

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting Minutes
March 21, 2012, 4:00 PM
Acton Town Hall

Regular (voting) members present: Joan Cirillo, Philip Keyes, Peggy Liversidge (minute-taker), Nan Towle Millett, Ann Shubert, Jim Snyder-Grant (chair), Laurie Ullmann

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Bob Guba, Bruce Rachman

Nonmembers present: Tom Tidman (Director of Natural Resources and LSCom's Town staff liaison), Janet Adachi (LSCom's Board of Selectmen liaison)

February meeting minutes: The February meeting minutes were approved.

Senior Service Day: For this year's ABRHS Senior Service Day, scheduled for Friday, April 27, Jim currently expects crews to be scheduled with Linda McElroy at Wheeler Lane (with Laurie's help), with Bettina Abe at the Arboretum, and with Charlie Carlson at the Pratt's Brook barrens. Jim also expects to lead a crew, either putting down woodchips at Guggins or pulling garlic mustard. Leaders of crews need to be sure to fill out a form. (Nan mentioned a non-LSCom activity that she will be involved with on that day that is of potential interest to committee members: a water garden at the high school, which is trying to achieve a type of conservation certification for schools known as Green Flag certification.)

CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) forms: Jim gave a reminder that everyone on Town committees who has direct involvement with young people must fill out a CORI form. These are available from the Town's Human Resources Department, or Jim can provide copies.

Jenks parking lot upgrade: Jim brought two drawings, by Tom Tidman and Corey York (of the Town's Engineering Department), showing a possible layout for an expanded parking area at Jenks. This was done following a survey by the Engineering Department to establish the exact boundaries of the narrow Jenks entrance strip. The new parking lot has a 50-foot frontage along Central Street, and as presently drawn it provides space for four cars plus an area extending about a car's length beyond the parking spots for backing up so that cars do not exit by backing onto the street. Other features include paving the entrance for several feet in from the street and using gravel beyond that; moving the kiosk to alongside the parking area (though Joan suggested that the current location, along the left [southern] side, would offer better wheelchair access if cars were in the parking spots); moving the vehicle gate; and placing a wooden guard rail where drivers pull into the parking spaces, along the northern boundary, as well as boulders along non-parking areas of the boundary. These barriers are intended both to define the boundary and to keep people from pulling through the parking spots and exiting through the driveway on the abutting property to the north (as has been done).

Josh Haines, the Jenks steward and owner of this abutting property, agrees that this upgrade would be an improvement. Tom and Corey will inform the homeowner on the other side of the plans and see if they can address any concerns expressed.

It was noted that the Engineering Department now has two employees who are able to do surveying, so this may allow us to move forward a bit more quickly on other needed parking lot upgrades. This design might also serve as a model for future upgrades, such as the Grassy Pond parking area on Newtown Road. Joan suggested that a better-defined parking area for Wetherbee be considered.

Proposed Town Forest land transfer: Jim outlined Warrant Article 33 on this spring's Town Meeting agenda that proposes to exchange two small parcels of land along the eastern edge of the Town Forest, along Quarry Road and NARA Park: approximately 2.3 acres of current Town Forest land in the northeastern corner would be redesignated as general municipal property in exchange for approximately 2.4 acres of current general municipal property in the southeastern corner that would be redesignated as Town Forest land. The transfer would provide space for future parking for NARA and possibly for the Miracle League baseball field that is proposed to be built for special-needs children north of the existing NARA facilities (covered in Warrant Article 34); also, because the more southerly access trail from Quarry Road and a bit of the yellow trail are currently on the municipal property that we would receive, the transfer would result in the entire trail system being on Town Forest land. If this warrant article passes, the transfer goes to the state legislature for their approval.

Benches: Based on feedback received about LSCom's proposed bench policy, Joan had a few questions for Tom T. and Bob about bench installations. (1) Did they feel installation would necessitate the use of concrete or cement? Tom's initial thought was that a concrete slab or footing would be needed (but only for nongranite benches) to anchor each bench; but then he agreed with Bob that it probably would suffice to take a chain and attach one end to the bench and the other to a concrete block that is buried underground. (2) Joan noted that the proposed bench policy contemplates that benches will be installed either by Town staff or LSCom members. Did Tom feel that only his crew should install the benches? Tom answered that he had assumed that would be the case but that it is not essential. Joan said this was important, that both LSCom and Town staff could handle installations; she wanted to be sensitive to concerns Tom might have that his crew might "push back" if there were a lot of benches to install. Tom said he didn't think there would be a problem in any event; he doubted there would be more than a few benches a year.

Letter to volunteers: There was a brief discussion of a draft letter that Jim plans to send to the trail volunteers list giving suggestions as to how they can help on an ongoing basis as they walk the trails throughout the season as well alerting them to possible larger projects they might participate in (e.g., invasives removal, Spring Hill boardwalk). Suggestions included putting much of the text into bullet format, asking them to send us suggestions and comments, and mentioning the volunteer picnic.

Guidebook update: Peggy reported that she began working on guidebook revisions over the winter and is almost ready to send them out to stewards for their review. She noted that the versions currently on the website are old descriptions, which are quite variable in form and content; the current guidebook versions should have been put on the website but for some reason never were. The revisions she has made are based the guidebook versions and include trail and acreage updates, miscellaneous changes such as the TTT, and in some cases moving sentences or changing wording in small ways, but the revised versions are still quite similar to the current guidebook entries. She, Bob, and Jim met recently to go over some related map changes that are needed and Bob has begun working on them.

After stewards have had a chance to review their parcels' descriptions, Peggy wondered if another person should read through all the descriptions before they are put on the website. It was suggested that Linda McElroy might be willing to do this; Peggy will check with her about this. After this has been done, a decision can be made as to whether we will do a new print edition as well.

Signage update: Peggy read an email update from Bettina Abe about signage. Bettina has recently replaced the parcel name signs at the Canoe Launch, Wetherbee, and the Arboretum, and she plans to sand and repaint the Heath Hen and Jenks signs. Peggy has also asked her to put on her list the Great Hill sign behind the fire station and the Stoneymeade sign at the Concord border. Bettina has requested that stewards let her know of any additional signs that need replacement or repair/repainting.

Another signage question Peggy has noted and brought to Bettina's attention is the fact that on the connecting trails between Nashoba Brook and Spring Hill, the trail nearest Davis Lane has back-to-back signs at the property boundary with the name of parcel being entered, but corresponding signs are lacking on the trail nearest Wheeler Lane. Both trails between Camp Acton and Spring Hill also have these boundary signs. Peggy suggested that the one connector trail without such signage should have it. Bettina checked with Philip to get his opinion and found that he didn't think this was necessary because of the proximity of one of the new "You Are Here" signs, but Peggy wanted to get the group's input. The general opinion was that, although new signs on this trail shouldn't be a high priority, they should be on the list of signs to add at some point.

Bruce and Bob also had suggestions. Bruce mentioned that the sign at Camp Acton, located beside the outer gate, is too far in from Pope Road to be readily seen, and people sometimes have difficulty finding the entrance; he would like to see the sign relocated along the road. Bob stated that the sign for Grassy Pond on Nagog Hill Road is peeling because it was painted without having primer applied; he stressed that all signs should be treated with primer before being painted. He also stated that wording should be laid out on the boards with sufficient room on the ends to allow for proper mounting.

BCT update: Laurie reported that he went to a Bay Circuit Alliance meeting last week. They approved a new charter, a more formal organizational structure, and a new Board of Directors, which includes representatives from the AMC and TTOR. Future funding might be available from the BCA for trail improvements along sections of our trails used by the BCT.

Parcel issues: *Grassy Pond:* Ann stated that there is another Scout looking for a project, and he could perhaps add more boardwalk segments along the rocky part of the loop trail between the Willis Holden Drive access trail and the pond. *Town Forest:* Bob stated that Theresa Portante has reported finding an increasing amount of trash around the Capt. Handley Road parking lot and that it seems to be becoming a teenage hangout. Bob suggested that removing some trees and shrubs that are reducing visibility into the parking lot might discourage kids from gathering here. It was agreed that Tom would be asked if he could arrange to have this clearing done. *Wetherbee:* Joan requested help with cutting some branches overhanging the access path along the field. Bruce stated that this could be done with a pole saw, and both he and Bob indicated they could do this at some point. Bob also indicated that he plans to cut down buckthorn and autumn olive in the meadow.

Parcel walks with stewards: Some of the stewards had not had a chance to review Jim's suggested checklist for his parcel walks, so discussion of this item was limited and will be continued at the April meeting. Joan noted the length and detail of the checklist and wondered if Jim was taking on too much and might become overwhelmed by this project. She also thought it seemed a bit like micromanagement, since stewards are already expected to do many of these items as a matter of course. Nan indicated that she has found past walks with Jim to be very useful and that she has learned a lot from him during them.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 11, at 4:00 P.M. Note that this is the second Wednesday, not the usual third.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30.