

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, May 17, 2016, Town Hall, Room 9, 7 P.M.

Attendance

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

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Joe Holmes, Sherman Smith, John Watlington

Nonmembers:

Janet Adachi (LSC's Board of Selectmen liaison), Allen Warner (8th Grade Workday coordinator)

Bettina called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M.

Review and approval of April minutes

Approved unanimously.

Considering the LSC Vice-Chair

Bruce, destined to be the next LSC Chair, has spoken with Bob F about being Vice-Chair. Everyone else has stepped back and Bob is happy to help in any way he can, so he is it! Bob cautions that he has a travel schedule for his work.

Bruce will call on the Vice Chair for any support that he can give. Jim pointed out that there had been a running list of things that the LSC might want from the Town through Tom Tidman and Natural Resources (NR). We didn't work with the list this year because of Bettina being in the NR office. Bruce agreed that he and Bob will maintain a list with which to annoy the Town.

Bruce pointed out that during his Vice Chair year, Bob will get an idea of what being Chair is all about, and one year hence, Bob will become Chair. Bob recognizes that being Chair is a bigger commitment than Vice Chair and cautions that he may have difficulty meeting those commitments. The LSC will keep that in mind.

Bruce cannot attend the July meeting.

Junior High School Workday, 09/08/16

The workday will not be 09/08—too early. It will be later in September or in early October, aiming for a Friday. Allen will coordinate 100-120 8th graders on various community service projects. The kids will work for 3.5 h. For the last couple years (not counting a one-year hiatus in the program), there were some jobs that were insufficient for their energies, e.g., painting picnic tables and benches. Allen is working with Tom Tidman and Bettina to make sure the projects are more substantive this year.

Allen said that a Faulkner house project would take 20 kids. Wheeler Farm would take 20. He would like 20 or 30 for Boxborough projects. And he still has another 40-50 available. Allen said that Tom thought that trail work on new Assabet River trails would be a good project. Allen sees putting 30-40 kids on this would be a good start for a project list from the LSC.

Suggestions: The kids could do wood chips at Grassy Pond, in from each of its three entrances, and possibly also at the Hybrid Farm at Nagog Hill. Cutting bittersweet at Nagog Hill is a possibility. The Guggins Brook trail in from Route 111 needs chipping every couple years, including now. If we would

ever secure a trail through Scoutland, we would have another trail that would need building. A handicap trail at Camp Acton that's been proposed for Campsite 2 would be a challenge. Lots of different projects could be scoped out for Camp Acton.

Bettina said that we will make a master list of projects and tools required. The list will be on the LSC's June agenda.

Considering the LSC 2016-2017 membership

Possible associate members to become regular (voting) members: John, Joe H, and Paula Goodwin. Possible regular member to become an associate: Gary Kilpatrick. Bettina will leave the LSC. (The Arboretum has never had a steward before Bettina, but it has enough volunteer help and doesn't need a steward.) The above changes will give the LSC nine regular members and nine associates. Bettina will email Charlie Aaronson of the Volunteer Coordinating Committee these changes tomorrow.

Next month the LSC will vote on its officers. Do John, Joe H, and Paula have to do anything? Yes. Jim went through how such end-of-year changes are done, culminating with the Town Clerk emailing them and asking that they be sworn in.

How to deal with abandoned Eagle Scout projects

Bruce and Bettina shared the list of current Eagle Scout projects. The only abandoned project on the list is for Camp Acton accessibility improvements. A "suspect" project is a Robbins Mill boardwalk. In the future a Scout should be given a project along with a deadline beyond which the LSC will consider it abandoned. Bob F pointed out that the Scout is supposed to provide a schedule as part of the project.

Bruce: If your parcel has a project, let the LSC know, and we'll let the boys know of the project's window.

Volunteers

Jim: We're about ready to have the Yahoo list disappear, to be replaced by something that still needs a bit more definition. We have the front end — a sign-up form — understood. But then do we do large email blasts or should we instead contact the volunteers individually? Bettina says that after we receive a sign-up form, the volunteer should be called. Bettina has volunteered to be the person making the initial call. So, the volunteer fills out the form, their name goes into a spreadsheet, we call or contact the volunteer and then work with them to get a job right away in order to get them "plugged in." Bettina will share the volunteer's information with a matching steward.

Jim: When we get this system worked out, we'll notify the Yahoo group about it and also that this group will be shut down. Our questionnaire is up and running except for a couple edits that Jim needs to put in. Jim will sit with Bettina as to how the spreadsheet flow works. Right now, Jim and Bettina will have sole access. Bettina will be the volunteer coordinator for a year. Then some steward will take over to distribute names to stewards as to who's volunteering for what.

If anyone has other thoughts on how to manage this, let Jim know.

Joe H, who had two people on the current list come to help him in the last couple years, had 3 questions/comments: The person in charge can delete people, right? Yes. We should keep the ability to email everyone as a new project might be of interest to someone already signed up. And when you do have a mass emailing, do it a second time.

What we learned at the 03/28 Sudbury Valley Trustees Workshop: Chapter 61 Current Use Tax Programs

Bettina explained that this was how the Town acquired some land. It was educational, but not really relevant to LSC interests.

Nagog Pond and Concord

This is scheduled to be before the Board of Selectmen (BoS) in July. There was to have been a meeting involving both towns about water. Concord, however, said “No” because it wants to focus on Nagog Pond. Janet thinks that the two towns still need a discussion on other issues. Keep an eye on the BoS agendas.

Assabet River Trails Project

Bettina is still putting together a Notice of Intent to build boardwalks. She says that Tom Tidman thinks that in the meantime we could go ahead with building the trails. Bettina led a discussion on this project. Some points:

- Organization for the Assabet, Sudbury, and Concord Rivers (OARS) could get volunteers. Bettina could pick workdays for the trails. She would let OARS know and OARS could send this out to its list.
- There is lots of trash to deal with. It might be too dangerous as a Junior High project.
- Why are the trails called green and blue trails? Could there be new names?
- Will we need a steward for this land? Acton and Maynard each owns part of the land, Acton’s part is municipal property.
- The Highway Department will pick up the State-built boardwalks that the State left on Martin Street.

Bettina needs to figure out how to focus on this project, and then how to proceed.

LSC Website

Jim: It’s live. It’s operating. He is still updating a database that’s on a server provided and donated by Bruce Rachman..

Who’s going to edit the Great Hill map (e.g., fix the name of “Wass Rock”) and how? Stewards can do the editing in two ways. Edit the current map, or make a new map like we’ve done for North Acton.

A discussion ensued on how to work with the “Acton Trails” maps.

The Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) was left on the Spring Hill and Nashoba Brook maps “because it’s there.” It’s also on the Robbins Mill map, but it’s different. Do we want to remove the BCT from our maps? Laurie was at a recent BCT meeting where it was observed that people using local maps should find out where the BCT is and what the BCT is emphasizing. Also, lots of BCT hikers would like to use local trails but need to know where the BCT is, relative to the local trails. There was consensus that if the BCT is relying on local maps, we should keep the BCT on our maps if it is legible and doesn’t confuse local hikers. Do we want to mark the BCT on roadways (where it necessarily must sometimes be)? No. BCT hikers generally know how to handle such things.

Should we have a kiosk at the Jay Lane parking area (where the BCT enters/exits Spring Hill)? Probably not as the Town has an easement on the property but does not own it. A discussion ensued about the trail system through Jay Lane and Stoneymeade.

Bettina: It’s amazing what we’ve accomplished with our maps in the last two years.

Workdate calendar

Nothing right now.

Parcel specific

- Arboretum

Bettina shared a wildflowers-photo page that she intends to also share at a no-pick scavenger hunt (sic).

- Arboretum and Great Hill

Bettina and John talked about the honeysuckle at both parcels.

- Camp Acton

Bruce had emailed Tom Tidman about the Camp Acton access road being rutted with ruts being filled with water. No response from Tom. (This was cited as a wonderful example of having someone with a list of projects who would talk with Tom on these things, so reviving this list might be good thing.)

- Camp Acton and Spring Hill

– Bettina pointed out that there is a proposed subdivision off of Spring Hill road that will include a massive driveway on the edge of Conservation Land leading to two big houses that will be visible from both Camp Acton and Spring Hill.

– Bob G shared some history on how the Town acquired Spring Hill and Camp Acton.

- Canoe Launch

Joe H pointed out that Concord Outfitters, not the State, stocks the Canoe Launch area privately. Joe says that the guy at Concord Outfitters is willing to tell fishermen of projects at the Canoe Launch. Joe speculates that maybe they could even help with the Assabet trails too because the trails could lead to some good fishing spots. Clarification: the State does stock the Assabet River — in Northborough. In Acton the State stocks Fort Pond Brook and Nashoba Brook.

- Grassy Pond

Bob G expressed his continuing concern with no work being done on the Newtown Road parking. He points out that Tom Tidman hired tree people for the Jenks parking. The Highway Department did the grading and surfacing, and now Jenks has an excellent parking lot with more people using it. Laurie agreed that this project should have priority, one reason being the safety factor involved with people having to back out. Bettina pointed out that for the Newtown Road parking, there is expense. Tom determines priorities, but how? Only Tom can address this. We have to get this parking-lot issue in front of Tom.

- Guggins Brook

– Jim will be assigning the Guggins Brook boardwalk project to someone.

– Bob G pointed out a tree problem when one comes into the parking from 111. A tree removal discussion ensued. Bob G described how he and Elan Reisman took down a difficult tree at Nagog using a rope winch secured to the tree not too far up. John pointed out that this (“bucking”) would have been covered in the 3d day of chainsaw training that trainees passed on. Jim will take more detailed pictures of the problem at Guggins.

- Heath Hen Meadow

There is huge overgrowth at the Robbins Street cul de sac. This was pointed out 3-4 weeks ago and one wonders why it has not yet been cleared out. Clarification: Bob G was referring to Municipal Properties and the Highway Department, which he had contacted for improved roadway-edge brush management, not the Heath Hen Meadows Steward.

- Nashoba Brook

– Are potholes eliminated at Davis Road? Not yet.

– Per Laurie, there is a large dead oak tree endangering the Stone Chamber. More tree-removal discussion. Laurie will organize a sawyer workday to take down this tree if Bruce is sure that he can get a line up into the tree. Bettina urged the sawyers to discuss this offline.

– Laurie shared an article in the Appalachian Mountain Club’s “Outdoors Magazine” that featured the “Best of the Bay Circuit Trail” and cited Nashoba Brook for the “Best History Hike.”

. . . , Nashoba Brook stands out for its detailed interpretive information, illuminating the land’s historic value. Signs on the 2-mile, brookside Trail Through Time—portions of which are on the BCT—explain the significance of an American Indian ceremonial site, stone walls, dams, mill remains, and a stone chamber built into a hillside. (Go ahead: Crawl inside.) One kiosk notes the remains of a 19th-century pencil factory, an important player in a competitive local market. Thoreau worked at his family’s nearby factory for much of his life.

See: <http://www.outdoors.org/articles/amc-outdoors/best-of-the-bay-circuit-trail/>

- General

- Bettina made note to ask again about both the Newtown Road parking and the pothole concerns.
- The LSC liked it when Tom used to come to meetings. Bob G liked it when he had easy access to Tom at Town Hall compared to Tom’s present Town Hall isolation.

Brainstorming stories for the LSC website

Something on fly fishing off the Canoe Launch; or flats fishing; or interview an angler.

June agenda

Voting for new Chair and officers.

Listing Junior High Workday projects.

Evaluate meeting

Lively.

The meeting adjourned at 8:39 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, July 19, at 7 P.M., in Room 9.