

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, April 19, 2016, Town Hall, Room 9, 7 P.M.

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe (Chair), Bob Guba, Bruce Rachman, Jim Snyder-Grant, Laurie Ullmann, Joe Will (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Paula Goodwin, Joe Holmes, Jim Salem, Sherman Smith

Nonmembers:

Janet Adachi (LSC's Board of Selectmen liaison), Carolyn Kiely (Quail Ridge resident)

Bettina called the meeting to order at 7:06 P.M. Laurie brought brownies.

Review and approval of March minutes

There was discussion about the section "Cut wood on Conservation Land." Can the public use chain saws on trees that have fallen in parking areas? We don't want to encourage this and Conservation Land rules say "No power tools." Won't logs left on the side of a parking lot just stay there? Joe H left some longish stuff at the Canoe Launch parking recently and it disappeared.

Approval of the March minutes was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously.

National Trails Day Project

Acton Cub Scout Pack 32 is offering to do an Acton trails service project this year; 20-30 people (a 50/50 mix of Scouts and parents) for 2-4 hours on a Saturday in June. Is there something they could take on?

The Pack (w/parents) has been doing this a few years now and it's been a wonderful event. The Saturday in June has not been stated, but June 4 is National Trails Day. Sherm has had the Pack project at Pratt's Brook the last two years. Bettina: Grassy Pond now has wet places that could use wood chips. Bruce suggested "turnpiking" (placing logs parallel to trail and filling between the logs with wood chips). If anyone has any project for the Cub Scouts this year, send Bettina an email.

High School Seniors April Community Service

Does anybody have a project?

- Laurie is doing something at Wheeler Lane.
- Jim S-G is using two crews; one at the Donald land at the Arboretum to pull garlic mustard.
- Ed Russell may have a crew at Guggins Brook. Bettina has ordered him \$1000 worth of lumber.
- Bettina also has some projects in the Arboretum.
- Joe H will have some cleanup at the train station.
- Nan Towle Millett is going to have students pick garlic mustard near Iron Work Farm.

How to manage unstewardship parcels

Joe H distributed information on 16 unstewardship parcels in Acton. Per Joe, these have the same problems as our stewarded lands. Should we ignore them or should these parcels have supervision?

Discussion points (generally in chronological order):

- We've ignored them since the LSC was formed in 1996.

- We could continue to ignore them all and let them “go to pot.” It’s called “nature.”
- Can’t get to the parcel at the rear of 2 Minot Avenue.
- Bettina gave a history of how things were established; why land became stewarded. Right now, we don’t have the resources to do more. Natural Resources (NR) is pretty well maxed out in supporting what we have. For some parcels, we have to rely on neighbors.
- Straying from the agenda: Two examples of projects not reaching the top of the NR priority list: The Davis Road parking lot for Nashoba Brook and the Newtown Road parking lot (already surveyed and designed) for Grassy Pond. Also on the priority list, the two new parking areas at the to-be-developed Assabet River trails.
- Back to unstewarding parcels: Joe, are you volunteering to take a look at these?
- The McGloin-Steinman parcel is the largest unstewarding parcel. The town just added to it. It’s wet most of the year.
- We’ll definitely need a steward for the Caouette land.
- Joe H wanted to bring this (unstewarding parcels) to the attention of the LSC. These properties are mostly gifted to town for unpaid taxes. The land generally is unbuildable. For the small unstewarding parcels (Caouette is an exception), Joe H suggests that we could 1) ignore them all and do nothing, 2) get a Steward-at-Large (to do several small parcels), 3) get neighbors to take responsibility for some of these, or 4) maybe once a year have a workday on these.
- Doesn’t (3) happen now with neighbors? No, neighbors are often the culprits; also, neighbors won’t turn in their neighbors.
- The Monson parcel (or some other unstewarding parcel) has an American chestnut tree. (Who says it’s an American chestnut?) Unfortunately the tree is injured.
- Some of the parcels have Chapter 97 stone monuments placed by the State.
- Could notices be sent to abutters and tell them about the adjacent unstewarding land, possibly over a length of time?
- A lot of the parcels still have signs. Some have disappeared.
- 133 River Street is an interesting parcel.
- How did Joe H find all the parcels? They are in Acton’s Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). The OSRP contains a table of isolated conservation lands.
- What would be the top priority for these lands? Things do happen on them, e.g., trash dumping.
- Would anybody be interested in forming a small subcommittee that would draft a letter to abutters? What would be the purpose of such a letter?
- Bettina will ask Tom Tidman for his take on the small parcels.
- Bounds of parcels should be walked about once a year. Abutters, out of innocence, might not know what’s abutting their properties.
- Why are we discussing this?
- A good idea would be to just visit these parcels, but this is not a high priority.
- The OSRP will give you information on particular parcels. Maps can be found on the Town’s GIS (Geographic Information System).

What we learned at the 03/28 Sudbury Valley Trustees Workshop:

Chapter 61 Current Use Tax Programs, with special focus on enrollment withdrawal and how your municipality can effectively conserve land when these difficult situations arise.

Tabled to the May meeting.

Update: The Assabet River Trails Project

Left over from the train station construction is a big stack of boardwalks at the side of the road on Martin Street next to the train tracks. Corey York asked the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (DOT) if it would be using them. If not, could the DOT donate the boardwalks to the Massachusetts State Trails Program, a grant program. The DOT says we could have them for this project. We will repurpose them to use on the Assabet trails. Each is 16 ft long and 4 ft, 5 ft, and 6 ft wide. They are very heavy, so how to move them? Tom Tidman will ask the Highway Department to put them on a flatbed and haul them to Acton's new Harris Street facility. The Assabet trails need 125-ft and 180-ft boardwalks and a 30-ft bridge. The DOT boardwalks would save thousands of dollars. Next, the Town will start cutting the trails. Bettina will let the LSC know when this will happen.

Update: The LSC website; editing of website pages

Jim and Bruce are working to fix a layout issue. The content is essentially ready to go. The site is going to go live soon. The site's pages can be edited even after they are live. Jim has sent out instructions on how to do this. Everybody has a user name and password. Bettina can do this (editing), so anyone should be able to do it. Jim essentially is in charge (per Bruce), and Bruce is available to help Jim at any time. Bruce is in charge of styling. Jim has not yet dealt w/colors (right now the background is white) and welcomes opinions. Jim will get together with Bettina to work out colors. The site could go live and color work could follow.

The old website was unreadable on mobile devices. The new one is dynamic so it adapts to mobile. The mobile version is not the same as the website, however. The mobile version has a "hamburger" menu.

Paula will continue with news items on the side of the website page.

Update: Workdate calendar

The Workdate Calendar is on the website's right-hand side under "Volunteer" as part of "Upcoming Events." Who coordinates this? To get something on the Events calendar tell Bruce or Jim, although Jim can show you how to use it yourself as Joe H did for his Canoe Launch workdays.

The discussion then focused on volunteers. Points made:

- The most successful volunteer program is the Tuesday afternoon 3-h Arboretum program (w/some variation) from April to December.
- If you want school volunteers, you'll get them for couple of hours.
- For particular volunteer projects, people need a lot of guidance and everyone needs a tool in their hands. They should bring their own tools, unless you know that you can provide them. They could also cooperate with each other, "You bring this and I'll bring that."
- The LSC then gave lots of advice on how to prep for upcoming events, including models of how to ask for help.
- There is a filter on the LSC website by which someone can volunteer. Per Jim and Bettina, we'll be changing over to a Yahoo group. The volunteer will fill out a questionnaire, etc., and this will result in a new volunteer list with volunteer info compiled from a checklist.
- We could have volunteers sign up to be "A friend of <parcel name>" and get a list of people tied to particular parcels.
- The Canoe Launch (at the recently-stocked Assabet River) has lots of visitors. We could put notes re volunteering on their vehicle windshields.

Proposed Wright Hill trail(s)

Jim S (not S-G) reports that there are some major trails now that are in excellent shape. We want to

start putting up signs and clearing the new trail. A few have walked it and given feedback. There may be some local adjustments.

- How far around is the new trail? Probably close to a mile. It's a nice, relaxing quick walk.
- Bob G: The trails should have some signs to define the narrow rights-of-way near private homes. The current markers are flush to the ground.
- Leo Fochtman has offered to mow the right of way for us in the summer.
- Jim would place signs by the entrances (upper parking lot and also down by Central Street) and rights of way, and would welcome feedback on other sign possibilities.
- How to get the signs? Bettina responded as the sign source and described the signs. Right now, she has a bit of a backlog, but Wright Hill signs are on her list.
- Should there be a kiosk too? A kiosk would show the map w/description of the parcel. We should first get the parking lot established at the end of Wright Terrace. Right now it's like being on private land.
- Is the Wright Hill parking lot high on the NR priority list?
- What next? Jim should propose a location for the parking lot. Bruce will help put together a map like the others he's done. Jim: The parking area is pretty well defined. A discussion followed on the parking area, the related entrance to the parcel, and getting people onto the parcel.
- Bettina thinks there should be 4-by-4 posts w/blazes and/or arrows in key places along the trail as people need guidance. An alternative would be symbolic signage flush with the ground. That, however, would get covered up and be a lot of work.
- Jim and Bettina will talk with Leo Fochtman and any other interested parties on what to do and report back in May.
- The Wright Hill KML map needs some adjustments yet.
- Re the trails connecting Wright Hill to Guggins Brook: We do have notion of a trail easement across private land belonging to Gregory Lane and New View Associations. The easement trail (which is really nice) has been flagged and we have talked to a Town attorney about this. Jim S-G still owes the attorney a map. Then we will have the homeowners review it.

Jim S-G emailed the LSC a concept plan for the trails last night at midnight. Approval of the trails laid out in the concept plan was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously.

Draft maps for the “North Acton Woods”

Bruce brought copies and noted that:

- the layouts are viewable in color and black & white,
- by choice there are no informal (i.e., unblazed) trails shown,
- the maps have all the wall data, the boundaries, and the contour lines,
- the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) is incorporated, based on the railroad bed, so it's not yet accurate,
- when Bruce puts the maps together, he'll put the North Acton Trails map along with each individual parcel map.

The committee commented on the maps, first correcting the location of the stone chamber. It also noted that the State website would have all the information on the BFRT that Bruce would need. Since only blazed trails are to be shown, take off any trails that do not yet exist (e.g., the BFRT connector). These maps will be good replacements for the “You are here” maps currently posted at Robbins Mill.

Bettina noted (“for the Minutes) that she needs a finalized map that she can print out and laminate. Bruce will prepare it and get it to Bettina. Bettina will distribute it to all who are interested and when she gets an “okay,” she'll laminate. Make sure Bob Farra knows this.

Morrison Farm “birthday” celebration

There is a 20th Anniversary walk of the Morrison Farm property on Saturday May 7, sponsored by the Acton Conservation Trust. One purpose is to raise awareness that the forested backland might become Conservation Land some day.

Other parcel information

• Nagog Hill

Carolyn reported that we’re waiting for Concord’s revisit with Acton on Concord’s proposed project. So far Concord has been totally silent. Nagog Pond will be Concord’s primary source of water while Concord rests its wells. Based on the Concord Town Meeting, Concord is considering co-generation now, not solar generation, but Carolyn has seen no plan. The project is scheduled to come before the Acton Board of Selectmen on July 9, pushed back from April 11.

• North Acton Woods

– Bruce: We have to get rid of white blazes. Laurie will reblaze the white-blazed Bay Circuit Trail.
– Linda McElroy wants to get the Pipsissewa Trail done right away. The trail has to be cut and cutting should be done by someone officially on the LSC. Laurie and Bettina could do this. They could put a workdate on the website calendar.

• Camp Acton

The access road is severely rutted. It needs gravel. Bruce would recommend that, until the road is fixed, Camp Acton be accessible by SUV only.

• Pratt’s Brook

Bettina reported that the Eagle Scout project replacing a boardwalk between Brewster Lane and the bridge is still an active project

• Guggins Brook

There are lots of otter slides.

• General

Bettina brought some of the wooden directional arrows that could be installed on parcels. She also distributed Land Steward hats to anyone who did not already have one.

Brainstorming stories for the LSC website

For the first story about beaver deceivers, Guggins Brook and Heath Hen Meadow are only ones with beaver deceivers now. Nashoba Brook may have one in the future. Bettina: We need to add two more at Heath Hen Meadow in the summer when the water level drops. It was noted that there now are three beaver lodges, not two, near the bridge at Heath Hen Meadow.

May agenda

- “Considering Vice Chair” will be on the agenda. We could nominate, or wait until the June meeting.
- Who will be regular (voting) members and who will be associate members. New appointments and re-appointments become effective in July.
- An “Incomplete Eagle Scout projects update” — how to deal with abandoned projects.
- Continue the conversation about volunteers.
- Bob is still wondering about Tom’s plans for parking lots (particularly the Grassy Pond parking lot on Newtown Road).

Evaluate meeting

Laurie’s brownies were fantastic. Side conversations throughout the meeting were distracting. When

reviewing maps, it's hard to keep people silent as the devil's in the details. Reminder: Everyone should look at the maps closely when they get home.

The meeting adjourned at 9:03 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, May 17, at 7 P.M., in Room 9.