

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, September 17, 2019, Town Hall, Room 9, 7 P.M.

Attendees (in bold)

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

Associate (nonvoting) members: **Larry Boisvert**, **Andy Gatesman**, Josh Haines, Philip Keyes, Gary Kilpatrick, Nan Towle Millett, **Aaron Moore**, Jim Salem, Sherman Smith, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), **Bill Dickinson** (Acton Historical Commission Co-President), **Clare Siska** (Acton Dog Park Committee Chair)

1. Opening

Bruce opened the meeting at 7:07 p.m. with a quorum of 7 voting members present — listed above.

Joe noted an “Upcoming Event” not shown at the bottom of the agenda: “Oxen at Work at the Wetherbee Conservation Land (CL)” on October 13 by the Acton Conservation Trust. Featured will be an oxen demonstration at the Wetherbee Woods abutting the Wetherbee CL, followed by a birding and nature walk of the Wetherbee CL itself.

All present celebrated Bob G’s birthday, including a song, and cupcakes provided by Bettina.

2. Regular Business

Citizens’ concerns

None.

Bruce requests that in future agendas this item follow the “Review of Minutes” item.

Review and approval of August minutes

Approval was moved and voted unanimously.

Parcel Issues: Nashoba Brook: Sluice bridge kudos

Kudos to Bob G and others who pitched in to install this “beautiful, amazing bridge.” Bob did add some finishing touches, an AZEK top rail of plastic lumber, and support for it.

Parcel Issues: Nashoba Brook: Bridge at Pencil Factory

Bill provided his, and the Historical Commission’s, perspective on a possible bridge over Nashoba Brook at this site. Bill is an architect. He is “excited” about the project as “it makes sense” to have a bridge here. He has had some ideas of what might work, and at the beginning of the summer he presented them to the Historical Commission. The Commission liked it. He has also talked to Tom Tidman, Matt Selby, Linda McElroy, Frank Ramsbottom, Dean Charter, the Conservation Commission, and is now contacting all other relevant committees in town to find their feelings on this. On finding funding for it (e.g., CPA proposal), Bill would do the work himself. Discussion points:

- Laurie pointed out that this site is also an “emerald” on the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT).
- The bridge would not be an historic re-creation. Reasons: It shouldn’t re-create what essentially was

simply an unattractive road that crossed the brook; we would want the bridge to be a little more interesting. We don't want to encourage bikes from the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) to cross over on it. (Mountain bikes would be fine.) The "right thing to do" would be to make it handicapped accessible. If it looks like a restoration and it isn't, then there are issues.

- Laurie's idea (shared in the past) of a suspension bridge is a viable idea. A reason: It could be 75 ft, and there would be no need to worry about "the rest of it".
- The bridge would have to span 40 to 50 ft, running 10 ft back from the old abutments, and "look appropriate" in the woods.
- The LSC does not make 50-ft bridges.
- The LSC could make a 50-ft truss bridge.
- Both ends of the bridge would be on "undetermined" ground. There would have to be a site analysis as to where the bridge could be anchored. There would be lots of technical aspects going forward.
- This would not be a trivial span. It is a significant activity. Is there funding for this?
- There could be NIMBY opposition.
- Bikes couldn't be prevented from the bridge.
- Bikers are good stewards of our trails. They are not wrecking them.
- At the Pencil Factory kiosk, there is a picture looking west (where the original bridge was) to the current BFRT right of way. By the BFRT, there is a picture looking east.
- A bridge would make the Trail Through Time "available" to the other side. It would require "clearing out the causeway (of historical stuff)". There is other historical stuff nearby. Such work would have to be professionally done.
- A budget for the bridge would also have to be worked out. A few years ago, there was a rough estimate north of \$50K.
- \$3K would be needed just for materials.
- Bill would estimate \$50K for the bridge.
- This would be a government job at prevailing wage.
- Design costs would be significant.
- Bill would like to design it.
- As this would be part of the BCT, there could be \$ available from the Appalachian Mountain Club. First, though, we should try to figure out what it would cost.
- Has a pre-fab bridge been considered? No, they are about \$100K, per Bettina, who looked into them a few years ago. There is a pre-fab bridge on the Assabet River Rail Trail that she thinks cost about \$300K.
- Before Bill puts much time into pursuing this, he wants to make sure he is not butting his head against the wall. Would the LSC support what Bill wants to do? Yes, but he has to present a plan so that the decision can be a good one. Bill is also looking for what would be "next steps" after he finishes talking to everyone.
- Next step suggestions: Do research: Ask other communities. Ask the Massachusetts Department of

Transportation. Look at the bridge over Fort Pond Brook. Check with Amanda Lewis, MassTrails Program Manager. Get three quotes on \$ parts of project. Do a site survey and come up with min and max \$ amounts.

As things advance, Bill will schedule another time with the LSC on site survey, design, funding, etc.

Parcel Issues: Heath Hen Meadow: Bridge/dam/beavers

Bruce has not had the opportunity to revisit the bridge. He wants to make more measurements that would be required to gradually raise the bridge, probably about 6 inches on each end to avoid muddy sections, sloping upwards to about a foot over the high-water level in the middle. This will include adding a few more sections as the existing bridge is not long enough. He also wants to investigate proper methodology for driving in posts. He explained his idea for jacking up the bridge — a little bit at a time, tightening it to posts in the process. Beneath the bridge it's all gravel, which is a nice thing. We have depths of the gravel, etc., from Bettina. At the center of the bridge, the height over the water may exceed 3 ft. We would put railings in. We won't have to buy jacks as we have two of them. It would be a nice project that the LSC could do, but it wouldn't have to do it right away. This project would be "way cheaper" than the beaver deceiver option — about one-third as much. There would be much less maintenance too.

Bruce plans to do a full survey this month (including the cost of two new sections, replacing sills, and raising the bridge) to develop for the LSC a presentation with design, cost breakdown, and a final budget, and the Committee can vote on it.

Parcel Issues: Wills Hole/Town Forest: LSC input on proposed Dog Park site(s)

Bruce summarized two possible sites currently under consideration for an Acton Dog Park based on information Clare, Chair of the Acton Dog Park Committee (ADPC), shared with the LSC and with other Town committees. One site is on DPW land abutting both NARA and the Miracle Field. This particular site has 30 years' worth of loam on it. The other site is Town land at 70 Quarry Road that is currently part of the Wills Hole/Town Forest (WH/TF) parcel maintained by the LSC.

The 70 Quarry Road site includes a portion of the WH/TF yellow trail. That portion of the trail would have to be moved, but where to? Per Clare, the ADPC hasn't gotten to that level of detail yet. The trail concern would be moot if the Dog Park were to be on the DPW site. The 70 Quarry Road site would also have to involve significant tree clearing. Loam on the DPW site could be moved further north on the site, but that too would require tree clearing.

The Committee took a straw poll and determined the DPW site to be its first choice. The Committee could relay this by letter to the Board of Selectmen (BoS), which meets next Monday. The Committee directed John to draft a letter. John did so, and later in the meeting . . .

. . . approval of the letter to the BoS (with the ADPC and the Conservation Committee CC'd) was moved and voted unanimously.

Here is the body of John's letter to the Acton BoS (final edit):

The Acton Land Stewardship Committee has been apprised of the two possible locations selected by the Acton Dog Park Committee. One is on land currently used by the DPW. The other is on land currently associated with the Wills Hole/Town Forest parcel. It is the consensus of the Land

Stewardship Committee members that we support the selection of the site currently used by DPW. We believe that the loop trail system at Wills Hole/Town Forest would be unduly impacted if a portion was dedicated to a dog park. Additionally, we do not support the large amount of tree clearing that would be required to build a dog park. Lastly, we do not want the trail system or the conservation land surrounded by a fence. We feel the allure and beauty of these parcels is the natural setting. Therefore, we are not in favor of permanently changing Wills Hole/Town Forest to include a fenced dog park.

Parcel Issues: Nagog Hill: Orienteering proposal

Dale is not here, nor does he expect to be here for the October meeting. This likely will be on the November agenda.

Parcel Issues: Nagog Hill: Quail Ridge parking

Bruce shared an August 24 email with the Committee stating that, as a result of a meeting with a concerned abutter, the abutter is satisfied with the current situation.

Parcel Issues: Great Hill: Angler access

Per John, some people had been breaking branches to make fishing in the pond easier. John asks that, as a committee, should we trim back overhanging branches, or should we try to discourage this? The situation was first shared by John at the September LSC meeting and the Committee seemed to say "Let's keep the branches trimmed back." To formalize this, John made a motion, "As a principal, the LSC won't discourage fishing around the Great Hill pond, and the LSC will help keep some overhanging branches trimmed back for people wanting to fish."

After brief discussion, . . .

("Open the fishing space away from where dogs run because of fishing tackle.")

John would trim the branches so they don't have to be broken.)

. . . approval of the motion was voted unanimously.

Other Parcel Issues: Nashoba Brook

Re the red access trail at the Milldam Road cul de sac: Contrary to what was discussed at the August meeting, the house near the trail has not changed hands. The easement there is a utility easement and says nothing about signs, so Bettina suggests that the LSC not put up a Conservation Land sign there.

Laurie on making the eastern end of the lower Nashoba Brook bridge more accessible: As you approach that end, there is one huge rock off to the side. That rock could be rolled to the right to simplify building a step and ramp that would be straight off the end of the bridge. Bruce will make a site visit to better understand this.

Other Parcel Issues: Maintaining areas around LSC parcel parking lots.

Per Bob G, the worst area is the Capt. Handley Road parking lot for WH/TF. In 2017, the LSC "opened up" the parking lot so the police could easily monitor it. Before then, there was lots of trash, liquor bottles, even a computer monitor. In two years, things have deteriorated fast. The fire alarm box is now completely obscured by bittersweet vines. Bob will get in touch with Aaron, WH/TF's new steward, to talk about the brush cutter that's in the shed at Morrison Farm. It can take down most of the stuff that's grown back.

On the Heath Hen Meadow parking on the Robbins Street cul de sac: If there is encroachment there, we should call the Highway Department to take care of it, as Municipal Properties is no longer the Town

office that is responsible for it.

Bob G and Laurie talked with the responsible Town person about maintenance near the Nashoba Brook parking at Wheeler Lane. Town machines are meant to cut lawns. There are a few trees growing down where the bench is and the Town tries to mow as close to the trees as possible, but one still “cannot see anything from the bench.” Laurie has not used the brush cutter much, but is willing to try it. Laurie also suggests that this “sounds like a service project.”

Bettina pointed out that a few weeks ago, a Boy Scout troop wanted to do maintenance, but they can't use power tools, so the problem above would be too big for them. She points out that there has not been any maintenance plan for Wheeler Lane, including potholes in the parking lot (“The whole lot has to get graded.”) as well as what Bob G has cited above. She suggests that the LSC have a conversation with Tom Tidman about a long-term maintenance plan.

Other Parcel Issues: Guggins Brook

Larry told of his work with Jim Snyder-Grant. Maintenance is needed on the Central Street access. That trail has to be mowed and the sign has to be relocated. Bob G discussed the access at Central Street and the problems there with vegetation. Action item: Bob will try to teach both Larry (Guggins) and Aaron (WH/TF) about the LSC brush cutter, and September dates were set for same.

Other Parcel Issues: Grassy Pond

Bob asks, “Who’s willing to go to the Grassy Pond entrance on Newtown Road and take out Japanese knotweed? He’s been attacking this for years. A discussion on Japanese knotweed ensued.

Other Parcel Issues: Camp Acton

There is a new kiosk, accessible boardwalk (to be christened this fall), and fire pit. Bruce needs from Bettina something (a sign?) that pertains to handicapped use of the camping facilities.

Bruce also has a kiosk roof that could be retrofitted for any kiosk. Stewards should check whether the roof of any of their parcel’s kiosks needs replacing.

Website Issues: Progress with moving Acton Trails website to new server

Bruce gave it to the Town IT folks. Bettina is still nagging them. Per Bruce, it could be installed on a new server in 15 min.

Online maps new features

There is still a problem with the “locator”. That feature depends on the browser being used.

3. New/Special Business

Assabet River Blue and Green Trail

Per Bettina, this is an amazing trail and everyone should walk it. Could this be one of the LSC’s parcels (just the Acton half mile; then eventually coordinate with Maynard on the half mile in Maynard)? This could also help with establishing the little parking lot planned for Adams Street in Acton.

Public information meeting on invasives

Joe and John to discuss offline.

Girl Scout volunteers for outdoor activity

Bettina summarized the scouts' interests/activities.

4. Additional Regular Business

Next month's (October 15) agenda

No suggestions

Evaluate meeting

"Keep it in your hearts."

5. Adjournment

At 8:50 p.m., it was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, October 15, at 7 P.M., in Room 9.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft Meeting Minutes of August 20, 2019

Change in last line from Sept to Aug.