

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 18, 2013, Town Hall, Room 126, 4 P.M.

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe, Tom Arnold, Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Bruce Rachman, Jim Snyder-Grant (Chair), Laurie Ullmann

Associate (nonvoting) member present: Joe Will (Minutes)

Nonmembers: John Watlington (Acton resident)

Jim called the meeting to order at 4:03 P.M.

Review and approval of November 20 minutes

The minutes were accepted unanimously as corrected (two minor changes from circulated draft).

2014 meeting times

Associate members (at least 4 of them) would like to come to meetings, but they have jobs that make it difficult for them to attend a 4 P.M. meeting. Perhaps we could meet at 7 P.M., but what day? Our regular meeting day of the third Wednesday is not good as the Conservation Commission regularly meets that evening.

All attendees favored having evening meetings and sticking to the same time each month (rather than some meetings in the evening and some in the afternoon).

Action: Jim will do a Doodle poll to try to determine the best night. He will aim for a 7 P.M. meeting in January and he'll submit the forms for reserving space.

"The Nashoba-Spencer Woods" as a possible over-all name for the Acton/Carlisle contiguous conservation parcels

Jim likes the above name as it refers to both brooks, it has Native-Anglo elements, and it's similar in structure to names of other nearby areas: Estabrook Woods, Walden Woods, etc. It would be an "overarching" name and one might reference existing parcels such as the "Spring Hill Conservation Land of the Nashoba-Spencer Woods."

Comments:

- Bob suggests "North Acton Woods," but that wouldn't include the Carlisle parcels.
- A map of the whole Nashoba-Spencer Woods could be complex.
- Bruce suggests we table this until Phil Keyes (the Spring Hill Steward) is here. Not done.
- The purpose of such a name would be to raise public awareness of contiguous conservation land and use the contiguousness for publicity purposes. Letting people know we have this large parcel makes a lot of sense.
- Tom: Contiguousness is a factor in purchasing new lands for conservation.
- Bettina: We will have "contiguous lands" as part of the next guidebook.
- Give this a map rather than a name.
- Tom says to call this a "corridor."
- Bruce suggests the "Acton-Carlisle Corridor."
- We have a Grassy Pond-Wills Hole Corridor.
- It's like Boston's Emerald Necklace, the Bay Circuit Trail, the Quabbin-Cardigan Corridor.

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- It links to trails in Carlisle's Ben's Woods, Benfield Hill, and Spencer Brook conservation land.
- Besides human trails, another purpose of a corridor is wildlife passage.
- While it's good to recognize these contiguous woods, a name is not the way to do it.
- Jim, summarizing discussion: We'll let go of this naming idea for now, and focus on other ways of recognizing this parcel, such as publicity and signage.

Possible trail race in the Spring, 2014

This would be a Lions Club fund-raising project. Dave Christmas is the Lions contact. The new Robbins Mill trail is what got Dave excited about this. But he would like the race to be a little longer than the Robbins Mill loop, which is about a mile. He would want to limit the racing field to about 100–150 runners.

Comments:

- The LSC has no authority to approve a trail race. The Conservation Commission would have to approve of this. So would the Recreation Commission.
- The part of the Spring Hill loop that is nearest to Nashoba Brook would be an ankle buster to runners.
- One side of Camp Acton is a two-lane road. Connecting to Spring Hill wouldn't be bad. Then hitting Robbins Mill is not bad. Going through Nashoba Brook (the uphill part) is not bad.
- There was a general discussion of other possible routes.
- A race that would use Heath Hen Meadows/Mt. Hope would need Cemetery Commission's approval.
- We might suggest a cross-country event for winter as much of the trail problems are covered up.
- The time of year is important for such a race. Spring would be tough.
- A race like this could bring out the worst fears of the Canterbury Hill folks.
- Tom is not sure that the Conservation Commission would be comfortable with allowing use of Conservation land for anything that charges money for public participation.
- Trail wear and tear could be another concern.

Action: Jim acknowledged that he heard some support and some concerns. He will tell Dave that if the Lions get the approval of both Conservation and Recreation, then some on the committee would be happy to work with the Lions on defining a route and other aspects of organizing a race that would help protect the conservation areas and the runners.

Trail accessibility update

Jim sent out a request for help on this. Gary Kilpatrick, who is on the Acton Trails Volunteer list volunteered to help out and various LSC members sent in ideas. Jim met with the Commission on Disabilities (COD) yesterday, letting it know that we are exploring ways to provide information about our trails to help people evaluate trail accessibility. The COD assigned one of their members, Danny Factor, to help out with this work.

The Universal Trail Assessment Protocol (UTAP) was invented in the 1990s. It provides training materials for how to assess relative accessibility.

Jim feels that if we set up a framework correctly for gathering this assessment information, we could get volunteers to help gather this information trail by trail.

Comments:

- Concord marks some of its trails as "assessed." As we gather info and approve of it, we could post it.

- This would take a lot of time.
- Bruce: The Arboretum should be the first one. We are well on the way with accessibility information at the Arboretum.
- Bettina: We are using as a model the Dunn Pond map (which can be found at: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/parks/trails/prints/dunn-map-and-trailguide.pdf>).
- Tom: That map is okay but it's primitive.
- We'll try to make it nicer.
- Bettina will be talking to Lynn Horsky (a graphic designer that the Town has frequently hired) and Jim about this. Jim is looking into computer-made maps.
- Bruce: How about camping accessibility?
- Bettina: Could we introduce one accessible element to each parcel? At Camp Acton, Campsites 1 and 2 are very accessible. That could be the first element on the Camp Acton map.
- Bettina then spoke of some icons that we could use on the maps.
- Handicapped-accessible picnic table and porta-potty would be nice additions to Camp Acton.
- That would be up to the town.
- If there were to be a handicapped-accessible porta-potty, there would need to be some good thinking about where to put it.
- COD member Danny Factor would be happy to work with us on this.
- Tom: We're way ahead of the curve on this.
- Is there any money out there? Bettina says one possibility would be the CPA.

New steward update

Bob Farra (Robbins Mill) and Jason Temple (Pacy) were voted into the LSC by the Board of Selectmen as Associate members.

- Joe will update the LSC roster to include these new members. Jim will approve and share the roster with the LSC. In the meantime, Jim will pass around the new members' email information.
- Jim has put together a document for new stewards.

Robbins Mill recent and upcoming tasks

- Phil cut the trail link with Spring Hill. Nine others of us cut the other trail to Carlisle. These trails are flagged but not blazed.
- Jim shared a sample of "You are Here" signs posted at new interior intersections.
- There's plenty of evidence of use of the new trails.
- We have a few things to build on the Robbins Mill trails in the spring. These include three small crossings and a gigantic gas-pipeline crossing. We will need to make the pipeline crossing moveable or removable by the gas company so that the crossing doesn't get in the way of gas company needs.
- At least one bridge could be an Eagle Scout project. Eagle-candidate Thomas Malchodi would like to build it.
- If the pipeline crossing were to be removable, Jim envisioned a hinged opening that would flip one section onto the other sections.
- Bob: We should contact the gas company and the find minimum width for their equipment.
- Bruce: The opening near Carlisle on the gas line right of way (w/rocks across it) might give a clue. Known openings are not very big. Tenneco is the gas company and it just cut the pipeline right-of-way.
- Jim: Another major Robbins Mill item is what to do with the percolation test pipes (about 60 of

them) that are sunk into the ground throughout the parcel.

- A rebar doesn't work. The plastic is too brittle and it cracks.
- We could dig down about 6 inches around them and cut them off. This would be a power tool job, not a high-school student task.
- Bob: Another Robbins Mill need is a trail from the Carlisle Road parking through Scoutland to the Nashoba Brook parcel.
- Phil has flagged a trail from Nashoba Brook up to Scoutland. A trail from Scoutland to Carlisle Road is not yet set. It should go by the gigantic rock that the Trail Through Time team has identified as a possible source for the roof slabs of the stone chamber.
- Jim has given Scoutland Trustee Bill Klauer a document that would enable the trustees to sign off on a license to cross Scoutland. Hopefully a license will be signed soon.
- There is no interest for now in a loop trail in the area between Scoutland and Carlisle Road – just a single red trail.
- Near the Carlisle Road end of the Carlisle Road-Nashoba Brook trail, there is to be a viewing platform in the brook. This is upstream from the millpond. Steve Marsh is a developer who has agreed to build the platform. Bob sent plans for a platform to Bettina and she has given them to Steve. From the Carlisle parking, there is a long path built by scouts that takes you to what would be the platform site (across from the Robbins Mill assisted living community). Bob's plans show 20 ft of pier. You could extend this to improve fishing possibilities from the platform. When is Steve going to build this? That has not yet been set. Dock fittings could be done in the winter. Bob identified a company in New Hampshire that could provide this equipment.
- Another Robbins Mill possibility: There is a side trail from the red trail to Carlisle that goes to a nice pond. We may want to link to it. Not sure if that would be a loop or a one-way trail. If it becomes a loop, it would best avoid the part of the existing trail that travels along the edge of the backyard of a Carlisle homeowner.

Spring Hill boardwalk update

The boardwalk is in, thanks to the Natural Resources crew. Bruce has skied it. It's 3-ft wide, level, and beautiful. Bob would like to see ramps at either end. There are rocks at one end now so the step-up there is reasonable.

Meeting with Conservation Commission

Jim is running two things by the Conservation Commission:

- 1) A license with Scoutland (see Robbins Mill items above). Conservation Commission will have to sign it.
- 2) The plaque policy. We would like the Conservation Commission to approve it as well.

Annual Report

This is in progress. Jim will send it out to the Committee and he will accept individual edits and corrections.

Hazelnut/Nagog review and future plans

Jim reviewed the Quail Ridge development referencing a Site Plan (approved by the residents at Quail Ridge), copies of which he shared. Information included:

- The current access road from Hazelnut Street will be changed and improved. The gate will be moved to be much closer to the Concord Water building. There will be a sidewalk. There will be

a sign or signs directing people to the red-trail entrance to the Nagog Woods easement.

- There will also be trailhead parking and a trail easement off of Quail Ridge Road. This easement will link to the current trail mentioned in the previous bullet. It is possible that the Quail Ridge Road entrance could become the primary entrance to the trail, even though the other trail will remain. (There will be houses only 10 ft from that trail.) The new easement had been a golf cart path. It will pass through naturalized meadow.

Review list of LSC requests to Natural Resources Department

Starting this fall, Jim is meeting with Tom Tidman once a month to go over things we've asked for. He and Tom are finding it helpful. Jim shared a list of the items reviewed. These are non-routine items that might become "stuck." Jim has put a live link to this list in the meeting packet. We should let Jim know of anything out of the ordinary we would like from Natural Resources and he'll be happy to add it to the list and review the items with Tom until they are resolved. Jim discussed some of the items on the list. Details are included in the "Parcel reports" below.

Update on new town-owned parcel (Anderson land) at 180 Newtown Road

The actual closing happened at the end of September. The land is right at the north end of Arlington Street. Now, anybody can wander around there. You can park at the church (at Arlington and Newtown Road) and walk right across Arlington to the property. The property has a cart road that makes a loop. It is close to the Bulette Land but we still haven't made a final link with Bulette. We are hoping that somehow the inter-parcel land will get protected so we can connect with Bulette. The Anderson land is 17 acres. There is a deed map that Jim can share. There is additional land that we anticipate being protected as the back-land of a future PCRC development. When this land is protected, a continuous trail can be made from the Bulette land through the Anderson Land.

Parcel reports

- Arboretum

Wood Lane encroachments. There are a variety of issues including owners maintaining plantings in land owned by the town, mowing of conservation land, dumping, and other encroachments. (Bob: For our information, there is an "Acton Arboretum" sign at the Minot Street entrance high in a tree and facing the street.)

- Camp Acton

The lower gate is still there. The plan is to remove the lower gate, and, if it is reusable, use it to replace the upper gate. Bruce removed the sign that said "For authorized vehicle use only".

Bruce: Right now, things are almost inaccessible at Camp Acton except by skis.

Tom: There is an event pending.

Bettina: The access road will be plowed.

Bruce: I think they've removed the porta-potty.

- Camp Acton/Spring Hill:

Signs between the two parcels have been removed and we have no idea who or why. They were torn off.

Bettina: We've sent a request to build replacements.

- Grassy Pond

Jim met with Tom Tidman at the parking area off Newtown Road. The choices for parking are close to the road vs. farther back. Parking close to the road will require less work to build and will be easier to see and police. It will be a flipped version of what we have at Jenks. It means

losing a beech tree. Tom is thinking of three parking spaces.

Tom Arnold: Marking the access right on the road, as at Jenks, would be important.

- Guggins Brook

In the Mass Ave parking, both the drop off from Mass Ave and the drainage problem have been fixed.

- Heath Hen Meadow:

Someone raked out 2 or 3 holes in the beaver dam, so we don't know if the beaver pipe is really working well.

- Nagog Hill

Bettina installed the poster that highlights the HyBid arrangement with the town. It's on the kiosk in the parking near the farm. Hybid passed its license review "with flying colors" and its license has been renewed. The farm is limited to 32 horses. There are still some gate signs that need to be made. Bettina is on her third sign vendor.

- Pratt's Brook

The little plaque at the Brewster Lane entrance is broken.

Bob: Will it be a policy now to make a plaque? Current plaque policy is silent on this.

Jim has no feeling on whether we should replace it, remove it, or let it decay. We will let it be Theresa Portante-Lyle's call.

Bruce: A sign is kind of like a recruiting tool.

Tom: The more we publicize who helps us is good.

- Wetherbee

Bruce and Tom, with the aid of John Watlington, have built and installed a well cover on the previously-open round well.

Evaluate this meeting

"Excellent."

The meeting adjourned at 5:36 P.M.

The next meeting will be at 7 P.M., Wednesday, January 22.

Items that serve as background for today's meeting are here: <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-5890>. They are titled as follows:

00 - LSC Agenda 2013 12 18

01 - LSC minutes 2013 11 20 draft

03 - link to possible Acton Trails facebook page

05 - Email re: possible trail run

06 - email re trail accessibility information

07 - Advice for taking on a new parcel assignment

08.1 - Robbins Mill temporary sign

08.2 - Robbins Mill future tasks

09 - replacement Spring Hill boardwalk installed

11.1 - EARLY DRAFT annual report land stewards 2013

11.2 - current draft of 2013 Annual Report

12 - Tom/Town/LSC list

13 - Parcel Reports

14 - "Nagog Trail" Exhibit from Quail Ridge application

15.1 - 180 Newtown And Bulette (Google Earth)

15.2 - 180 Newtown Road Deed

15.3 - 180 Newtown Road Plan