

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, April 16, 2024, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

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

Associate (nonvoting) members: Stuart Amir-Lin, Ken Appel, Josh Haines, **Rebecca Harvey**, Everett Kenerson, Mel Lima, Bob Mackin, Adam Nolde, **David Pinsky**, Jim Salem, Bill Smith, Jason Temple, Steve Trimble, Todd Tsakiris, **Bob Walton**

Others: **Ian Bergemann** (Acton Land Stewardship Coordinator), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Alissa Nichol** (Select Board LSC liaison)

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

Review and acceptance of February 20 and March 19 Minutes

February minutes were accepted as presented; March minutes not yet available.

Concerns from the public

This Thursday the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail are meeting at Pedal Power at 7 pm. The meeting is about invasives along the rail trail. Anyone can attend (i.e. one doesn't have to be a member of the BFRT Friends).

Invasive plants, April 2024, Garlic Mustard

Find the "Invasive Species Wiki" under "Resources" on the Acton Trails website. Its url:

http://ec2-44-218-8-154.compute-1.amazonaws.com/aiw/index.php?title=Main_Page

At that site — the "Main Page" — click on "Invasive Plants". Then click on "Garlic Mustard" for the visual. John used re garlic mustard.

Actonians have been attacking garlic mustard for at least a decade. The nice thing about garlic mustard is that you can actually make a difference, unlike some invasives where it seems like you're beating your head against the wall. It takes two years for garlic mustard to seed. If most second-year plants are pulled before they seed, garlic mustard does tend to die down rather quickly. On the other hand, plants that have been growing longer than 2 years tend to have a very large root system. If you pull on the plant and get only part of the roots, the plant can sprout back the next year, appearing as a second-year plant that can start seeding that year. If you are successful in digging out most of the roots, then dealing with the plant gets much easier. First-year plants produce small rosettes but never a stem, nor seeds. Second-year plants will pop up a bunch of rosettes early in the spring. In a couple of weeks, stems will sprout and you get a very different type of leaf and beautiful white flowers that make garlic mustard easy to spot.

Caution: When you pick garlic mustard, don't discard it in place or compost it as might be done with most other invasive plants. It tends to stay alive and even go to seed. Bag it and close the bag. Leave the bag where the Town can pick it up (although John is not clear on what the Town does with the bagged plants).

David observed that the Boston Globe had an article that presented garlic mustard and Japanese knotweed as being edible, e.g., in salads.

John noted that Jim Snyder-Grant has made a list of garlic mustard sites in Acton and John will try to find a way to share the list or information from it with anyone interested.

Alissa noted that during the Green Acton Clean-Up Week, April 22-28, participants can include garlic mustard in their official orange bags that can be left at the Transfer Station or 9 other locations.

Ian's Trails Tales, April 2024: Arboretum

The Acton Arboretum is a bit different from other conservation lands. It's really a hybrid conservation land, more a place for education with its extensive and informative kiosk, its panels describing certain features such as the rain garden, and its numerous benches throughout.

The Arboretum maps need updating to include Dawn's Pond.

First impressions:

First Impressions

- Signs from Route 2!
- Carved wooden signs and paved parking with ADA spots!
- 3 Kiosks – Main on Taylor, 1 on Wood Ln, 1 on Minot Ave
 - Multiple trails – Yellow Loop is 1.2 miles
- Unique gardens and species! Plus interpretive signs!
- Picnic area, benches, wildflower trail, and boardwalk!



Town Hall, Room 12...

Trails:

The 6-panel kiosk at the Taylor Road entrance is particularly amazing, providing much more information to visitors than can be provided on the standard kiosks used in our other parcels.

Trails

- Trails consist of upper and lower grounds with Orchard trail, Wildflower trail, and Bi yellow loops and multiple access points
- Comprehensive trail system with options for accessibility – 1 ADA trail
 - Offers parking however often parking is full!
 - 8+ gardens! Dawn's Pond! 4 meadows!



Town Hall, Room 12...

There is some trail work that needs to be done. Stone dust works well in level places, but rain threatens stone dust trails where they are not level.

Wildlife:

The Arboretum plants can give you a good idea of what you could do if you want to landscape your own property.

Wildlife

- Covers multiple habitats and catered gardens!
- Amphibians spotted in ponds and bogs!
- Lower grounds support birds and nesting
- Diverse plant species ranging from native to non-native



Town Hall, Room 12...

Future Recommendations:

Future Recommendations

Current Conditions

- 2 parking areas (Taylor Rd & Wood Ln)
- 3 kiosks
- Over 1.2 miles of trails!
- ADA accessible path
- Interpretive panels
- Picnic tables and benches!
- Upper and lower grounds!

Future Conditions

- Improve and extend ADA trail system to create loop
 - Extend or create more parking
- Fundraise/apply for grants to support trail and garden projects
- Create story walks with themes like Poetry Walks or highlighting famous activists
- Formal field trip/guided walk reservation system

Conclusion

The Acton Arboretum is a defining icon of Acton and its people's dedication to preserving and cultivating wildlife habitat. The Arboretum provides visitors a relaxed woodland experience with the opportunity to observe all types of wildlife and learn their names. In addition, it has become a culturally diverse experience by including cultural groups in creating spaces that celebrate wildlife native to different regions. The Arboretum has also made strides in becoming more accessible which has enabled even more diversity among its visitors and thus exposing everyone to a space of learning and appreciation of nature. Increasing all of these trends that the Arboretum and its supporters have started could result in more accessible trails, support for new gardens to be developed, and opportunities to engage visitors in environmental education.



Town Hall, Room 12...

Per Ian: There are several grants for which he could apply this year — if so directed. Possible targets would be improving or repairing the ADA trail, getting more native plants, getting more pollinators, and trying to replace some of the invasives.

As a follow-up, David, who grew up in Acton and spent a lot of time on the Arboretum land, is willing to visit with anyone who would like to know more about the Arboretum land before it became the Arboretum.

Ian's Updates

Zoo New England continued part 2 of its wood turtle project, which was to plant some native species behind Veterans Field as well as transplant some native species a little way upstream at Nashoba Brook. Two people signed up to volunteer their help.

Ian has posted a “sign-up” for volunteers to participate in a once-a-week workday at Nagog Hill for the months of May and June. This is a pilot project for what Ian would like to be weekly one-day work sessions for two months at specified conservation parcels. Work at Nagog Hill will start with unearthing the stone wall that's next to Nagog Hill road, bordering the meadow and the trail.

Ian talked with Jim Snyder-Grant about garlic mustard. One idea was to create a one-day-per-week volunteering effort to deal with invasives. People could sign up for locations of interest, and one site to work would be specified each week.

Re the query to the LSC by Brewster Conant Jr on who did some work on the portion of the Isaac Davis Trail on his land: It wasn't anyone from the LSC. It possibly was a scout group, and Brewster was thankful for the work done.

Geocaching on Conservation Land

Ian shared a document, “Guidance on Geocache, Cache, and Marker Placement on Acton Conservation Lands”, that he had prepared, trying to keep in mind the ideas about geocaching shared at a previous LSC meeting. It's possible that some Committee members are seeing this for the first time. In any case, get comments on it to Ian and perhaps at the next LSC meeting there could be a vote on some sort of formal guidance. (“Cache” and “Marker” are included in the document as Rebecca has found a series of solar-powered lamps in the woods. In what follows, “geocache” will mean all three of these.)

Essentially, the document gives a parcel's steward, working with Conservation staff, the authority to decide about a geocache on their parcel. It gives broad oversight to both the stewards and Conservation staff. It seems like this would minimize issues that would come to LSC meetings.

Per the document: Someone wanting to place a geocache would have to

- Name the parcel,
- Give the exact location desired, latitude and longitude,
- Identify any container or type of container,
- And give their name and contact information

The next step would be a response from the steward and/or Conservation. The response could

- Request more information,
- Approve the placement,
- Or deny it, possibly suggesting alternative locations.

The document suggests some rules and regulations:

- All unapproved geocaches will be removed. Unapproved geocaches will be held at Town Hall.
- Placement of a geocache is up to the discretion of the parcel's steward and/or Conservation staff.
- Placement of a geocache before approval is grounds for its removal.

The document includes a brief FAQ section, e.g.:

- Do I need approval for each marker? Yes.
- If I placed it before the Guidance existed, do I need to apply for approval? Yes, or risk having it removed.
- What type of container? Contact Conservation.
- Can the geocache be approved, but later removed? Yes, and the owner will be contacted. (Examples: The geocache has been destroyed and is essentially trash; or the area floods and needs to be cleaned up.)

Discussion points:

- Is this basically the rules that you shared with us in a draft at the last meeting? No, those were Acton Conservation Land rules.

So, guidance in the document suggested at the last meeting is gone, and now approval is sort of at the discretion of the steward? Yes, but we could retain that guidance as “internal guidance” for stewards and Conservation staff. Such internal guidance would allow for some consistency in stewards’ decisions, i.e., stewards aren’t too different in their allowances. On the other hand, if such guidance were published, then it would set expectations for the public, possibly making it easier to defend negative decisions.

- Somehow, we should make sure that geocaches don’t collect a lot of debris. Some people tend to leave things like trolls and trinkets and it appears that there’s just junk around a tree. That is abhorrent on any conservation land.
- A little more guidance is necessary. And guidance should include a limit to how far a geocache can be placed off trail. Trails are located to avoid sensitive wetlands. If a geocache is placed in a sensitive wetland area, someone would have had to tramp in to place it. Someone would have to tramp in to check that latitude/longitude location. And if placement is denied, someone would have to tramp in to retrieve the geocache.
- Guidance is okay as long as it’s guidance and not absolute rules.
- Asking for latitude and longitude is putting a lot of responsibility on a citizen, many of whom would have no idea how to provide same.
- The people who set geocaches know all about using the GPS. They have an app for geocaching from which they can get the latitude/longitude coordinates.
- If they are going to put a geocache site into geocach.com, they’ve got to have coordinates.
- There should be a spreadsheet with one line for each actual and proposed geocache location. The spreadsheet should have a link to our mapping system so that someone can easily go to the proposed geocache site. So, the guidelines should include instructions on this. (Basically, to identify the geocache site, one would look at the online map, go to the proposed site, set the arrow on the map, save, and bookmark it, and then send the LSC the url.)

Ian will process what he’s heard, maybe get something out in a couple weeks for some final comments and may have a final draft by the next LSC meeting.

Other parcel issues.

- Camp Acton memorial bench: Nothing on the proposed memorial bench, but Bruce was able to cut up a tree that destroyed an existing bench. To replace the bench, Bruce suggests that Ian find a scout who would be willing to make a replacement bench. Right now, Ian has two picnic tables for Camp Acton, one that’s ADA compliant. One is ready now and the other is being made by a scout.
- Disc golf: Nothing new

- Jenks culvert: Still waiting to hear on the applied-for grant. Also, Ian is working with Engineering and the DPW to have the Jenks parking lot redone as it is “a bit washed out”. We are going to experiment and try to make a “fake” or “artificial” ditch so that water can take a different route downhill.
- Anderson Conservation Land steward: Nothing new, but Ian pointed out that the LSC has a full set of Associate members and one spot for a Full (voting) member. Bob is willing to become a Full member, something he could do when his Associate term ends.
- Arboretum Volunteer Workdays: Nothing
- Great Hill: There's a small culvert that leads out of the pond. Both sides are now washed out. To fix this, John is trying to get a few cubic feet of gravel from the Town and wonders if this is possible. Suggestion: Get it from the DPW lot behind NARA.
- Camp Acton (continued): There's a tree that's leaning over the parking area. A scoutmaster told Bruce that on the weekend the tree moved quite a bit in the wind and was creaking very, very loudly. The scoutmaster was afraid that it would tip onto the cars. Bruce thinks it prudent that it be taken down and he is willing to do so, with permission. Ian suggests that it could be good learning lesson for all the sawyers to be there.

ABRHS Senior Community Service Day April 26

Bettina, Tom Wolf, and Jon Campbell signed up for it.

Town things: OSRP, 549 Main St CR, Morrison Farm CR, Wetherbee Woods

The Town started interviewing today for Mike Gendron's position (Conservation Agent). Besides that, nothing too new. There is a scout interested in building a lean-to at Camp Acton. Another wants to build a fishing pier, “Grassy Pond style”, at Heath Hen Meadow. A third scout project is replacement of the utility pole bridge at Pratts Brook. The latter two first require Conservation Commission approval. The Town of Littleton is willing to provide a utility pole for the Pratts Brook project. To date, no scout has been interested in doing the boardwalk at Spring Hill.

Blazes, Bridges, Board/Bogwalks, Maps, Mowing, Shed, Website

The Town of Stow had requested information on the new bridge at Heath Hen Meadow re Stow's work on the Dunn Conservation Land that spans the Acton-Stow town line. Bettina will meet with a Stow representative on this as soon as he gets over an illness.

Other business

Rebecca has two concerns: How to receive her acton-ma.gov email and the rules for being a Full (voting) LSC member and the rules for an Associate member. Per Aaron and Bettina, a Full member gets to vote, and they're theoretically required to attend the meetings. An Associate member can be “bumped up” to voting status if needed to complete a quorum. Full members are approved for three-year terms. First-time Associates are approved for a one-year term, but for three-year terms after the first year. Rebecca has missed one meeting this year and believes she could become a Full member.

On the Acton Trails website, under Resources, one can find links to “Land Stewardship Guidelines”, “Guide for Stewards”, and “Land Stewardship Committee on the Town of Acton Website”. The latter links to a 2015 “Mission Statement” (preceding the length-of-term adjustment mentioned above). See <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-51434/>

Evaluate meeting

Multiple thumbs up!

Next month's (05/21/24) agenda

March minutes.

Adjournment

At 7:50 pm.

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