

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, April 22, 2014, Town Hall, Room 121, 7 P.M.

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe, Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Jim Snyder-Grant (Chair), Laurie Ullmann

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Josh Haines, Elan Riesman, Joe Will (Minutes)

Nonmembers:

Joe Holmes (Acton resident)

Jim called the meeting to order at 7:04 P.M.

Given that there was not a quorum of regular members, Jim noted that, per the Town of Acton Committee Handbook, the associate members present are to be counted toward the quorum and are entitled to vote at this meeting.

Review and approval of March 26 minutes

Minutes moved and voted unanimously.

Princess Pine Path (Nashoba Brook)

- This is a proposed trail in the Nashoba Brook Conservation Land, part of the Trail Through Time (TTT) managed by Linda McElroy. Linda has given certain TTT trails names so that she is able to talk of them. Princess pine is a small ground plant found in the vicinity of the Princess Pine Path. Heading north on the yellow trail on the east side of Nashoba Brook, you loop off to the left. The trail goes through stone mounds and comes back to rejoin the yellow loop. The trail passes through a really nice area from which to see the wetlands. Chances are that the combination of stone piles and water view is not a coincidence.
- The trails among the stone mounds will be marked with the same TTT sign used elsewhere for Indian rock piles, a set of three bright green dots suggesting a rock pile.
- Our policy is that at least three stewards walk a new trail and others be invited. So far, four stewards have walked this trail and have approved it.
- Jim moved, Bettina seconded that we approve this trail. Voted unanimously in favor.
- Laurie noted that even though trails are approved, trails can be changed. Right now there are two TTT trails and a third is planned. Linda has a work crew coming in shortly to do an initial clearing and cutting of the third trail. Another crew will come in to work on clearing debris.
- The Princess Pine Trail will need a hillside “bench cut” so that water can flow off the trail and people can walk “vertically.” Linda’s crew probably can’t do the bench cutting. Last bench cutting was part of the Eagle Scout project that made the new switchback blue trail on the east side of Great Hill. Per Jim: We’ll organize this a little bit later and Jim will call on volunteers.

Appointments, reappointments, and meeting times

Part 1: What Jim has determined so far:

- At the end of June, there is time for the Board of Selectmen to appoint and re-appoint members and adjust between associate and regular members.

- We have a number of volunteers interested in joining.
- We will have room in the committee. Right now, we could have two more associates.
- We may shortly have another parcel to take care of, Wright Hill.

Part 2: Meetings

- It's been a challenge to get quorums of regular members at evening meetings. Jim thinks evening meetings are good in order to get young, vigorous people (who work during the day). Evening meetings also make it easier for the public to participate. However, we may need to go back to some daytime meetings to get better participation by regular members.
- Going back and forth (evening and daytime) could be disruptive.
- Right now, Philip and Nan can't make evening meetings. Bruce can only make Tuesday night meetings (but he's on vacation tonight). Tom Arnold has a problem with one of the two nights.
- We may want to swap regulars and associates to get better regular attendance at night meetings.
- Is it fair to have a vote about evening meetings at an evening meeting (with associates voting)? We set up this arrangement at an afternoon meeting.
- Jim has started asking associates if they could come as regular members. Also has talked to some regular members.
- Bob recalled that when it formed, the LSC would meet on Tuesday evenings and availability on Tuesday evenings was a requirement for LSC membership. He observed that you have to have consistent meeting times for dedicated members.

Josh: Evenings would be better for me, but pack leader decision must come first. He definitely will give it consideration. It's really business travel that gets in the way.

Jim: We did a doodle poll and it was split between Tuesday and Wednesday.

Laurie: Is Thursday an option?

Josh: The earlier in the week the better. Mondays and Tuesdays are always better.

Jim: We hadn't considered Mondays and can't remember why. We need one more round of contacting people and getting dates, so he will try to come back next month with a more coherent proposal.

Josh: Maybe a 6 P.M. start time would be better.

Cemetery trails

Jim talked with Brewster Conant, Chair of the Cemetery Commission (CC) about the CC-LSC agreement for using the wooded portion of Mt. Hope Cemetery as a temporary extension of the Heath Hen Meadow trails. Jim drafted a new agreement and it went to the CC. Jim's draft proposed the agreement be for two years with automatic renewal. The CC suggested that the agreement be for five years with no automatic renewal.

Jim shared with the LSC a copy of his draft and of the former agreement. Jim went over the differences between the old and new versions. These included allowing Mt. Hope Cemetery to be an entrance to the trail system, use of signage, trail maintenance by the LSC, and the term of the agreement.

Discussion:

- There should be a sign about how to act when a burial service is occurring.
- We can work out signage with the CC.
- It's annoying that a lot of people don't pick up after their dogs in the woods.
- There is a trail entrance from Central Street.
- That trail is on private property, not cemetery land.
- If development would ever go forward on that property, part of a plan is that the Central Street pedestrian access will continue. However, if development is not approved, current owner could close down that trail.
- That's a strong statement (in the agreement) about people attending funerals.

- We might as well set the bar high.
- How does the Conservation Commission (one of the proposed signees) get involved? Jim is not sure. The Conservation Commission was party to the previous agreement and Jim didn't want to "rock that boat." Jim is fine with removing the Conservation Commission from the agreement if necessary.
- If this ends up being the agreement, are we comfortable with it?
- It was moved and seconded that the agreement (with the CC adjustment) is agreeable. Voted all in favor except Joe (a member of the CC) who recused himself.
- Should Joe have recused himself at the CC meeting? We moved on.

Sculptures in the woods (Guggins and elsewhere)

What's been found: At Guggins Brook, someone (Jim says a neighbor of his) placed unfired clay sculptures on stumps left from the Hurricane Sandy blowdowns. The sculptures fell apart fairly quickly and after about a week, Jim asked to have them removed.

Discussion:

- Guggins Brook (the arrangement of stumps) was our making.
- The general rule for Conservation Land is that all of it should be natural.
- Would statuary be considered a structure? Could be.
- Property left in Conservation Land for 48 hours becomes Town property.
- There's also a litter rule.
- There are rules in Acton's "Guide to Conservation Lands."
- One complaint about the guidebook is that the guidebook committee edited and added some rules without the Conservation Commission's permission.
- The Conservation Commission approved an early set of rules. There's a version in the Guide and one on the Website. These need to be reconciled.
- Jim: At some point we'll go back to the Conservation Commission with our version of the rules.
- The Conservation Commission has the right to make rules about Conservation Land that don't have to be part of Town bylaws.
- Do Town rules apply to Conservation Land? Yes, e.g., the dog ordinance.
- There was an outdoor art exhibit at the Arboretum in the 90s and some engraved stones were left there with permission.
- Last year the Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council asked about art at the Arboretum and there were lots of problems with that, e.g., vandalism. Bettina suggested NARA. The result is a new sculpture at NARA in a place where it can be seen but not easily touched by the public.
- What about geocaches? The individual geocaches are watched over by people we know. We track where geocaches are and we contact the sponsor if there's anything inappropriate. Bettina and some groups other than the LSC are set up to monitor these. Jim and Bettina are automatically notified every time someone goes to the geocaching website to say they found one. So far, there's never been a problem. There are agreements in the geocaching community about placements and securities. We run past Tom Tidman anything we hear about. Tom is qualified to approve. He's the "enforcing officer" according to Town bylaws.
- There are people who have set fires. About three years ago, some kids nearly burned down Pratt's Brook woods.

Action: Jim will review and bring back for consideration a standardization of rules and regulations.

Bench locations in Pratt's, and bench application

Bench locations:

- We did review the policy about benches and we need to agree on the maximum number of benches

that belong in a Conservation Area.

- Jim would like to go ahead with locating benches in Pratt's Brook.
- We have benches at the Senior Park, or do we? Bob: There are 2 in the Senior Park as the result of an Eagle Scout project. These were along with a garden that has since been eliminated. The two benches are still there.
- Bettina showed the LSC on a map where she would like to place Luna's Bench by the Stone Ford.
- Should it be concrete? Usually Shawn's crew would schlep in the concrete. They could use brook water.
- How about wood? Jim reviewed issues with wood, e.g., it decays, it could be vandalized. Losing a bench could be okay as it then could be reconsidered. We have the right to remove a bench if we decide not to maintain it.
- Could original donor replace a bench? They could be contacted. If a bench disappears and someone misses it, the town could replace it.
- Other places for a bench at Pratt's Brook:
 - the blueberry barrens
 - somewhere on the heights of land east of the Valley Road entrance.
 - perhaps near Tenney Brook close to the pond that lies outside the Conservation Land. A bench "near" the Parker Street entrance may be an "accessible" feature.
 - Along the blue trail overlooking the little pond below the railroad tracks.

In all, Jim marked 5 places on the map, so $5 + 2 = 7$ benches are what we are considering. Not counting those at the Senior Park and one near Tenney Brook, we would have 4 (Stone Ford, blueberry barrens, the height of land, and overlooking the little pond below the tracks), which seem a nice number. As for one near the Parker Street entrance, the Stone Ford bench would serve.

- Jim moved, it was seconded that we allow up to 4 benches in the wooded part of Pratt's Brook and continue with up to two benches in the Senior Park. Voted unanimously.
- Follow-up question: Do we have any reasons for "Why a bench here?" The discussion suggested some:
 - at a pond or an overlooking hill to view wildlife
 - watching water flow
 - a unique place like the barrens
 - places for bird watching Bettina's bench application:
- Bettina will pay for Luna's Bench at the Stone Ford. She is open for contributions. (Luna was Bettina's 9.5-year-old black Lab who died a couple months ago. Luna hiked all of Acton's trails and was an occasional visitor at LSC meetings.)
- There is a granite memorial bench at the Caouette-Simeone land. It has a name engraved on it. It has a nice view of the fields. To see the Mill Pond from it, you would have to clear away 5 ft of brush. Would granite look better at Pratt's Brook? Bettina likes the idea; it fits in with the stone at the Stone Ford.
- There is a standard stone bench available. Bettina knows the vendor. It's backless; 50-50-100 pounds (leg, leg, bench). "Luna" might be discretely engraved on the edge of the bench, or on a plaque. Bettina will talk with the vendor as to how it works.
- Bettina could check with Acton Monument Company in North Acton, but don't make the bench to look like a tombstone.

Acton: Bettina will look into this and come back with an appropriately amended application.

Reviewing the Tom Tidman/Town Natural Resources to-do list

Jim met with Tom today and reviewed the ongoing list. A few updates:

- Who has jurisdiction of Grassy Pond? Grassy Pond is a Great Pond, so the Commonwealth has jurisdiction. Tom is comfortable continuing to do things as we've been doing them. In general, however, we should be talking with the State.
- Jenks parking: We are waiting for some additional trees to be planted. Tom was hoping to get trees from a site on School Street. The owner says okay, so Tom can finish the landscaping. As for the kiosk, Town employee Tom Bailey knows where it is. Where it belongs is another interesting question. Tom and Jim are going out on May 1 to talk about where kiosk is to be. It can't be in the way of snowplowing. If possible, it should be visible from a car so person not mobile could see what's there.
 - If Josh would put stakes in where the kiosk should go, that could drive Jim and Tom's visit.
 - Frank Ramsbottom (Town Building Commissioner) suggested the placement be accessible to cars. Jim is not sure of what this means. Bettina says it means "where practicable." Bettina thinks that Frank would agree that access to the sign is not germane. People could print the map at home.
 - Should have the kiosk facing north, to avoid ultraviolet damage.
 - It would be good idea if the kiosk would get a fresh coat of paint while in shop. Bettina has a gallon of new paint.
 - As for the sign identifying the Jenks Land, it takes one car to block it. We need that sign brought up to the road. There are two stakes beside the road.
 - As for the cleared area at the back of the parking site, we should anticipate that it will be filled with invasives shortly. We can reduce that probability by sowing an appropriate seed mix there.
- Berry Lane (#2 and #4) encroachments: Per Bettina, former owners dismantled the boundary stone wall to (illegally) make their back yards larger. We are going to have the Engineering Department survey the boundary. Bettina will contact the homeowners. The homeowners don't want to pay for rebuilding the wall. Bettina will call the homeowners or go to their houses for permission to stand on their land. Homeowners would like to be there for the survey. String will be used to show the property line. Bettina will ask Engineering if something more substantial than string can be used. Bettina will try to get Scouts to rebuild the wall. Are Scouts good at this? Scouts can move stones, but can they build a wall? Homeowners will demand that the wall "look good." There is a good supply of rocks nearby.
- Grassy Pond parking off Newtown Road: Two steps next: Tom will go there with Corey to locate corners. Then Tom will check where wetlands are. After that, he will be able to draw up plans for the Conservation Commission.
 - Cars are appearing there more often now. Jim saw a tow truck there for a car down by the kiosk.

Coyotes and Coy-wolves

Not discussed at the meeting due to time limitations.

Robbins Mill trail relocations

Bob has suggested a couple of useful relocations. Jim shared maps of current trails. Jim would like to get together with Bob and Phil to flag the relocations for approval at our May meeting. First new trail is to avoid a shortcut at the trail "bulge." The shortcut is a "natural" cut through (as happened this winter). The other relocation involves the trail off to Carlisle where it crosses the gas line right of way. That crossing is very soggy and the task of placing a large, moveable bridge there is daunting. Bob's relocation plan changes the crossing from one that is difficult to one that is much more reasonable. The new crossing of soggy land would be on Conservation Land so any bridge wouldn't have to be moveable. Also the crossing of the gas line would be high and dry. We would retain the current trail to access the nice little pond. Jim and company will flag Bob's suggested trails, have others check it out, and come back to the LSC with a flagged proposal. Unfortunately this relocation probably cannot be done in time for a June trail party with Carlisle. We'll have a party in the fall.

Sidebar

Bob reports that for the Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT), all rails have been taken up from the Caouette land to the building crossing the trail (and beyond). Does anyone know the history of that building and why it was able to build on the rail right of way? There also is a house in Maynard on the right of way. Jim says that the state was not consistent in keeping ownership of the corridor. When it gets to the building, the ARRT will go out along 27 and then go back in. Jim says that we will have rail trails on future agenda. The Caouette land is interesting. Half the foundation of a roundhouse is there. There were two rail lines and then a third around the site of a factory. It was a tannery.

Website/Facebook updates, including Grassy Pond viewing deck plans

Not discussed at the meeting due to time limitations.

Parcel reports

- Guggins: There is a step-over blowdown that Jim can clear with a handsaw.
- Arboretum: On the Billings Trail someone has dumped a Christmas tree. Jim says we could move the tree back 15 ft to the abutter's leaf pile so it will be on their property.
- Mt. Hope: Joe described a 6-in.-diameter blowdown.

Evaluate this meeting

Elan: It was cool.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 P.M.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, May 28 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:

- *March Minutes draft and agenda reminder* April 21 by Joe Will
- *Last chance to review proposed new princess pine path* April 21 by Jim Snyder-Grant
- *Re: Routing of Princess Pine path* April 22 by Jim Snyder-Grant
- *Latest draft cemetery / LSC agreement* April 21 by Jim Snyder-Grant
- *art found at Guggins Brook* April 7 by Jim Snyder-Grant
- *roster* January 2 by Joe Will
- *Robbins Mill Trail March Update* March 26 by Bob Guba

In addition, these documents are stored in the Town's Docushare system:

- Bench Application from Bettina Abe for Pratt's Brook:

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-43442/Bench%20Donation%20-%20Abe.pdf>