

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 21, 2025, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

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

Associate (nonvoting) members: Stuart Amir-Lin, Ken Appel, Josh Haines, **Jody Harris**, **Rebecca Harvey**, Everett Kenerson, Mel Lima, Bob Mackin, Adam Nolde, David Pinsky, Jim Salem, Bill Smith, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris, **Bob Walton**

Others: **Ian Bergemann** (Community Conservation Specialist), **Dwight DeMay** (Carlisle LSC)

Tom opened the meeting at 7:07 p.m.

Review & acceptance of December 17 Minutes

December Minutes not ready yet.

Concerns from the public

Dwight is a member of the Carlisle LSC and is interested in hearing our geocache discussion.

Hidden Container/Geocache Discussion

This was moved up in the agenda out of deference to Dwight.

Ian's "Guidelines for Hiding a Container" is on the Acton Trails website,

https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-93226/HideContainerPolicy_July2024.pdf

as is his "Hiding a Container Request Form"

https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-93227/HideContainerRequestForm_July2024.pdf

Dwight has access to both forms and Ian is quite willing to have a phone call with him if he would like more information.

So far this year, two request forms have been submitted. One was for placement of a geocache on the Town right-of-way along the Assabet River Rail Trail, so it wouldn't be a Conservation Land geocache.

Sometime in the spring Ian expects to reach out to geocache owners with the "Hiding" form so they can apply for approval of their geocache.

The process: A geocacher fills out and submits the form. Ian will check on the geocache with the appropriate land steward. The steward can determine if it's in a reasonable location and, if more than one geocache, that the number of geocaches is not excessive. If the geocache is approved. Ian will timestamp the form with an approval and send a copy for the geocacher to keep in their records. Ian should be the Town contact person for any geocacher, or citizen concerned about geocaching.

A current question: What happens with the geocaches currently "out there"? Ian expects to work with a geocache reviewer for the geocache.com website and come up with an email list of all geocache.com users of Acton Conservation Land geocache sites. He would email each user a "Hiding" form and let them know that they need to either 1) use the form and apply to the Town of Acton, per the Town's "Guidelines", and Ian then would proceed as described above, or 2) remove the geocache, or 3) abandon the geocache and likely have it removed by the Town. Ian would like to know whether stewards agree with this process.

Discussion points:

- We should be clear that if a geocacher does not reapply, then the geocache is going to go away.
- What should the timeline be for responding (before we say the geocache is “abandoned property”?)

Suggestion: 30 days.

- Some persons put out quite a large number of geocaches. Give them a week or two per geocache?
- Are we limiting the number of geocaches in the Conservation areas overall and, if so, how would we do this? That's open for discussion.
- It should be one application per cache!
- We should be concerned about the density of the geocaches and the numbers who will be searching for them. A short excursion by just few people to a cache conveniently located near a trail is going to be far less damaging to a forest than a much longer excursion by several people deeper into the forest.
- The land steward would be able to “push” on the above when giving approval.
- We've been reminded that in Acton we currently don't have a “stay-on-trail” policy, something to keep in mind.
- Because folks are trying to find something in a novel location, we need to be careful of how many geocaches there are.
- We have the opportunity to leave placement of a geocache up to the land steward. Some stewards may be okay with it being 30-50 feet from a trail, while others might want it closer.
- Geocache placement also depends on the site environment. We already know that wetlands or sensitive areas are off limits. But there are some gray areas.
- We'll have to see what happens with this process. Then it will be important that we talk about it, noting in particular any trends.
- Having owners of the existing geocaches fill out a form for each geocache will give us much more information about what's out there.
- Putting a limit on how many geocaches can be hidden per Conservation Land might be something that we do in the future.
- Individual geocachers can track how much “footprint” they get for each geocache. This information could help us make decisions favorable to the forest.
- We shouldn't pay any attention to such (tracking) numbers. Those are only the people who actually go through the process of reporting that they went there.
- Maybe we should identify geocaches that clearly won't be approved if there is an application, like the “archipelago” geocache (in the middle of some islands), and just let the applicants know politely that they should choose some other place.
- It's good to have those who will be denied submit the “Hiding” form so that the denial can be tracked in the Land Steward files.

Invasive plants, January 2025

It's difficult to identify them this time of year so John will hold off until March.

Boardwalk Design Guide project

Per Bob, the idea is that everything goes up on the web (currently as shown at the right) so the public is informed.

The “Other Boardwalk and Bridge Guides” are from the State of California and the U.S. Forest Service.

The “Design Guide” will consist of several often-unrelated statements related to boardwalks and bridges constructed by the land stewards. So rather than prepare an entire guidebook for

ACTON BOARDWALK DESIGN
GUIDE REVISION PROJECT

Currently this project is mostly in the information gathering phase. Decisions on new guide components are made in Land Steward monthly meetings: see [New Guide Components](#) below.

Please send corrections/comments to:
walton9781538@gmail.com

[New Guide Components](#)

Proposed and accepted guide components.

[2016 Boardwalk Design Guide](#)

This is the guide being updated.

[Other Boardwalk and Bridge Guides](#)

[Span Calculations](#)

[Acton Conservation Area Bridges](#)

approval, the stewards can approve one part at a time and proceed slowly over the span of several meetings. For February, Bob is proposing that the stewards consider for Design Guide acceptance or rejection:

1. “Place treads bark-side (green-side) up, unless the pith-side (heart-wood-side) is clearly of better quality” and
2. “Boardwalks and bridges should be level, except for ramps which should be short. If necessary, slopes of up to 4 degrees may be considered level.”

The latter idea came from Bruce when he was working with Bob on the Spring Hill boardwalk extension, and both ideas are supported by references on the project website. Bob is suggesting that the LSC try to achieve consensus at the February meeting that these be accepted as statements in the Revised Design Guide.

Discussion points:

- Is “bark-side up” the same as “smiley-face down”? Yes.
- At some time, we need to have a discussion of wood quality. It seems to have deteriorated.
- The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) has published the 5th Edition of a book of trail design standards. Its structures seem much more appropriate for those built on our Conservation Lands than the “much, much more serious” structures found in the California or Forest Service publications.
- There probably is a very small subset of the land stewards who are probably interested in the technical details of this Guide. Perhaps a small “working group” could develop the Guide and then come back to the entire LSC as warranted.
- There are people who aren't land stewards that try to build things seemingly always with disappointing results because they don't follow LSC guidelines.
- Bob: Two reasons to not have a working group: 1) A working group would have to have extra meetings, whereas short discussions in the middle of a regular LSC meeting would be a lot more efficient for the people involved, and 2) for a particular discussion, how would a Working Group be sure that it's including everyone it should? It seems better to have very short sessions in the middle of an LSC meeting, and if a particular topic would meaningfully involve only a couple of people, then they could split off to discuss it — rather than trying to find people for the entire project.
- A working group should include the people who have made a lot of really amazing boardwalks and bridges in the last 10 years. This would include Bruce, John, Jon, and Ken Appel
- A working group would come back to the LSC with a finished product to be voted up or down. It seems better to expose the product a little at a time.

No motion was forthcoming so we will go another month, consider Bob's two proposed topics at the February meeting and if the discussion gets too detailed, we can split it off from the meeting.

John expressed the stewards' appreciation for all the work that Bob has put in on this. Bob's idea of bringing Guide topics to a quick vote is something that we can easily comprehend and is a way of working through this “huge mess”. Thank you, Bob.

Ian's updates

- Scoutland: We sent a letter to Bill Klauer but have not heard back. Suggestion: Show the letter to a friend of Bill's. Have the friend find out from Bill if Bill has any plan to respond.
- Land Steward Check Ins: A few stewards still haven't filled that out Ian's check-in form. If the dates he's provided don't work, let him know. These will be helpful for forming stewards' goals, and for the land that each one stewards. Ian will send an email on this to stewards after this meeting.
- Land Steward Logs: Ian feels that a steward could use the log as kind of a diary. If you do some work on your parcel day-to-day, record it in your log. Or you could summarize your work for the month. You should

log the total hours that you've put in. Massachusetts values the work of volunteers among the highest of all the states — between \$40 and \$44 per hour (more for sawyering). For Ian to be able to provide stewards' total hours worked is invaluable in applying for matching grants and for his work with the Town budget.

After the meeting Ian will send out the log form again. Anytime you volunteer, fill it out as best you can, including a ballpark idea of the hours you put in.

A discussion (begun last month) ensued as to whether the logs would replace monthly reports.

Discussion points:

- Tom's thinking has been that the logs would replace the monthly reports.
- Why not let people send monthly reports if they want and fill out the log all the time?
- No steward looks at the log form I fill out. So, no one knows any observations I make. I think I will report sort of a summery, something a little different from what is in the log form.
- It's really helpful to share information with each other . . . not so helpful for sharing our hours.
- Ian could reduce the log form to focus more on just time spent rather than things qualitative.
- Unless Ian is trying to capture such information . . . perhaps for a database. Observations might be useful.
- I vote very much for having detailed useful data in the log form and observations in a monthly report. That means that maybe some months you don't file a report.
- A concern about some of the changes being made is that we are breaking up the LSC. It's becoming an "Everybody talks to Ian" group. If that happens, then Ian is the only person who knows what's going on and that's not what the land stewards have really been in the past. It means that if Ian isn't on top of his communication, communication gets lost. So, I really encourage stewards to report their hours to Ian but keep e-mailing status reports to let everyone else know what's going on.
- We should think about having some sort of template on what people should be telling us monthly, allowing for months when there is nothing to report.
- Some stewards we never hear from. Are they still doing anything?
- No reports from a steward suggests they're probably not even looking at the land. Let's encourage everyone to e-mail reports.
- Not a topic for today, but maybe we need to say that once a month a steward needs to submit a report. If not heard from, the steward can only be asked, "Did you not do anything this month?". Right now, there is no way to say to a steward that you are no longer on the LSC.
- You should fill out the hourly report. Then whether you send an email or not is optional.
- You could have a one-liner, "Things are very quiet" But is that really necessary?
- Even if nothing's going on, that's news. A one sentence report says at least that somebody looked at the land and didn't find anything.
- So, the log form should simply be for accumulating hours for administrative purposes?
- Yes, and it can be reduced to be filled out more quickly with a lot less of an ask. It would be just for hours and slightly what you did during those hours.
- When filling out the log-form, Rebecca will use her own judgment as to whether her activity (much related to her camera project) in a parcel other than her's should be submitted on the log-form as volunteer time.
- The hours submitted on the log form are to be those that you spent working (pulling invasive species, commenting on the condition of trails or bridges, reporting to a parcel's steward, or to the LSC, etc.) re any Conservation Land.
- Suggest that the online form break out separately the hours spent walking trails and hours spent working invasives . . . and anything else along those lines that come to mind.
- Email any such suggestions to Ian.

– Upcoming programs & volunteer opportunities: With his promotion, Ian’s job description changed a bit to emphasize environmental education, to go along with his responsibilities for volunteer coordination and land stewardship. Ian will share his activities regularly with the LSC.

Re environmental education, he has been working on monthly programming for the upcoming months with each month having a theme, a target audience (e.g., kids, teenagers), and a lecture (Ian or a guest). Themes for upcoming months:

March: Migration and Vernal Pool

April: Earth Month & Invasive Species

May: Wetlands

June: Dogs and Trail Use

Each month, Ian and Jody will do Wednesday Walks of a Conservation Land.

In March, Ian plans to present to the LSC Acton’s “Open Space and Recreation Plan 2024-2031” (OSRP) that was approved by the State, clearing the way for “a lot more” grant opportunities.

April activities will include:

- Volunteer hours every Tuesday for people to help remove invasive species.
- A whole family day of removing invasive species working with the AB Family Network
- Children at the Library making Wanted Posters of different invasives.
- A possible collaboration with True West on an invasive species theme Trivia Night.
- A lecture at the Library (by John?) at the end of the month on invasives.

The overarching idea is that we start educating people on the woods, and how to maintain them . . . and maybe drum up some more LSC volunteers.

Re the OSRP: Ian’s goal is to do several public workshops on it. Basically, re open space and recreation, in 350+ pages, it tells all the goals of the Town and how its open space (predominantly its Conservation Lands) and recreation should be managed. Ian expects to share about a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation with the LSC, the Council on Aging, and at the Library. The OSRP includes a Seven-Year Action Plan and took a very long time to pull together by a number of Town employees (and includes a great picture of Dale!). Ian will provide a link to its web site when available.

Other parcel issues

– Wetherbee (Woods): Everything is signed that is supposed to be signed, including Acton’s contract with the State for the grant to help pay for the property. Acton’s Conservation Agent says that we’ll be closing on the property in late spring. They are currently demolishing the house that’s on the property and will go after the antennas soon. Ian plans to talk with Todd Tsakiris about being its steward.

Updates

– Shed: Great thanks to Bob on his efforts at cleaning in and around the shed! Remaining trash: The wheelbarrow, a big piece of heavy concrete, and some (not useful) heavy logs. Ian will make a pile of the “too heavy” trash and have the DPW remove it. (The DPW could also remove the heavy abandoned safe in the Davis parking area at Nashoba Brook!)

– Sawyering: We need more sawyer training on the more complicated tasks. Another sawyering problem: We have a number of sawyers on the list who might work on things in their parcels but really don’t pay any attention to other requests. It likely is that some of them don’t have the time, and the sawyers in general don’t have the numbers. If most of our sawyers cut one tree a month, we would need a half a dozen more. It’s often the case that we need to raise the skill level of the ones who do show up. We can do that by getting the storm cleanup training program running. But if we’re going to do training, we must make sure that we’re getting the numbers to come. Maybe it’s time to have a flyer that invites people to become, or

advance as, sawyers with dates for two training sessions, one at the introductory level and one for (advanced) storm cleanup.

Two things: New sawyers must be sworn in so that they have Town liability insurance coverage. Also, they must have the correct safety equipment. Dale can provide suggestions for appropriate safety equipment - there are some "typical" items listed in the sawyer spreadsheet.

Could the Town budget handle two sessions of sawyer training this year? Legally, it has to. For unpaid employees, the employer is required to provide required training and safety equipment. Also, it should be noted that volunteer sawyers save the town thousands and thousands of thousands of dollars every year with their tree work.

– Kiosks: The remnants of the Great Hill kiosk that was at the top of Great Hill's big meadow may have been removed by the DPW. If not, John is willing to help Ian have it removed.

– Signs: The DPW is offering to make some new Conservation Land signs. If you have a suggestion for a new sign or a candidate for replacement, let Ian know, and send a picture if possible. New signs will soon be up at the Anderson land, as well as one at Grassy Pond.

Rebecca described a sign near the floating bog at Wills Hole that is covered with some kind of mold and needs cleaning. Per Bettina, using a little Clorox and water and wiping it down with a paper towel should clean it perfectly.

Next month's (02/18/25) agenda

Continued boardwalk design discussion; kiosk standards — what information should be on them, etc.

Evaluate meeting

"It was fun! The biscotti was great. Thank you, Tom."

Adjournment

At 8:12 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, February 18, 2025, at 7 p.m.