

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, May 16, 2023, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

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

Associate (nonvoting) members: **Ken Appel**, Josh Haines, **Rebecca Harvey**, Everett Kenerson, Gary Kilpatrick, Mel Lima, Bob Mackin, **Adam Nolde**, **Hilary Reid**, Jim Salem, Bill Smith, Jason Temple, **Steve Trimble**, Todd Tsakiris

Others: **Bettina Abe** (Acton Conservation), **Mike Gendron** (Acton Conservation Agent), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Alissa Nichol** (Select Board Liaison), **Bob Walton** (Acton resident)

Aaron opened the meeting at 7:07 p.m. Attendees included Alissa Nichol, newly elected Select Board (SB) member and SB Liaison to the LSC.

Review and approval of April 18 minutes

Approved as presented.

Concerns from the public

The Phil Keyes Memorial Ride is Saturday 9 a.m. at Great Brook Farm State Park in Carlisle.

Jody noted that another Acton BioBlitz is scheduled for June 1-15. She will send sign-up information to the land stewards when it becomes available.

Invasive plants 2023, Part 4

Postponed until June.

Town Meeting (TM) follow-up

TM approved funding for the Camp Acton road regrading and culvert replacement. Mike has already talked with contractors and hopefully the work will be done this summer. TM also approved funding (\$45K, but no mower) for the Conservation Restriction (CR) monitoring program; also the Jenks culvert replacement. Re the latter, we will wait until June, or so, to see if the Town receives a BRIC (Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities) grant. If that happens, we would have to use only about a quarter of the approved CPA (Community Preservation Act) funds. TM also approved the 549 Main Street (Conant land) CR. Acquisition of that property is still in process, but if it is acquired the LSC should include it in future agendas as the LSC may be asked if it is interested in helping to maintain this parcel. Maintenance would be more limited from what the LSC does with other parcels as this parcel would be owned by the Acton Water District (AWD). The CR will include a land management plan that must include signage information (as the land is for water protection) and possibly trail, kiosk, parking, invasives, etc., information. TM also approved an increase in the Conservation Division's budget for maintenance of the Arboretum — specifically for contracting out more strenuous tasks that formerly were done by volunteers.

Accept Robbins Mill reroute

Hilary walked it and reports that the reroute “makes a lot of sense”. Hilary (or Bob, should Hilary be unavailable) should coordinate with Jody and the blazing team. In fact, Bob has already started digging (required) out some of the vegetation that crowds the reroute.

Geocaching

The Land Stewards received an email from someone who would like to hide geocaches on Conservation Land (CL). Bettina has been told about many that are already at Nashoba Brook, the Arboretum, Nagog Hill, Great Hill, Jenks, and other parcels and she's never received any complaints about their presence. One instance was cited of a turkey vulture nesting close to a geocache, suggesting that a warning sign alerting geocache hunters could be used for such a random instance. In general, the land stewards had no concerns with geocaching but if something need be taken to, say, the Conservation Commission, Mike could do so, and an email re the result should be sent to the person referenced at the beginning of this item.

Other parcel issues

– Guggins Brook

The Board of Health at its meeting tonight approved beaver removal upstream (probably about 75 m) from the Guggins Brook bridge that was built under Bruce Rachman's supervision. The beaver dam itself (likely outside the Guggins Brook parcel) is flooding AWD land and the AWD requested the beaver trapping. Mike is working to get funding for more beaver deceivers and their installation, as trapping is just a temporary fix.

– Nashoba Brook

Tom had some high school seniors do some cleanup around the Wheeler Lane mugwort patches so he could hit the patches better with a mower. They also removed weeds from the Wheeler foundation. Bettina was to check with the Historical Commission about securing a concrete pad for a bench at this trailhead. However, Bill Dickinson, Historical Commission Chair, told her that he didn't think it was anything to worry about, so Bettina suggests that Tom go ahead with installing the pad.

Eagle Scout project ideas

Bettina has enough right now, with no Scouts waiting for a project. There are two projects standing by: 1) a crossing of the little creek at Bulette, not the grander Grassy Pond crossing that the contractor is going to build, and 2) bog bridges that Jon could use at Guggins Brook along its boundary with Idylwilde Farms.

Stonefield Farm Trail with trailhead along the Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT)

– Jody reported on the quarter-mile trail that the ACT and 50 volunteers built Sunday on Stonefield Farm wooded land just off the ARRT and just north of the Town line with Maynard. Jody blazed it this week and it's ready for a sign or a kiosk (probably a sign . . . probably as soon as \$ is found to pay for same). There is still work to be done with invasives, primarily bittersweet and burning bush. To help with the purchase of the Stonefield Farm APR (Agricultural Preservation Restriction), Susan Mitchell-Hardt had obtained a \$15K grant from the Fields Pond Foundation with the condition that such a woodland trail be built. In general, stewardship tasks at Stonefield Farm will be monitored by the Acton Agricultural Commission and the Sudbury Valley Trustees, co-holders of the APR.

– Re the letter received by the LSC on the garlic mustard proliferation along the ARRT, Bettina advised the sender on how to deal with garlic mustard and never heard back.

Updates

– Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP): Part of the OSRP is a five-year action plan that shows goals with sub-goals that have very specific action items. Action items that pertain to parcel management should be reviewed by the LSC. The LSC should look at previous action items and think about new action items. Down the road a bit, Mike and Bettina will be reaching out to the LSC for input. Also, there will be a solicitation (via a flyer) for pictures from Acton CLs to be used in the OSRP, and even on its cover. Would it be appropriate to post the flyers at trailhead kiosks, a temporary posting? No objections, but perhaps only at the more popular sites like Great Hill. The solicitation could also be posted on the Acton Trails website.

– Morrison Farm CR: Mike and Bettina met earlier today with Pete Westover, who is authoring the CR, and some Ag Comm members about getting things “up and running” again. The Ag Comm likely will seek more feedback from the various committees it had previously contacted in order to bring a revised CR proposal to the SB. It may be that the biggest change will be to carve out the buildings and have the CR relate only to the land.

– Bridges, Board/Bogwalks, Maps, Mowing, Chain sawing, Website:
Peg Sestrich has updated the website to say that we need a steward for Robbins Mill.

Bettina will try to get the Heath Hen Meadow bridge rebuild restarted, aiming initially for one workday a week (likely Thursday) and see how that works.

Bettina must reschedule (with Ken and Jon) the jacking up of the dock that extends into the Assabet River along the Assabet River Blue and Green Trail. Bettina described how they will do it. Bruce suggests they use the two chain jacks in the shed, describing how a chain jack works. Bettina will let Bruce know when they will tackle the project in case he is able to assist.

Re maps, Tom started an “experiment” at Nashoba Brook with the sign shown here with a QR code. The sign is about the size of a kiosk map box. He laminated a couple of these and stapled them to the front of the map boxes on two kiosks. Tom walked the LSC through the directions shown on the sign. This sign is so generic that it could be used on any parcel in Acton, i.e., this QR code will work for any parcel. One thing Tom would like would be some measure of the sign’s effectiveness. The Town could possibly help with this if the IT staff would be able to track the number of “hits” the sign would get so as to give some indication that people are using the code. For example, if we put out more of these signs and the number of hits goes up, then we would have a good idea that people are seeing the sign and using it on the trails. Mike and Bettina will check with IT on this. Suggestion: We could put these on all our “You are Lost” signs throughout the forests!



Is the idea that this is to eventually replace paper maps? Having paper maps posted at the kiosks should continue, but this might alleviate the task of having to restock map boxes.

Generally, the stewards regard this as a great idea, and Tom extends credit to Bob for having shared the idea a few meetings ago. Tom would like to hear from IT on whether we can track the use before we push the idea out too much. We can, however, print out a bunch of these, laminate them, and provide them to any steward who wants to post them — mainly on kiosks. Bettina will do the production work and stewards can come to Town Hall to pick up signs for their parcels.

Discussion points:

Bob suggests that there be a small version that could be put on a tree with a nail so that they could be put “all over the place” in, at least, Spring Hill . . . the problem being that people won’t necessarily pay attention to the sign until they need the map (well after passing a trailhead kiosk).

Ken: Are QR codes complete? I don’t see the Assabet River Blue and Green Trail. This trail is there, but not colored nor labeled like the other trails (because it’s not on CL as are the trails at most of our other

parcels). Also, there is nowhere to get lost on this trail as it just goes one mile into Maynard. However, we should put the QR code on the kiosk there. And the QR code will show your blue-dot location on the trail — in fact it will show your location anywhere in town.

Rebecca: At Spring Hill, some of the “You are Here” signs have QR codes, but they are getting dirty. Bob thinks, via testing, that all the ones at Spring Hill still work.

– LSC membership, Mission Statement: Hopefully, approval of the LSC Mission Statement will be on the SB’s May 22 agenda. Also, all stewards in attendance tonight have responded to the request from the Volunteer Coordinating Committee as to whether they plan to continue as LSC members for another term.

Next month’s (06/20/23) agenda

Chair, Vice-Chair, Clerk elections

Evaluate meeting

Thumbs up!

Adjournment

At 8:08 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, June 20, at 7 p.m.