

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 21, 2017, Town Hall, Room 9, 7 P.M.

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Bob Farra, Paula Goodwin (Vice Chair), Bob Guba, Bruce Rachman (Chair), Jim Snyder-Grant, Laurie Ullmann, John Watlington, Joe Will (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Sherman Smith

Others: Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), Janet Adachi (Acton Board of Selectmen LSC liaison), Jezanna Gruber (176 Central Street observer), Susan Mitchell-Hardt (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT) President) (briefly)

Bruce called the meeting to order at 7:06 P.M.

Jezanna is almost an official Associate. She has interviewed with the Volunteer Coordinating Committee and with Janet. She still needs Board of Selectmen (BoS) approval.

Guest (if any) introduction(s) and comments

- Joe put this item into the agenda because he knows of some people who may want to share information with the LSC but are not aware of how to get on the agenda, or of any need for doing so.
- Per Susan, the ACT has engaged a raptor (bird of prey) rehabilitator for a talk March 18 as part of an effort to do more outreach w/families w/children. The presentation will feature 6 live raptors. Susan also reminded the LSC of ACT's 9:30 a.m. walk (led by Andy Magee) Saturday 12/02 of the Newtown Road land abutting Grassy Pond for which the Town will be asking its residents for purchase approval at the Special Town Meeting 12/04.

Review and approval of September and October minutes

- Approval of the September minutes was moved and voted unanimously.
 - For the October minutes, Joe Holmes suggested by email one revision to better describe what he was willing to do to help control Japanese barberry at the Pacy Conservation Land (CL).
- Approval of October minutes with revision was moved and voted unanimously.

Getting things onto the LSC agenda

Joe explained that he collects suggestions, drafts the agenda, and submits it to the Town Clerk on Thursday or Friday before the Tuesday meeting. He also copies the LSC with the submission, but for some reason that didn't happen with this meeting's agenda.

Girl Scout Troop 6 (Judith Kaplan, Co-leader) brochure permissions:

– To post on Acton Trails website

– To make available (scouts hand out, or place) at certain trail locations, e.g., kiosks

Bob G had suggested to Judith that the "Be Safe on the Trail" section should also advise a hiker to 1) take along a map, and 2) tell people where you are going. Bettina also sent Judith some edits. Once edited, Judith is invited to come back to the LSC for the LSC's advice on use of the brochure.

Parcel description updates on the website

Jim: This is about website descriptions, nothing else. We need an agreed-upon way to make changes. It would be good to have an easy process for making (and undoing) parcel description updates. Bruce pointed out that a parcel Steward can make changes, but the website administrator has to approve any changes before posting. But, what about Committee approval of changes? After good discussion, there was unanimous agreement on Bruce's "less is more" two-step approval process: 1) A Steward has access to editing his/her parcel description. 2) The administrator approves any change and the posted version will include the word "pending." Bruce has control of the server and is able to roll back any change to a previous version.

Jim will send out an email to the LSC asking Stewards to read over their parcel descriptions and send any comments to Bruce. If there are significant issues, bring them to the Committee. Jim will also suggest how the review process can extend to information other than parcel descriptions. This would include map concerns.

During the discussion Jim gave a couple of examples of suggested changes that he had received, and John told of some Great Hill descriptions that are unsatisfactory to him. Learning of these changes, Bettina expressed concern that the Guidebook is going to print very soon and there is no time to make such changes in it. At least there is a "pointer" in the book to the Acton Trails website.

New interactive-map features

Jim demonstrated some features of the interactive parcel (Open Street) maps that you can get to via the Acton Trails website. These included adjusting typography and naming trails. Several concerns/issues were raised:

- On naming trails, Bob G says that we do not name CL trails, but the Arboretum is different. There are no trail names on other CLs, but there is the "Blue and Green Trail" (not on CL) along the Assabet River — blue suggesting water, green suggesting land. If there are any other trail names, let Jim know. (Other towns do have named trails.)
- On the Jenks CL interactive map, a red trail goes outside of Acton. The current rule: If any part of an Acton trail is outside of Acton, the map shows the whole trail.
- How do the Acton Trails maps show trails in other towns? By dotted lines, like Acton's unofficial trails are shown.
- Acton Trails maps do not have names for parcels not in Acton.
- Are there clear boundary lines to the different CLs in North Acton? Jim: We've faded them out very much . . . but he was able to show the "very hard to see" boundary lines.
- It would be nice to have the name of a parcel more clearly identified with the parcel.
- Currently "i" (lowercase) is being used for an information kiosk. Whether it's "i" or "K", it would be nice if the letter could be a larger size. Should there be a distinction between "information" and "kiosk"?
- (Editor's Note: There are two parts of Robbins Mill CL that are ostensibly separated by Scoutland. For what follows, "Robbins Mill North" will refer to Robbins Mill land north of Scoutland and "Robbins Mill" will refer to Robbins Mill land south of Scoutland.) There was discussion on the name of Robbins Mill North that is bordered by Nashoba Brook (the stream). Some feel that Robbins Mill North should be part of Nashoba Brook CL instead of Robbins Mill CL. The reason Robbins Mill North is included with Robbins Mill CL is that the Robbins Mill (housing) development donated the land. Changing the name would be a "big deal" (i.e., involved process). A Scout is building a kiosk at the Carlisle Road entrance (to Robbins Mill North). What to put on a sign at this entrance, or on the kiosk, as to the name of the parcel? Some feel that it shouldn't say "Robbins Mill" as one can't get

from Robbins Mill North to Robbins Mill without going through Nashoba Brook and Spring Hill CLs. What the LSC puts out as information is more important than names, so interior signs could say, at Wheeler Lane for example, “To Carlisle Road” with no reference to “Robbins Mill.” Discussion as to what to put on the Carlisle Road sign and kiosk can be continued at next month’s meeting.

– There are two new benches at Nashoba Brook, one at Wheeler Lane and one by the pest house.

Guidelines for reporting downed trees

The present system works. The only concern is that you (the sawyer) should let people know (send an email) that you are going out to do the work before you go out.

Heath Hen Meadow (North)

Keep or cancel blue cutoff trail?

Any other blazed/blocked trail issues?

– There currently is a big tree down at the bridge.

– In Mt. Hope Cemetery, should the main trail in from the parking (where “P” is on the map) to the yellow trail be blazed (red)? If the LSC wants blazing, this will have to go to the Cemetery Commission for its approval. The short access trail to the west of the P is an informal trail and need not be a red trail. On the map, it should simply be a dotted trail.

– That the crossover “trail” near the previously-described access trail was blazed blue was a misunderstanding. It is not an official trail and the LSC agreed that the LSC should remove the blazes and close it off. All LSC members should understand the rules on new trails.

Heath Hen Meadow: Blaze trail to Winter Island?

– The Winter Island trail is designated “blue” on the HHM map, so Joe Holmes has blazed it blue. Should the connector trail (across the water) be blazed? Should it be shown on the map as dotted or blue? On the hand-drawn maps, the connector from the east is labeled “Winter Access Only” and is known colloquially as the winter trail. It was concluded that the connector trail through the water will not be blazed. It could be labelled in some way as a winter trail and there could be something to warn people to use it only w/caution. As for the trail stub (shown on the map) from Mt. Hope Cemetery to the north, it would be inappropriate to show a dotted trail across HHM Brook. The map can keep the stub, however, and people can discover that winter passage to Winter Island on their own.

Guggins/Central Street easement — Jim

Jim reviewed the situation and would like to suggest to NewView something that the LSC has approved and that NewView residents would be likely to approve. The LSC had recommended the easement change. The Conservation Commission agreed and suggested that the trail be more apparent to the public. The NewView residents would like to indicate the trail without being too obtrusive about it. Jim, representing NewView, suggests that the word “TRAIL” (yellow letters) be shown vertically on a 4-by-4 (brown) post. The 4-by-4 post, but not the existing sign, would be visible from the sidewalk. The intent is that the vertical “TRAIL” be on one side only, but it could be on two sides. The post would be about 10 ft from the closest sidewalk and 25 ft from the corner of the entrance to NewView. Someone entering the trail there would see the existing sign 30 or 40 ft down the trail. The LSC likes the idea of an unobtrusive post and approves what Jim is suggesting. (Jim also would like the Town to close up the gap in the guardrails along the sidewalk that is the current trail entrance, but now requires visitors to negotiate a dangerously steep embankment.)

Wright Hill-Guggins Brook easement trail representative for the Town (volunteer needed)

Sherman has agreed to handle the Town side of the easement. Sherman walked the proposed trail with Jim and Bob G. In the future, anything on this will come from Sherman, not Jim.

Robbins Mill/Scoutland

Nothing new. Bill Klauer, Scoutland Trustee, is busy with historical Community Preservation Act (CPA) applications. Neither Bob G nor Bob F see any evidence of campsites from the Canturbury Road side of Scoutland, purportedly the current preferred access by current Scout users.

Other parcels

- Joe mentioned two current CPA proposals that relate to CLs: Support for the handicapped-accessible campsite at Camp Acton, and the China Trail and Garden at the Arboretum.
- Spring Hill: Laurie and Bruce have been helping Phil Keyes with some Spring Hill tasks.
- Grassy Pond: The top of the sign at the Willis Holden Drive trailhead is rotten and needs to be replaced. Bob G reinforced its post. The sign is on Bettina's winter project list. Bob reminds Stewards that any human-made item that's exposed at a parcel needs to be regularly checked.
- Nagog Hill: An example of the above — There is a map box on the sign at the Newtown Road entrance across from the Grassy Pond parking. The lid almost falls apart in one's hand and needs to be fixed.
- Great Hill: John is waiting for a new map box for a Great Hill kiosk. John also mentioned the new trail that is intended to replace the steep blue trail on the south side of the Great Hill. As should always be the case, the new trail should be established before the old trail is blocked off.
- Nashoba Brook: Laurie checked that the tree that fell on the stone chamber didn't damage the potato cave. The tree is now gone. He observed that whoever pulled the weeds on the potato cave shouldn't have done so. Bob G and fellow Monday Meanderers from Framingham hiked the Trail Through Time.

Concord/Nagog Pond, 11/20 Remand Hearing, any consequence for LSC?

Joe pointed out that the LSC is mentioned in this agreement. Yesterday the BoS reopened the hearing, heard testimony, and will wait until 11/29 to deliberate. Jim provided some details of what this is about. He said that the LSC can wait until there is a decision to finalize trail details with Concord (which should be reaching out to the LSC to talk about the trails). There is some concern about the accuracy of the boundary line between the new houses of Skyline Drive and the LSC red trail. Perhaps the LSC should re-walk it.

Brainstorming WildAware stories

- Paula like the idea of contributor-developed stories, possibly from high school students such as those involved with STEM. Bruce suggests contacting the schools. Bettina could talk about this with students that she escorts through the Arboretum.
- Linda McElroy shared with Paula a personal story of an encounter with a deer and her fawn. Paula also mentioned an article on deciduous bark that might serve as a basis for a WildAware article.
- Jim reminded the LSC that soon Acton will own a new Grassy Pond parcel. There has been a "waterfall" of information developed on the land around the pond. Paula could contact Susan Mitchell-Hardt or Brian Barker for more on this.
- Possibly not appropriate for an article, but Bettina notes that beavers have built a new lodge and pond on Nashoba Brook at the site where beavers previously had been removed. Also, there is a dam at the pencil factory, evidenced by the fact that the water upstream has been rising.

December 19 agenda

The LSC should keep monitoring beaver activity on Nashoba Brook but this is not an agenda item at this time. In a hike along the Nashoba Brook cart road, Bob G came across lots of junk iron work. There apparently was an old dump in these woods. Let's have "junk" on the agenda.

Evaluate meeting

"So beautiful."

- Members are urged to join Andy Magee's Grassy Pond walk Saturday, 12/02, at 9:30 a.m.
- Per Bruce: Joe Holmes volunteers his house for an LSC Holiday Party. The LSC can pick the date. More details to come.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, December 19, at 7 P.M., in Room 9.