

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 17, 2023, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

Regular (voting) members: **Jon Campbell, Dale Chayes, Zanna Gruber** (Vice-Chair), **Aaron Moore** (Chair), Bruce Rachman, **John Watlington, Joe Will** (Minutes), **Tom Wolf**

Associate (nonvoting) members: Ken Appel, Josh Haines, Rebecca Harvey, Everett Kenerson, Gary Kilpatrick, Mel Lima, **Bob Mackin, Hilary Reid**, Jim Salem, Bill Smith, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris

Others: **Bettina Abe** (Acton Conservation), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Patrick Hearn** (Acton Agricultural Commission), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Praneel Murali** (Acton resident), **Steve Trimble** (Acton resident), **Bob Walton** (Acton resident), **Caller 978-973-4025** listened as Attendee.

Aaron opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Review and approval of November 15 and December 20 minutes

Both approved as drafted.

Concerns from the public

Lisa Tomyl has notified Town committees that committee reports for the 2022 Town Report are due February 28. Bettina will draft an LSC report and send it to members for comments.

Morrison Farm Conservation Restriction

Patrick Hearn of the Agricultural Commission presented the Ag Comm's plans, with assistance from ACT, to place a Conservation Restriction (CR) on the Morrison Farm land. The CR would not include the four buildings (house, barn, garage, chicken coop). He presented the information shown on these slides:

Acton Ag Comm Briefing to Land Stewards Regarding Morrison Farm CR 17 Jan 2023

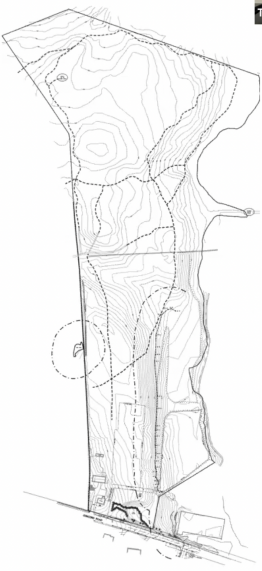
The Morrison Farm CR will protect the land present use and allow the historic buildings to remain in present use to serve DPW storage needs and future plans of the Historical Commissions.

Morrison Farm Land

- The land will be protected in this CR from activities that would reduce its environmental or agricultural value thus assuring existing and future conservation, agriculture, and recreation including forest, hiking trails, community gardens, open pasture, meadow, orchard and dog walking.
- The CR would not allow activities such as hunting, operation of motorcycles, ATVs, powered trail bikes, or snowmobiles, dumping, introduction of invasive plants, excavation of soil, disturbing the topography, or any activities detrimental to drainage, flood control, water quality, or erosion control.

Morrison Farm Historic Buildings

- The Morrison Farm historic buildings include a farmhouse, single car garage, chicken coop, and barn that date to 1933. These buildings and any future replacements would be restricted in the CR to their present use, footprint and outward historic appearance. The buildings interiors would not be open to the public and only accessible to town staff.



A brief history of activities related to Morrison Farm:

Acton Ag Comm Briefing to Land Stewards Regarding Morrison Farm CR 17 Jan 2023

Date	Committee/Town Meeting	Subject	Outcome
1997	Town Meeting	Debt exclusion override to purchase Morrison Farm for \$1.3M	Purchase approved
2007	Morrison Farm Reuse Committee	Numerous recommendations for reuse-presented to the BOS	Community Garden plots and boardwalks/paths
2008	Recreation Commission	Construction of Community Garden plots	Approximately 50 garden plots in present use
2013	Town Meeting	Authorize \$2.8M (\$260K CPA, \$2.5M debt) expenditure for a community center, playground and playing field.	Authorization denied
2016	Selectboard	Vote to sell the house to Habitat for Humanity	BOS voted unanimously against selling the house
2023	Agricultural Commission	Place a CR on the Morrison Farm property	Pending

Not part of the CR plan, but a future possibility that could benefit the Farm and abutting historic sites:

Acton Ag Comm Briefing to Land Stewards Regarding Morrison Farm CR 17 Jan 2023

Potential Concord Road Historic Corridor Placement on National Register

- Concept has arisen in multiple conversations and appears to be gathering support
- Ag Comm is supportive of Historic Commissions in their preservation efforts
- Combines significant historic sites that are within ¼ mile along Concord Road
- Stepping stone to Federal and State funding



Woodlawn Chapel



Alarm Rock



Morrison Farm House



East Acton Village Green

The Ag Comm's "Road Map" for getting to Town Meeting.

Acton Ag Comm Briefing to Land Stewards Regarding Morrison Farm CR 17 Jan 2023		
CR/Warrant Article Preparation Schedule	Status	Letter of Support
• 08 Dec Ag Comm/ ACT Discussion with Planning Dept	Highly Positive	
• 12 Dec Historic District Commission	Positive	
• 13 Dec Historical Commission	Positive, in discussion	
• 16 Dec Letters from Community Gardeners	Highly Positive	
• 27 Dec ACT funding support for CR	Positive	
• 27 Dec Ag Comm Discussion with Dean Charter	Positive, in discussion	
• 3 Jan Ag Comm/DPW Onsite to review equip storage	Highly Positive	
• 4 Jan Pete Westover begin drafting CR	Highly Positive	
• 6 Jan OSC	Highly Positive	
• 10 Jan Initial Draft CR complete	Positive	
• 10 Jan Historic District Commission	Highly Positive	
• 11 Jan Historical Commission	Positive	
• 17 Jan Land Stewards		
• 18 Jan Conservation Commission		
• 23 Jan Select Board		
• 1 Feb Draft CR/Article to Town Mgr.		
• 1 May Town Meeting		

Legend	Highly Positive	Positive	Positive, in discussion	Uncertain	Negative
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The Ag Comm presented this information hoping to get LSC approval of the CR. Patrick sent the current Version 4 of the CR to Aaron, the LSC Chair, but not to the entire LSC. Since most LSC members have not had a chance to read the CR, they cannot vote on it at this meeting. What the LSC could do is approve Aaron, as Chair, sending a letter of LSC support for the CR. Patrick would like to put together a package for the 01/23 meeting of the Select Board (SB). To that end, the Ag Comm could consider comments from the LSC and the Conservation Commission (still to be visited) and put together a Version 5. This would go to all parties, so that everyone would have the version that goes to the SB. Patrick detailed known changes from Version 4 to Version 5. Bettina is forwarding Version 4 and information on the known changes to the LSC, so it will be current on the CR.

Questions and comments:

- Will mountain biking and walking of dogs be on the "allowed" list? Yes, the CR will be very clear about biking and walking of dogs.
- The collapsed shed that was built on utility poles and has a corrugated steel roof is not part of the CR and will "go away".
- It's a bit frustrating to take the time to read through the whole CR document and then find out that this version is obsolete. Unfortunately, that's what happens when a document gets reviewed by so many people, as this has been.
- The document should show which version it is. This had been requested and this observation will help support that request.
- Not included among the (four) farm buildings listed early in the CR draft is the Land Stewards' shed (and woodpile). The shed is mentioned later in the draft.
- There was much discussion on the four buildings and their viability, but the CR is for the land, not the buildings. The CR does comment on problems related to the buildings, possible treatments of the buildings (including allowing for their flexible use), and responsibilities for the buildings — probably to be eventually in the hands of the Historical Commission, the Historic District Commission, or some other group.

- The CR gives confusing reference (some simply being poor wording) to parking and to road maintenance. This will be clarified, particularly per suggestions offered at this meeting.
- The regulations for trails seem a bit more restrictive than what the stewards are used to. If ACT is a holder of a CR, then there will have to be written permission from the ACT for some types of trail work.
- Even though the Morrison Farm Committee hasn't met since 2016, it has never been terminated by the SB, and it should have some say in this.
- Who's responsible for trail maintenance at Morrison Farm? The land stewards have done this voluntarily but are not formally responsible as the Farm is municipal land and not conservation land. A bigger question is, who is responsible for Morrison Farm? It may be Corey York and the Town DPW.

Motion, with friendly amendment and second: The Land Stewardship Committee strongly supports, via a letter to the SB, the concept of a Conservation Restriction on the Morrison farmland provided that the issues raised at this meeting are satisfactorily addressed, as determined by the LSC Chair upon receipt of a revised draft of the Conservation Restriction.

Patrick will present to the Conservation Commission tomorrow night. He'll then adjust the CR based on suggestions from that meeting and this one. He should have the revisions to Aaron by midday on the 19th, would like the LSC letter by the 21st, and then have everything in the SB's hands on the 23^d. Following the SB meeting, Patrick would incorporate the SB's suggestions and then submit it to the Town Manager's office. There would also be a Public Forum and, if the SB approves the CR concept, a meeting with the Town Finance Committee, both of which could generate more changes.

The motion was approved in a unanimous roll call vote.

Open Space and Recreation Plan

There is an in-person meeting on the evening of 01/19 at the Rec Department. If the LSC wants, it can send a liaison to that meeting. The purpose is to go over the four (so far) goals and get them written the way one wants them written. Sometime after that meeting, Bettina will explain how prioritization of open-space parcels will occur. If the LSC is happy with the goals as written, a liaison is not necessary. Susan and Bettina will attend. Those who don't attend can send any concerns re the goals to Bettina.

South Acton Vision & Action Plan

This is on the agenda because the South Acton area includes some conservation lands. There are 4 meetings on 3 days in the coming week at the Town Library. You can find meeting information on the Town website. Kristen Guichard, Town Planner, told Bettina that nothing re the conservation lands will change.

Invasive plants 2023, Part 1

Because of the meeting's length to this point, John is okay delaying this presentation until next meeting, noting that the later presentation will better synchronize with the appearance of the plants in the Spring.

Parcel issues; open-space events

– Heath Hen Meadow Rainbow Trail

Jody reports that it's not at Heath Hen Meadow, but on the 176 Central Street parcel abutting the west side of Mt. Hope Cemetery. The trail was named and marked by kids from the day care center on Central Street. It goes from behind the cemetery shed to what some call the gravel pit, a couple hundred yards, with 7 trail markers.

– Jenks Poison Ivy Treatment (08/04/22)

This is on the agenda in case anyone wants to learn any more about the message from Scott Smyers about completing the treatment. Per Bettina, this was requested by Josh Haines, Jenks steward, because someone who goes to Jenks a lot is deathly allergic to poison ivy. Scott, a certified applicator for Oxbow Associates, volunteered his services. If you want to see Scott's report, let Bettina know.

– 549 Main Street

This is a parcel that is under consideration for purchase by the Acton Water District (AWD). There was some reporting on it a few months ago that was confusing to land stewards as it would become publicly accessible land and no reference was made to any land steward involvement with its development. The property includes the portion of the Isaac Davis Trail that enters the woods on the east side of Main Street just north of the Post Office. Jody and the ACT arranged for two parcel tours, led by its owner, Brewster Conant Jr., and Matt Mosteller of the AWD that were “excellent”. Acquiring the property would be a very advantageous move for the AWD, both for protection of wells currently in the vicinity and possibly new wells. The tours included a visit to the old stone bridge where the Isaac Davis Trail crosses Nashoba Brook (not part of the 549 Main Street parcel). The AWD votes on 01/23 on the purchase of the land for \$4.9M. Anyone in the AWD can attend the meeting and vote. Following Earth Day, April 22, the AWD will have an Open House at its new treatment plant in Acton Center on April 24. On May 1, Town Meeting voters can vote on the purchase of a CR for the land for \$2.45M. If there is interest, Brewster would try to work out more walks of the parcel. There are some Native American stone structures on the parcel that the CR may reference (without specifying their locations). The Town and the Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) would be co-holders of the CR.

Ensuing comments:

- This will be an expensive purchase and it will be reflected in Town water bills.
- A lot of the AWD lands are not open for recreational use. What would be happening here? Open trails will include the Isaac Davis Trail (currently open two times a year), trails taken on the tours, and trails around the meadow at Brook Street. However, the trails will not be open to dogs because to do so wouldn’t be supportive of good water quality.
- Would the open trails include the part of the Isaac Davis Trail across the old bridge over Nashoba Brook? No, Brewster owns that property, but it is not part of the 549 Main Street parcel.
- Would this parcel become one stewarded by the LSC? The Town could ask the LSC if it wanted to recruit a steward for this parcel and the LSC could vote on it. If the LSC would decide not to steward the land, then the Town would have to look elsewhere for maintenance, possibly the SVT.
- If stewarded by the LSC, the parcel could be on the Acton Trails website if the LSC wanted it so.
- Would there be a map? Yes. Jody shared a map that Brewster had prepared showing the trails taken on the tour. She will send it to the whole committee.
- There wouldn’t be any parking for the parcel. Perhaps the Donelan’s parking could be used, but then one would have to come up Brook Street, which Bettina thinks is slated to have sidewalks.

– Nashoba Brook

There is some concern re the Davis Road parking lot about vehicles that are driving up into the adjoining small meadow for “not so clean” purposes. Is there something we can do that would at least discourage cars from driving there? Bob Walton suggests that we plant a 4x4 removable post in the middle of the roadway with a sign on it. However, anyone could remove, and discard, a removable post. A removable post would allow for the possibility of an ambulance driving into the meadow. However, the ambulance wouldn’t be able to get much farther. A post would be cheaper than, say, a metal bar gate (~\$8K) like those at NARA. Another option is two posts and a chain. Bettina will talk with Shawn O’Malley about this. The post would also need a sign.

– Scout projects

We’ve been deluged with Eagle Scout candidates. Abhay Mahajan is building a kiosk at the new parking lot on Arlington Street for the expanded Bulette parcel. Max MacQuilken is interested in the removal of invasives. He should talk with John about that. Matthew Martineau wants to build a boardwalk at Guggins, so Jon and Josh Haines are working with him on that. Lina Lawande wants to build a kiosk at the Genevieve Lane entrance to the expanded Bulette. William Atherton wants to bridge some of the waterflows on Grassy Pond trails. Send any thoughts on these projects to Bettina.

Updates

– Bridges/boardwalks/beavers

“Beavers” is listed because, fyi, Grassy Pond Brook is flooding in the vicinity of St. Elizabeth’s Church on Arlington Street and the Board of Health (BoH) has approved beaver removal there. Ditto the BoH action for Dustin Lane where a septic system is in jeopardy due to beavers.

Bettina notes that she and Mike Gendron have yet to pick up the wood at the end of Milldam Rd left over as waste from Tom’s repair of the lower Nashoba Brook bridge. They will do so soon.

– Community Preservation Act

On January 12 the Camp Acton and the Jenks culvert projects were presented to the Community Preservation Committee. Historic projects will be presented on January 24. The Open Space set-aside request for \$600K and Mike Gendron’s Town-owned-CR proposals for lesser-known Acton parcels (specifically, Buxton, Haartz, WR Grace, 90 Martin, Audubon Hill, Quail Ridge, Canoe Launch) will be presented on February 14. Mike’s proposal also includes the purchase of a brush mower to help with meadow mowing. (There was discussion later in the meeting as to whether this should be a brush mower or a flail mower — something that should be looked into.)

– Maps

Moving slowly on these.

– Mowing

Contract mowing of the big field at Nagog Hill was done “pretty well” although there’s still a lot of work to do around the edges. One of the two small meadows was mowed as was an abutting private meadow. If the other small meadow on conservation land gets mowed, it will be by Dale, given a right time and conditions. Some cleanup was done at the south end of the Arboretum, and there is still more to do there.

– Chain sawing

We need more trained sawyers. Bettina is working on personal protective equipment (PPE) for sawyers who don’t have it. Dale will continue looking for a tree that could be worked on collectively as an exercise. Under discussion are strategies for taking down a big tree at Guggins Brook without damaging a nearby boardwalk.

The LSC should look for more chain saw training opportunities. The LSC could host it, as the LSC has done before. There should be a rudimentary class, also a class on storm cleanup.

– Website

Nothing

– LSC membership

Steve notified the Volunteer Coordinating Committee (VCC) of his interest in the LSC about a month ago. He’s heard nothing yet. The VCC hasn’t processed Ken Appel’s or Adam Nolde’s applications yet.

Next month’s (02/21/23) agenda

Probably Morrison Farm.

Evaluate meeting

It was good! Longer than usual, but discussion was complicated, important, and necessary.

Adjournment

At 8:35 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, February 21, at 7 p.m.