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Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, July 15, 2014, Town Hall, Room 126, 7 P.M.

Attendance

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

Associate (nonvoting) members present: none

Nonmembers:

Janet Adachi (LSC's Board of Selectmen liaison), Sherman Smith (Acton resident, helps at Pratt's Brook)

Jim called the meeting to order at 7:06 P.M. In writing the agenda on the board, Jim included "target times" and asked for clock-watcher. Bruce put Jim on Bruce's timer.

Review and approval of June 17 minutes

Approval of minutes (with one spelling correction) moved and voted unanimously.

Draft charter for LSC

Prior to the meeting, Jim had e-shared his draft of a "Town of Acton Land Stewardship Committee Mission Statement" with the Committee. As the basis for this Mission Statement, Jim started with a document formerly called a "Charter." He said that it was possible to find several different versions of the document from the past several years.

Any comments from the Committee? None.

Jim: We may have a version that is exactly ready for approval.

Jim explained:

- Re the name, calling it a charter could be confusing according to Town counsel. So "Mission Statement" was chosen. Its main purpose is to be an agreed-upon structure on how we operate and interact with the Town.
- The language in the overall mission part has not changed since around 2010. Jim read the mission.
- As town committees go, the LSC is unusual because we do unusual things. We do things that we approve, e.g., we decide about trails and then we act on those decisions. We can have a Website and Facebook page. We educate people. We make maps.
- The paragraph on dealing with the Open Meeting Law outside of meetings has the key assertion that discussions of "practical details" of performing duties outside of a formal meeting (e.g., while out in the woods) are permissible.
- We want to get the section on volunteers right. We want to define them so they can get all the protection they can from the Town. We can't provide this protection to a person who would simply "claim" s/he is a volunteer. We will "support" our volunteers and have them usually "work under the supervision of Committee members." At present, this document is intentionally silent on insurance coverage and indemnification for volunteers. There will be another document on that in the near future.
- The information under "Reporting" is essentially boilerplate. Generally, we proceed under the direction of Tom Tidman. In particular, Tom is responsible for alerting and guiding us if any of our plans would require permission from the Conservation Commission.

- The chair already writes and submits annual reports. This just formalizes that requirement. Jim has written and submitted the Committee’s 2013 Annual Report.
- There are some small changes that Jim and Janet Adachi worked on that have no effect on the message of the document.

Discussion:

- Joe: The opening statement allows for the LSC to work on Town lands that are not Conservation Lands. Jim agrees.
- Bob Farra questions the use of “benefit” in the “Mission.” Per Bob, “benefit” does not resonate as well as other sentences. “Benefit” has multiple interpretations including a negative aspect. A discussion ensued on the meaning of “benefit of humans.” Jim responded to Bob’s satisfaction, “We’re here to do good and that good is distributed among the users of the places described in the ‘Mission’.” Bettina: Bob’s is an interesting comment about “benefit.” What would mass Audubon say? Bettina found and read Mass Audubon’s Mission Statement. Laurie thinks the use of “benefit” is fine.
- Bruce: Let’s table further discussion on this until next meeting. He would like time to read the Mission Statement.
- Jim: We’ll come back to this the next time we meet.

Janet congratulated Jim on this work. Joan Cirillo worked a lot on earlier drafts and contributed extensive comments. Jim indicated that Tom Arnold and Phil Keyes also contributed helpful comments. Jim collaborated with Bob Guba to write the first two charters. This one evolved from their efforts. The Town counsel is standing by to review this. Then it will go to the Conservation Commission and the Board of Selectmen (BOS).

Town counsel had pointed out to Jim that the LSC exists at the whim of the BOS. Some other Town committees have a more permanent life. Town counsel thinks that perhaps the LSC should be a more permanent committee, which would require a Town of Acton Charter change, but that’s something to consider for later, if at all.

Bench location review: Nashoba Brook, Pratt’s Brook, Great Hill

• Pratt’s Brook

We had approved Luna’s bench at Pratt’s brook. Bettina hasn’t yet gotten the bench.

Jim: Bettina writes a check to the Town of Acton and Acton acquires the bench. This is to make it clear that the bench is a Town bench. As such, it will be a tax-deductible donation for Bettina—and whoever helps her; and the bench can be bought without paying sales tax.

• Great Hill

Joe joined Tom Tidman, Bettina, and Cathy Fochtman (Town Recreation Director) on a visit to Great Hill where they settled on what they felt was a good location for the bench, facing and overlooking the pond near its south end and beyond the north end of the playing field. The site has yet to be “run by” the donor, Judy Piermarini. The donor suggests a bench of recycled plastic with a plaque, “In memory of ‘Sunny’ our beloved dog, 1999–2011. Given by the Piermarini family.”

Jim would like to hear about the choice of material and the wording for the plaque. He heard:

- We should be consistent with material from one bench to another.
- This bench would be in the full sun so granite may be inappropriate.
- Is wood good? Dogs could pee on it a lot.
- Dogs wouldn’t hurt teak. It’s been in use at the Arboretum for decades.

- Plastic doesn't seem appropriate on Conservation Land. On the other hand, this plastic is recycled.
- Wood will wear out, but plastic would be there a long time. Wood can last about 10 years.
- Because of the location, plastic may be the best. It would get a lot of use. Do recycled plastic benches have backs? Yes. Bob saw a good plastic bench on Northfield Mountain and shared a picture. Plastic looks real (like wood). Bettina has had a plastic bench for 17 years and it looks like new.
- Would we want benches to have a lifetime? Good question. If vandals sense a weakness in a bench, they will try to smash it.
- The bench would be on a concrete pad. The bench would be screwed onto brackets. The brackets would be screwed into the concrete.
- There appeared to be consensus on using recycled plastic.
- The donor would have to get her plaque wording on three lines. This may limit her words.
- There is no point in using the family name on the plaque. Why not, "In memory of 'Sunny,' 1999–2011."
- Bettina could get in touch with Judy Piermarini with suggestions for the wording, including leaving out the family name.

Why is the LSC involved with approving this bench since it would be on Recreation Land?

Jim: Great Hill is a Recreation Area and a Conservation Area. Jim has looked at the deeds and they indicate that all big Great Hill parcels are under the Conservation Commission. Therefore, as benches are under LSC purview, it is wise for us to review and approve this one.

If Great Hill is Conservation Land, then how did Recreation get involved with using Conservation Land?

Jim: Neither Doug Halley nor Tom Tidman knows why. Cathy has looked at minutes of Town Meetings and has found nothing.

Moved: We approve the bench of recycled plastic and have Bettina work with Judy on the wording for the plaque. The wording has yet to be approved by the LSC. Seconded. Passed unanimously.

Bob F: What we are deciding now is setting precedent, e.g., taking off last name will always eliminate last name.

Jim: This is consistent with what we've approved for Luna's bench at Pratt's Brook.

- This is not a precedent for benches that honor humans.

• Nashoba Brook

Jim has seen the site proposed by Linda McElroy for the Nashoba Brook Trail Through Time bench. It looks lovely. Phil Keyes has said it's fine also.

Jim drew a diagram to show the bench location (per Linda's application: 30 yd W of 3-sided Indian kiosk). The bench would be wooden and would look down towards Nashoba Brook. Linda likes wood because of expense, and out of consideration for the people having to install it. Linda has submitted an application. She is still working on plaque wording, something like "Trail Through Time, funded by the Acton Community Preservation Act." There would be no names or dates.

- Joe says to include a date. Jim agrees.
- Don't use "funded by" as the name implies the funding.
- We should treat this like the Great Hill application: Have Jim work out details with Linda.
- Bruce and Bettina agree. Jim says he would go for short wording.

Moved: We approve the bench of wood and authorize Jim to agree on the plaque wording with Linda. Seconded. Passed unanimously.

LSC officer elections

Jim recommends: Jim (Chair), Dave (apparently willing to continue, Vice Chair), Joe (Clerk).

– Moved the above slate for another year. Seconded. Passed unanimously.

Review and approve bridge plans for Robbins Mill

Jim shared Bob Guba's bridge design document that Bob developed in cooperation with Bob Farra.

– Bob described his design (and (a little later) an anchoring concept he feels is necessary to keep two sections together—but “we’ll keep it simple at first”).

– We’ll give the Tennessee Gas Company lots of phone numbers so that when they want to move it, they’ll be able to easily get in touch with someone.

– Bob G: The gas company should go to Town Hall (Tom Tidman's office), then to our Committee. Then, we’ll get volunteers and do the moving.

– Bob Farra thinks the gas company will be fine with leaving it up to us.

– Bettina: If worse comes to worse, the gas company can pick up the sections itself.

– We’ll give them the committee email address and the Natural Resources phone number.

– Bettina: Tom Tidman will buy the bridge materials if the LSC approves it.

– We might ask for \$250 and include screws instead of nails to allow us to maintain the sections more easily; and for connecting pieces that will allow the sections to stay in place with each other, but still be removed easily.

– Moved (by Bruce) “We go for it (directing Natural Resources to create a purchase order for \$250)”
Seconded. Further discussion: None. Passed unanimously.

– Bettina will call Bob Guba when the purchase order is ready. Bob wants to be at the purchase site in order to select each piece.

– Will bog bridges float on water? Bob G: We’ll see.

Bob had another point re getting items to the site. Bob visited the site this morning to gps the cart road (from Log Hill Road in Carlisle) and the trail to the pond. About 80% of the cart road is on Acton land. There is a little wedge that isn't. He called Sylvia Willard, Carlisle's Conservation Administrator (Think: Acton's Tom Tidman). She said it's private property.

– Jim told the history: When the developer laid out the Carlisle plots, the developer kept the cart road open for future access. When development plans did not go through, Mike King, owner at 201 Log Hill Road, stepped in and said we don't want more development here, so he arranged to buy a bit of the land to close the gap and glommed it onto his land. They are happy to give us access over their property for maintenance.

– Bob used a 6-ft fiberglass chimney brush rod to check the width of the cart road and it's wide enough to let us get right to the site with a truck.

– Bob also gps'd the trail to the pond. We can't do a loop around the pond. At the north end, it's a swamp. Jim has more information about the pond and possible future trails there. We need a chainsaw on the pond trail. This might be a two-person job. Bob is not sure.

– Two Carlisle homes beside the cart road include land in both towns. We don't want to show the cart road section that goes over private land on our maps.

Time line for the gas line span: a month or two this summer, as soon as we get the materials.

Bob F: There is one other place we should have a bridge and boardwalk in place of hopping over rocks, on the yellow loop trail.

Bruce: Let's discuss a different bridge, the one that connects Spring Hill and Robbins Mill. This is a

critical bridge. (Right now in the dry season you don't need others.) If Scouts are not submitting plans, we should take over that project as well and send Scouts to another project. We are not hearing from the Scouts.

Bettina: Neither of the Scouts has given us anything. She will contact them again and give them one more chance.

Report on meeting with Tom Tidman

Jim will skip through the list unless someone is excited about a topic.

Did Tom talk about the gate at Camp Acton?

- The upper gate is broken. Bruce thinks it's just worn out.
- Bob G: It was falling apart and the repair hasn't lasted.
- Bruce could try to repair, but things are really aging.
- Jim will get back to Tom that it really isn't repairable.
- We've tried once; it's rotting and needs replacing.
- Repair it, or move the lower gate up. It will be tricky to adjust, but it's an historic thing too as Scouts put it in.
- Bruce has "Authorized Vehicles Only" at the upper gate to keep cars out of the campground.

Bob G: Tom was to take over mowing at Grassy Pond, the access trail at Wetherbee, and Stoneymeade. We should get a "yes" or "no" from Tom as to whether he can do it 4 times a summer. Bob G widened the access trail at Wetherbee; he went back there two weeks ago and stuff has grown up.

Do we have a riding mower? The Town does. Jim doesn't think they use riding mowers on Conservation Lands.

Jim: If the Town can't do the mowing, we'll scramble to get volunteer coverage.

Jim will update list of items and send it to the group in a day or two.

August meeting

How many can be here on 08/19? Count shows that we would have a quorum. Jim will not be here and Dave doesn't think he'll be here. Bettina is willing to chair the meeting. Jim, Joe, and Bettina will work out the agenda.

Planning for adding new associates

Jim hasn't gotten in touch yet with either the Board of Selectmen or the Volunteer Coordinating Committee (VCC) to bring in new associates. He can share 1) where we need stewards, and 2) names who have expressed interest so far. He points out that the new Mission Statement has extra slots for associates. Right now we have three open slots.

Needs so far:

- Steward for Great Hill. This is most urgent. We could easily use two people.
- Steward for the Canoe Launch, or a co-Steward with Bettina.
- Steward for Wright Hill. The Town is closing on the purchase at the end of July. Jim can't be three things (LSC Chair, Guggins Brook Steward, Wright Hill Steward). Guggins is the most labor intensive.
- Steward for the Morrison Farm wooded area. Bruce and Joe are interested. Bruce has cut a lot of deadfall there.

Names so far:

- Sherman Smith, associate candidate, who will be walking Pratt's Brook shortly with Theresa

Portante-Lyle.

- Amanda Stern, associate candidate, who's been through the VCC process but hasn't been in touch with Jim recently.
- Joe Holmes, who has been volunteering a bunch at the Arboretum.
- John Watlington, associate candidate, who has been helping Tom Arnold keep up with widening trails at Wetherbee.

Right now we have 8 associates so we could fit in all 3 associate candidates.

Jim will be in touch with the 3 (or 4) above and talk to them about our options.

Brainstorming possible CPA (Community Preservation Act) projects

There's CPA money that can be used to improve Conservation Lands.

We've talked about spanning Nashoba Brook by the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT). How about a bridge to span Nashoba Brook at the pencil factory; also one near Carlisle?

Could put in handicap accessible (HA) composting toilet at Camp Acton (would be permanent).

We are exploring options of making Campsite 1 HA. This would include the grade on the road from the parking lot. This is in the Open Space and Recreation Plan rollout goals.

Perhaps in August and definitely by September we should be talking about these possible CPA proposals.

Janet: The application deadline is in November. People present their proposals. Then the Community Preservation Committee deliberates in December and January.

Jim: The earlier we can get stuff in order, the better. Let's prioritize.

1. BFRT accesses.
2. HA toilet at Camp Acton

There is a plan for such a thing (HA toilet) at the Arboretum. There is one now, but it's not there all winter. Talking about toilets at Town meeting may be fun.

Laurie: If anything is needed for the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT), there are funds available. You can leverage CPA projects with other grants, which is a plus for getting a CPA proposal approved. BCT wants to make sure that all access points, like the one to be at Carlisle Road, are publicized. Jay Lane is an access point with no identification other than a BCT logo. BCT needs more prominent BCT information at these places—not necessarily a kiosk, but perhaps its own sign.

Parcel reports

Jim got e-reports from almost everyone.

- Canoe Launch

Bettina: There's poison ivy at the Canoe Launch. We also have lots of Japanese knotweed. Knotweed is difficult to get out. Our goal there is not total removal, but to keep the knotweed down to the point where (a) it doesn't spread further and (b) native plants have a chance to coexist.

- Nashoba Brook

Bettina will be working with a volunteer BCT maintenance crew to "brush out" Nashoba Brook.

- Pacy

Jason will go out soon with a weed whacker.

– Bruce: If Jason likes using the weed whacker, there's more work at Camp Acton.

- Camp Acton

Jim and Bruce met with Tom Tidman, Cheryl Getsick of the Recreation Department, and the Acton Fire Chief and simplified the Camp Acton permitting form.

– Bruce: We also had them increase the capacity of Campsite 1 from 10 to 40. We agreed to propose raising the cost of Campsite 1 (only—as it is special) from \$15 to \$30. And we worked with the Fire Department for a state-approved poster on fire safety. It would be essentially a “use common sense” poster.

– Bob G raised the concern of whether and when to break camp if there’s high wind. Discussion ensued.

• Robbins Mill

Bob G cut 26 perc pipes with a sawzall 6 in. below ground level. Then Bob F used a backpack to get all 26 out in one trip—temporarily losing one that a tree branch grabbed along the way. They posted pictures on Facebook and it proved to be one of our most popular posts. The Bobs are offering a prize to the person who can find a perc pipe still in the ground.

– Blazing of the trails by Peggy Liversidge has commenced. She has now gone once around the yellow trail.

– We’ll talk at a future meeting about crossing a stream with rocks; also the pond trail.

– Bob G: We have a 15-ft wide trail easement to Carlisle Road over the Valentine land. How close do the Valentines want us to keep that? It should have been surveyed if the Valentines want us to stay on the easement. Jim: We will have to take this up with the Valentines.

• Great Hill

Wass Rock has “Wass Rock” spray painted on the back. Paul Wasserbohr was the steward at one time and now it’s Wass Rock.

This name does have a deep history and does not need preservation on maps or in the trail guide.

• Guggins Brook

At the inner meadow, Jim preserved some plants that turned out to be a special species of goldenrod instead of milkweed, so he will soon be cutting down the extra plants.

• Pratt’s Brook

The blueberry barrens are fabulous right now. Middle-size blueberries are there now. High bush will be next. (Surprised there are no bears!) According to Bob G, passing trains would set the field on fire and the burns were good for blueberries. He wonders if controlled burns could happen there now.

• Miscellany

– Bob: What about parcels we never hear about. Jim will pursue.

– On bees and hornets: Bettina says to contact Natural Resources. Bob G: Will they (NR) show up pronto? Bettina: Yes, pronto! Last year, Bettina took care of Pratt’s Brook pronto. Discussion ensued on what a yellow jacket bee looks like.

– Unresolved (prompted by Bob’s backpacking): How to get backpacks back from Allen Warner?

<Photo of Bob F backpacking cut perc pipes removed to reduce size of PDF file>

Evaluate this meeting

Having times beside the agenda on the board is a good idea. They will keep the meeting flowing at an appropriate rate.

The meeting adjourned at 8:48 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, August 19, at 7 P.M., in Room 126.

These documents that served as background to this meeting were sent by email to the lsc@acton-ma.gov list:

- "LSC June minutes draft" July 11 Joe Will
- "For Tuesday meeting: Committee mission" July 14 Jim Snyder-Grant
- "bench donation application #2 Piermarini for Sunny" June 19 Jim Snyder-Grant
- "Application for bench at Nashoba Brook Indian Kiosk July 15 Jim Snyder-Grant
- "Nagog Hill Report" July 13 Elan Riesman
- "Robbins Mill July report" July 13 Bob Farra
- "Grassy Pond" July 14 Ann Shubert
- "Nashoba Brook Report" July 14 Laurence Ullmann
- "Pacy Update" July 14 Jason Temple
- "Camp Acton Report" July 15 Bruce Rachman
- "WHole/TF" July 12 Joe Will
- "Guggins report" July 13 Jim Snyder-Grant