

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting Minutes
April 11, 2012, 4:00 PM
Acton Town Hall

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe, Joan Cirillo, Dave Cochrane, Philip Keyes, Peggy Liversidge (minute-taker), Nan Towle Millett, Ann Shubert, Jim Snyder-Grant (chair)

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Bob Guba, Bruce Rachman, Heidi Sikina

Nonmembers present: Tom Tidman (Director of Natural Resources and LSCom's Town staff liaison), Janet Adachi (LSCom's Board of Selectmen liaison)

March meeting minutes: The March meeting minutes were approved.

Possible new trails at Nashoba Brook and Wills Hole: Three new proposed trails were discussed. The first two are short trails at Nashoba Brook that have already been flagged during a walk taken by Jim, Bruce, Laurie Ullmann, and Linda McElroy. The first, at the Wheeler Lane entrance, is an extension of a handicapped accessible trail that has already been put in as part of the Trail Through Time work at the Wheeler Farm site. That trail leads from near the cellar hole and goes for a short distance in a southerly direction between the yellow trail and the brook, ending at a picnic table. The extension, which would not be handicapped accessible, would continue a bit further in the same direction until it links up again with the yellow trail before it descends to the brookside. This trail extension was approved and will be left unblazed for now. The second trail is a short L-shaped spur trail through the stone pile cluster that has been cleared along the easterly half of the loop trail, between the two Spring Hill connector trails. This new spur will follow a stone wall for a short distance and then turn northeast and end at a stone foundation of unknown origin. This trail was also approved and the decision about whether to blaze it left to be decided later. Jim noted that the trail might be extended later to create a loop back to the yellow trail. He also said that there are other stone pile clusters in this section of Nashoba Brook that might be cleared and accessed with additional short spur or loop trails.

At the Town Forest, Jim wants to explore the possibility of cutting a trail from the end of Sachem Way to the yellow trail near Wills Hole. This summer the Acton Housing Authority (AHA) will be starting to build a new development at the end of Sachem Way (off Route 2A just west of Harris Street), and Jim has scheduled a meeting with Kelly Cronin, the executive director of the AHA. Things on his list to discuss are parking, a kiosk, and an agreement about permanent public access from this point. Philip suggested initially proposing a trail that would provide access just for residents of the immediate area. Bob also thought that parking for nonresidents of the development might present a problem.

Camp Acton permit and parking issues: Bruce raised his concern that the camping permit used by the Natural Resources Department needs to be carefully reviewed to be sure that all facts and policies are correctly expressed and that policy aligns with practice. For instance, he noted that although the permit is called an overnight camping permit, he recently was required to get one (and pay the \$15 fee) for picnicking during the day with his Boy Scouts that involved using a fireplace. While he indicated that requiring a permit for any use involving a campfire was perhaps not unreasonable, this is not clearly stated. He also noted that the stipulation that those using the campsites bring in a portable toilet is out of date (there has been one there for several years, maintained by EMS). He brought a copy of the permit document with a number of questions and problems noted. Joan added that liability issues are not well covered and said that she raised questions about the waiver language and other aspects of the permit form some time ago. She wondered about the source of some of the rules listed, noting that the form seems to suggest that Camp Acton is under Recreation Department rather than ConsCom

jurisdiction. She also noted that she is unaware of any ConsCom-adopted regulation that requires anyone to pay a fee for picnicking at any of Acton's conservation lands, regardless of what the form says.

Jim suggested that several people work together to review and mark up the permit document and present a new draft for Tom's review and ultimately for ConsCom approval. Joan mentioned an email to Bruce and Jim (dated 3/12/12) that included an attachment containing some of her suggested changes to the Camp Acton permit. It was agreed that Bruce and Jim will work together on this, making use of documents and notes that have already been written.

Concerning parking, various aspects of this ongoing issue were mentioned. These centered around whether the existing gate at Pope Road should be retained or removed, including the potential problem caused by users parking on the access road because of the current sign ("authorized vehicles only") at the gate; possible security problems if the gate is removed or the gate is retained but left unlocked; the possibility of using the Tenneco easement for parking by day users of the land; the current poor condition of the access road; and whether the police and fire departments should be consulted for their input before we make any recommendation.

Bruce's suggestion is to open the parking lot to all users (i.e., remove the outer gate entirely or leave it permanently open and remove the current sign restricting access) but with a sign at the lot indicating that priority should be given to overnight campers. He said that the utility easement has been used in the past for parking and suggested this could continue to be done in the unlikely event that the parking lot fills up. He also said that the police do not appear to be concerned about leaving the gate open since he has noted that they have left it that way after checking the parking lot.

A vote was taken about whether to recommend removal of the outer gate, with 6 voting yes, 1 no, and 1 abstention. Bruce also agreed to speak with the police and fire departments to see what they would recommend, although several people cautioned against giving them the power to veto a Committee recommendation. Tom suggested he speak first with Bob Parisi.

Tom also stated that the road definitely needs to be regraded, and he recommended installing guard rails at the stream crossing. The road work (but not the gate removal) would require ConsCom approval under the Wetlands Protection Act.

Parcel walks with stewards: Following last month's brief discussion, Jim revised the checklist document for guiding the walks he proposes to take with all stewards on their parcels over the summer and fall. One change he noted was the stipulation that the steward would be responsible for taking the notes on the walk, writing them up, and submitting them to him. He sees the walks as an opportunity to get together with stewards, particularly those who never or rarely attend meetings, on the land itself and emphasized that not all items on the list will need to be covered on all walks. One important element that he hopes to do on all walks, however, will be to survey the property boundaries, as much as is practical, to check for dumping, encroachment, and structures. Bob suggested paying particular attention to boundaries that abut yards (e.g., at Wetherbee, Town Forest, Pratt's Brook). He also noted that summer is not the best time to do such walks, because of heat, abundance of ticks, and lack of visibility due to full foliage. Jim will consider pushing the timing toward the fall.

Invasives: Jim has drawn up a schedule for work this season on invasives and will be sending it out soon. The focus will be primarily on garlic mustard, especially at Camp Acton and the Arboretum. Theresa Portante has offered to do some work at Town Forest, and there will be a crew working at Great Hill on Senior Service Day. Jim asked whether Scouts could do some work at Camp Acton, and Bruce replied that a crew could probably help in late May.

Wetherbee buckthorn and autumn olive cleanup on Senior Service Day: Bob reported that although he will be unable to oversee the Senior Service Day work scheduled to clean up buckthorn and autumn olive clippings at Wetherbee, he has been told that a small crew still plans to do the work. Joan stated that she might be able to check in for at least a part of the morning.

Bob also stated that he plans to mow the field with these invasives (just beyond the kiosk) over the summer, in the hope that repeated mowings might weaken and eventually kill the plants.

Grassy Pond vandalism: Following the second case of vandalism and trashing at the Grassy Pond deck, Ann retrieved some cans and bottles using a long pole and Bettina spent some time cleaning the marker defacement of the plaque and sanding the benches where the wood had been carved into. The plaque looks better but is not completely restored, and acetone was suggested. Ann, however, said she thinks Bettina has done enough work on it. It was also suggested that it would be preferable if the cleanup work were done by young people who are part of the police department's program for youth offenders, run by Officer Keith Campbell, although it was noted that the kids doing the work would probably not be those who had actually participated in these incidents. Some suggestions for trying to find those responsible included a motion-sensitive camera, a tamper-proof enclosure for a trail camera, a microphone to monitor sound, and finding neighbors who would be willing to keep a watch on activity and notify us as necessary. Ann offered to contact some residents on Newtown Road about this last suggestion. As to privacy concerns about video surveillance, Joan mentioned that she has done a bit of research and has found that, when you are talking about individuals who are doing something illegal in front of a video camera outdoors, in plain view, and in a public place, you should be okay because those individuals have "no reasonable expectation of privacy" in that situation.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 16, at 4:00 P.M.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:35.