

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, September 16, 2014, Town Hall, Room 126, 7 P.M.

Attendance

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

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Elan Riesman, Sherman Smith, John Watlington

Jim called the meeting to order at 7:05 P.M.

Review and approval of August 19 minutes

- Approval of minutes moved and voted 6-0, Jim abstained due to being absent from August meeting.

Possible CPA (Community Preservation Act) projects

- At Wills Hole, consider making accessible the trail from the Nagog Park entrance to Wills Hole.

Two other ideas mentioned at the previous meeting:

- Replace the Mary's Brook boardwalk. Bettina presented this last week to the CPC. CPA application would be for ~\$30K. Project would take down several trees, including some somewhat invasive black walnuts; also a huge tree that would require a commercial operation. In response to a comment about the value of black walnut wood, Bettina would appreciate it if anyone who knows a "wood person" (an expert on black walnut wood) would direct that person to her.
- A way to cross over the wetlands at Pacy to open up trails on the north side of the wetlands.

Any of these projects will require an enthusiastic supporter, and then an organizer to make sure it happens. Bettina could do one of Wills Hole or Pacy after the Arboretum boardwalks are done. So, we have an enthusiastic person for 2015. Anyone for 2014? There were no enthusiastic "jump-ups."

CPA money would become available after the 2015 TM. There is a 3-yr spending requirement. Project paperwork due date this fall is 11/17. The big hurdle is the CPC. After CPC decides what it wants, the CPC gives it to the Board of Selectmen to sign off on (usually happens) for Town Meeting (usually accepts).

Laurie mentioned that there was CPA-talk "a long time ago" of access to the pencil factory. This may fall under the CPA "historical" category and there may already be people pursuing this. Mass DOT has been speaking with Bill Klauer (of Acton Historical Society), and Bettina should talk with Tom Tidman. It is not in the current Bruce Freeman Rail Trail documents. At the pencil factory, it would be nice to build up the rock wall.

Joe described a project being studied by The Discovery Museums that would seek CPA funding and could possibly relate to making Great Hill accessible via the Discovery Museums property.

Review all incomplete and not-started Scout projects on Conservation Land

Bettina shared a spreadsheet on 2014 Eagle Scout projects.

- Thomas Malchodi had a fund-raising bake sale and has gotten lumber for his project. Bob F asked "When?" for this project. Per Bruce, Thomas was cutting the lumber last weekend and should be ready to do the install in a week or two. Thomas does have plans that his leaders have commented on and

help adjust. There should be no problems.

- Based on a meeting with James Gong, his project at Grassy Pond is more than a year away.
- The Stewards have done Forrest Pailles's work. Forrest is not going to be an Eagle Scout, so he does not need a replacement project.
- Bruce likes the new projects.
- Bettina will update her list and send it out.

Any follow-up on 8th-grade Service Day

This was called just "Service Day." Jim has heard nothing of it being revived. Bruce: RJ Grey Junior High probably will never find anyone like Allen Warner to take this over — at least not this year.

Laurie had sent an email, and is now reminding the LSC of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) Trail Workday planned for 10/18 on the section of the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) in Spring Hill that parallels the Nashoba Brook east-side trail, where the BCT is rocky and generally wet. It's between the two red trails joining Spring Hill to Nashoba Brook. We could build boardwalks there, but that would be a major project. Laurie wants the AMC to evaluate this section of the BCT and suggest how to otherwise improve the trail. The AMC can build trails using local material and they are trying to teach people the process. Laurie suggests that we try to get people to this free event to learn something about trail building. We could draw on the AMC expertise for a solution that could involve moving large rocks.

AMC trail workdays focus on any trail for which AMC has responsibility. In Acton it's the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT). However, a workday does not have to be done on the BCT. Other possible "like" projects that came to mind: The Jay Lane red access trail to Spring Hill (part of the BCT), the corduroyed section near the pencil factory (already bypassed, a minor project).

This AMC workday is the same day as the BCT annual meeting in the afternoon.

Jim: It is great for Laurie to get the AMC crew to work that section of the BCT. Laurie is to let Jim know of what develops, including room at the workday event.

Laurie's email also mentioned a smaller project possibility on Friday, Oct. 24, using 10 to 15 employees of Vibram in West Concord. Any ideas? The Vibram people could work on the brush on the Jay Lane trail. Linda McElroy also wanted some help with three things at Wheeler Lane. Perhaps Vibram could split their crew. Laurie suggests that it would be good to let Linda have first bid.

Continuing the search to clear Jay Lane: Bob G notes that anyone with the brush cutter could have it cleared out in one hour. Elan will coordinate with Bob and Bruce to do the clearing.

Update on Valentine Conservation Restriction trail easement

Jim, Bob G, and Laurie met with three Steve's (Hinton, Spang, and Tobin) from the Carlisle Conservation Foundation, and Jack Valentine who owns a "gigantic" piece of land that straddles the Acton-Carlisle boundary in North Acton. The land has a huge Conservation Restriction (CR) on it that allows housing places in the woods. Included in the CR is a 15-ft wide trail easement that will enable 1) the Carlisle and Acton Conservation lands to connect to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT), and 2) the Bay Circuit Alliance to complete one of the few gaps remaining in the BCT. The group put up flags to mark a trail from Acton Street (Carlisle Road in Acton) to the BFRT.

Bob says that the next steps are in our ballpark. He thinks the markings are pretty good right now, but he wants to go back when the leaves are gone to do the markings more accurately. Bob said that he told the Steve's about when he thought planning for extending the trail to the Acton/Carlisle Conservation

Lands would happen.

This new proposed Valentine connection to the BFRT will involve a bridge and a boardwalk. The AMC, the Trustees of Reservations, and the CPA could be funding sources.

(The BFRT is out for bid now. Contracts should be out the end of October. Construction will begin in 2015 and may be done in 2016.)

Update on Wright Hill and associated trail easements

Trail easements will involve the New View Condo Association (NVCA). Jim lives in New View, so there is a potential conflict of interest as he could be an active advocate for the NVCA as one of its members. Jim has signed and filed disclosure notices with the Town and will recuse himself when we talk about trail easements.

Bob G and Bettina could be the ones to move the easements along. Jim could pass on to them what he knows.

Based on Bob's experience at Robbins Mill and Great Hill, Bob feels that private homeowners would not like their "personal trails" used, so he advocates that the trail to these new easements be further away so homes are out of sight of trail users and trail users are out of sight of homeowners. In particular, he does not want the junction of the easement trail and the Guggins Brook trail where it is now. Bruce likes the idea of keeping trails away from homes. (We do not want to connect the easement trail to the red access trail from the 111 parking up to the end of the long boardwalk. This area is Acton Water District property and also swamp.)

Next steps: Jim will make a good map, and suggests that we have a field trip with Jim the New View rep and Bob the LSC rep. Then we'll discuss further at a future meeting. Laurie would like to be included on the field trip.

Parcel reports, including recent construction projects

- Pratt's Brook

John had talked about the buckthorn around the blueberry barrens. Sherm went there with his lopper and "took out most of it." Now he has noticed more. Suggestions abounded about not leaving roots intact as aboveground efforts serve to make the root structure larger. John suggested leaving the buckthorn at a certain height and he could weed-wrench out the roots. There is a "farm dump" nearby where John could drop his cuttings. We're mostly seeing glossy buckthorn, which doesn't have thorns.

- Great Hill

Except for dog droppings, Great Hill is in good shape. John fixed and reinstalled the broken "Great Hill Conservation Land" sign at the Kelley Road red-trail entrance. John is coordinating maps and other kiosk stuff with Bettina.

- Nagog Hill

Elan expressed his concern about "secondary leaners." The primary ones are very secure and well over people's heads. The secondary leaners appear to be not so secure. Bob G says that we could take down the tree that's holding everything up. There was also talk of using a 10-ft-long power pole pruning saw. Elan, Bruce, and Bob will look more closely at this.

- Robbins Mill

Bruce: We need to put a Robbins Mill map on the website. Bob: we have a map printed from Google Earth. Bruce would like the map to be like the other maps. Bob suggested to Jim what to do and Jim said that he could work on it. Jim also said that we will revisit maps in general.

- Canoe Launch

On the use of herbicide here, we should check with Tom Tidman whether this would be in wetlands.

- Camp Acton

Bruce needs help to move a picnic table. There are a bunch of scouts coming back in a couple weeks.

- Arboretum

– There has been vandalism: Two teak benches in the fragrance garden were kicked apart and their arms broken off. Shawn has taken them to his shop where he will work on them. Bettina is in touch with bench-maker Country Casual about replacement parts, and is checking on insurance.

– We should put an improved Arboretum map on the website.

- The Ponds

Thanks to Laurie for coordinating with Vertex Pharmaceuticals two hours of work by Vertex employees at both Ice House Pond and Robbins Mill Pond. Laurie provided four canoes.

- Heath Hen Meadows

Bob G cleaned up some downed trees. He also repaired a t-strap on the Mt. Hope side of the boardwalk. He pointed out that folks should have a look (live or on Facebook) at the beaver deceivers and the new cage around the inlet. He's hoping the beavers are having a nervous breakdown over the water flow through their dam (The water is over the inlet end of the deceivers so we suspect it's not readily apparent to the beavers how it's escaping.)

- Wills Hole/Town Forest

Joe needs maps for the Sachem Way office (which turned out to not exist). Bettina will provide.

Listing and prioritizing items to be on future agendas

Jim is aiming for an approximate agenda for our next meeting. We are mentioning these without discussion now.

Possibly for October:

- Handicapped access to trails; related mapping project
- Gate at Camp Acton
- Scoutland trail
- More new stewards – two
- Fall party (social only – no business)

For November:

- LSC Charter

For a winter meeting:

- Maps
- Parcel write-ups
- Guidebooks
- Website
- Invasives

For a spring meeting:

- Meadow plans

Other topics (to be placed)

- Parking areas that need improvement
- Future scout projects
- Mill Corner Condo trail permission
- Triangle Hill Farm (two parcels that can't be built upon)
- Great Hill-111 access near CVS
- Bruce Freeman Rail Trail projects, e.g., bridge to pencil factory

Evaluate this meeting

Bruce: Good pacing.

Jim: The timing worked well. We finished 30 min ahead of schedule. Jim would like to think about an agenda experiment, possibly prioritizing items as high, medium, and low.

During "Parcel Reports," Bob G suggested using a list of parcels to go through, considering that some parcel reports had already gone to the LSC via email. Bob will bring a list to the next meeting and show Jim what he means.

The meeting adjourned at 8:31 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, October 21, 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 August minutes" September 14, Joe Will
- "2014 Eagle Scout Projects" September 16, Bettina Abe
- "Nashoba Brook report" September 16, Laurence Ullmann
- "Nagog Hill" September 16, Elan Riesman
- "How my role is changing with the trail easements between Wright Hill and Guggins" September 16, Jim Snyder-Grant
- "Robbins Mill August/September Update" September 15, Bob Farra
- "Canoe Launch" September 16, Bettina Abe
- "Camp Acton Report September" September 15, Bruce Rachman
- "WHole/TF" September 9, Joe Will
- "MtH/HHMeadow, September 4, Joe Will
- "North Acton Woods/Carlisle Conservation Lands" September 3, Bob Guba
- "LSC: Nagog Hill" September 5, Elan Riesman