jon spoke briefly about a temporary orienteering event a couple weeks ago at Grassy Pond. Now Dale and Jon are ready to set up the orienteering course at Nagog Hill. Hopefully, there will be some Boy Scouts or other volunteers to help dig holes for the posts. Dale will send Bettina details when they are available so that she can seek volunteers.

Dale also discussed the muddy trail into the large meadow behind where the Hybid Farm paddocks used to be. He wondered whether moving the trail a bit closer to the stone wall and using wood chips as needed would make for better passage. Another possibility could be to reroute that portion of the trail to the east of the stone wall in the former paddock area. A boardwalk in the current location would have to be 50-60 ft long to be all-season.

Somebody has removed some of the Hybid fences but much remains. Right now, the removal seems to be “cosmetic only” with much fencing junk remaining. The former owners have additional time yet to finish the removal.

– Nashoba Brook boardwalk repair

Last week, Bruce acquired all the materials he needs, so he's ready to begin. Bruce was encouraged to organize work dates for others to help rather than trying to do the project all by himself. Bruce will think about it.

Will the access trail from the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail to the Stone Chamber be blazed? No. Having direct access is to be discouraged out of fear of vandalism. It may be blocked off.

What about the short connection from the yellow trail to the BFRT (where there is no cut in the fence) south of the Pencil Factory? No. It's on the map but it's not to be “advertised”.

– Robbins Mill

Bob Farra continues to look for new steward.

– Other

When one picks up trash how does one we dispose of it? Bettina can supply stewards with blue bags that can be taken to the Transfer Station. One could put a can on the corner of a parking lot and Tom could send a truck. (This needs to be checked with Tom.) Trash could be taken home and disposed of with household trash.

Per Laurie, Steve Tobin of Carlisle is pursuing a wetlands permit from the Acton Conservation Commission for building a portion of the Bay Circuit Trail through the Valentine land. Bettina will let the LSC know when it goes through. See

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-79298/48%20Rd%20RDA%20Work%20Description.pdf>

for a description of the project.

News from the shed

There has been a lot of stuff delivered there lately. John said that he used one of the brush cutters and found it to be in good shape and working well. The other is completely dead. There was additional discussion about how the cutters work.

Trail blazing needs

Jody's been "out there" but has done no blazing. Bill and Todd Tsakiris have done a fair amount. The new blazes at Nagog Hill look great!

Website issues

None

Maps update

Can we add the new blue trail at Camp Acton to the printed map and the online map? We would have to ask Jim Snyder-Grant to electronically doctor the old drawn map, or we could draw it by hand. Or, we could fix the online map and use it for both the printed map and the online map. The map also needs to show the handicapped campsite. Jon may want to take this on. Bettina will talk with Jon offline.

John described two possible trails at Great Hill that he has flagged with white tape. Stewards should share reactions, if any, with John and hopefully the LSC will approve the trails in a couple months.

When will the parking lot off Piper Lane be final? The surface left behind after the house demolition seems quite stable and useable as is. Should there be a "Great Hill" sign there? Yes. What about a kiosk? Yes. John will take this offline with Bruce. Bettina and John will have to decide where the sign should go and will have to coordinate this with Susan to assure that it will be on conservation land, not private land.

Next month's (November 16) agenda

- Town rules on using equipment in the parcels
- Trash in parcels
- Notify Joe and John with any other items.

Evaluate meeting

Attendees, in person and virtual, loved it!

Adjournment

8:15 pm

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

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft Meeting Minutes of September 21, 2021