

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 21, 2014, Town Hall, Room 126, 7 P.M.

Attendance

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

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

Jim called the meeting to order at 7:03 P.M. Bob Farra volunteered to be timekeeper for this meeting.

Review and approval of September 16 minutes

- Joe read an insert submitted by Laurie to acknowledge that the planned trail on the Valentine Conservation Restriction (CR) easement “will enable the Bay Circuit Alliance to complete one of the few gaps remaining in the BCT (Bay Circuit Trail).”
- Deleted the item that said, “Bruce says that we have one more project in Robbins Mill. Griffin Smith of Troop 1 will build a boardwalk or kiosk. He hasn’t started yet but Bettina is going to a lumber store with him on Thursday” as it was deemed confusing. Bettina’s clarification: Bruce is overseeing a project by Nicholas Kim. Bettina met Nicholas at a lumberyard a couple weeks ago. Bettina knows that Griffin Smith is doing something at NARA, but she is not sure what.
- Approval of minutes as amended was moved and voted unanimously.

Handicapped access to trails; related mapping project and upcoming conference

Jim had two related items about handicapped accessibility (HA) to trails.

First:

We were going to try to develop a map for the Arboretum that would have HA information. Jim didn’t do what he had wanted to do on a computer and wondered whether the Town hired someone.

Bettina: No. She and Fran Portante have been focused on the final draft of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). She is waiting for the State to approve Section G (HA Inventory) of the OSRP. Once the State approves it, she will post it everywhere she can, anywhere it’s relevant. Also, once there is State approval, the time would be appropriate to move on to maps. In the meantime, Bettina has laminated the HA inventory for the Arboretum and posted it in the Arboretum kiosk. Bettina is aiming to update the Arboretum Master Plan and tackle the mapping project as a couple of winter projects.

Jim: The reason this is relevant to us is that somehow we should document HA for various Conservation Lands. The Arboretum and NARA are farthest along with this. Jim would like to follow this good work. Getting all the HA information on a map seems daunting so, following Bettina’s method, using the inclusive Accessibility Inventory in Section G of the OSRP, seems a reasonable way to go. It could be like a DocuShare link. It would provide all that one needs to know for addressing disability issues. We could also show plans for potential upgrades for Conservation Lands. We have identified at least one upgrade for each parcel.

Second:

Jim shared information on an upcoming conference in Leominster that he plans to attend. It will have an accessibility focus. Jim mentioned the workshop that he would be attending. He invited others to

attend or to at least let him or Bettina know of other workshops that we'd like him to consider attending.

Scoutland trail

Jim described where Scoutland is and how it's in the way of completing a trail. Scoutland is owned by the Trustees of Scoutland. There currently are two trustees. One thinks the trail is a fine idea; the other disagrees. Trustee Bill Klauer is trying to recruit a third trustee. This week he will be calling someone who has been a Scoutmaster up to the end of the most recent Scouting year. Bill has asked that we be sure that we've flagged the proposed trail across Scoutland. Jim will try to get together with Phil Keyes to verify the flagging, or reflag if necessary. If this would be on a weekend, Bob F could join them. Jim asked if there is anyone else interested and able to join them. The trail distance is small and stays away from the old Scoutland campsites. Laurie said that maybe he could be the third trustee. Jim asked Laurie to call Bill and let us know how the call goes.

Valentine Conservation Restriction trail update

Bob G shared a map of the Valentine property in North Acton. On the map, the red trail is the existing planned CR trail. When it gets to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT), it goes up a steep bank. The yellow trail is an alternative that provides a gradual uphill to the BFRT instead of a steep bank.

Re the current planned CR trail: After the first (southern) part of the CR trail that's in Carlisle, the remaining part of the trail must stay in Acton to reach the BFRT. This would require a bridge and about 100 ft of bridge boardwalk to cross wetlands. After leaves are on the ground, Bob will try to get stakes more accurately placed and look for the narrowest spot to cross the wetlands. There may be need for even another boardwalk.

Re the alternative yellow trail: This would involve working with the Carlisle Conservation Foundation and the Valentines, not with the BFRT. It would eliminate both the need for a climb up to the BFRT and a bridge over a Butter Brook tributary.

In any case, the CR trail wouldn't be completed until the BFRT is built (current BFRT completion date is 2016; plans are available online). In the meantime, however, paperwork and surveying necessary for the CR trail can happen. Another challenge for designing the CR trail: The CR forbids bicycle access.

Progress on Natural Resources / LSC topics being tracked

Jim met with Tom Tidman today to go over their list of projects. What follows describes some of the progress made:

1. Berry Lane encroachment: 2 Berry Lane has rocks marking its boundary and the owner is clear on it. Bettina has vision of additional rocks there (trees would be an alternative) to fill a gap in the middle. She has used all the rocks in the vicinity of both 2 and 4 Berry Lane and is working with Shawn O'Malley on getting more rocks.
2. Grassy Pond parking on Newtown Road: Wetlands filing has been done and the Conservation Commission has approved. Waiting only on the Highway Dept. Tom is going to re-ask the Highway Dept. The parking area will have a slight slope downwards so there is no great transition from parking to the trail.
3. The gate at Camp Acton is at the upper spot and is usable. Bruce noted that it should have a lock and Bruce should have a key. Tom will ask Shawn to order more locks.
4. Viewing platform at Robbins Mill Pond. Tom, Bettina, and Steve Marsh, the developer, were there

at the same time to be clear about where platform is to be. Per Bettina, the developer is committed to doing this. The Conservation Commission has already approved the platform. (Note: Steve is responsible for the “mystery paving” in the parking lot along Carlisle Road.)

5. In Nagog Hill, Bob G detected that part of the field on the SW side is actually Town property. Jim Young, owner of the adjacent land, has been maintaining (mowing) the field. Jim S-G asked Tom to speak to Jim Young about this, and Jim Young is totally aware that he's been maintaining Town property. However, Tom has decided that the Town will take over this task. Tom also got permission to use Jim Young's driveway to get to the field. As for the field boundaries, the Town will “eyeball” them for its work.
6. The agricultural lease at Wetherbee is unblocked so we can start moving toward an agreement that the State will have to submit crop and insecticide and herbicide plans each year to the Conservation Commission. Tom will dig up old leases, and he and Jim will meet with the State as to what it wants to do with the lease. Then things will go to Town Counsel to clean this up. On a related note, Jim would like to get the right for the public to walk on the State land in front of the church just north of Route 2.

Jim will send out a link to this list of the Natural Resources/LSC topics being tracked.

More on new stewards

Joe Holmes has been interested in being one, but the conversation with Jim has been going slowly. The two have reviewed options and pros & cons of possible assignments. Bettina: Offer Joe (who helps Bettina at the Arboretum) the Canoe Launch.

Jim has been trying to reach another possible steward, Amanda Stearn. He did reach her voice mail recording and asked her to call back.

Other possible needs for stewards:|

- Canoe Launch: See note above.
- Either Guggins Brook or Wright Hill (Jim can't do both): Jim is doing a lot of work at Guggins, so (per Bob G) we need the “right” steward for his replacement. Wright Hill will be complex as there are no trails there yet. The Town needs easements on New View and Gregory Lane properties. The Town does not yet own Wright Hill. It's waiting for the fall Town Meeting. Cathy Fochtman has bought the house on Wright Hill and there are trail easement connections across her land. Town Counsel wants those easements accepted before it closes on the parcel.
- Grassy Pond: Ann Shubert might want someone to take over.
- Stoneymeade: Ditto for Nan Towle Millet.
- Combined North Acton parcels: An extra steward could help with “cross-parcel” issues.

Try out new 'parcel reports' format (for meeting)

Bob G: Practically all the parcels have been reported on. There was nothing for the Arboretum.

Bettina: We usually don't send one. If there is problem, one will be sent.

Bob: Nan gave him a verbal report on Stoneymeade. The woods are encroaching on the field. The Town is not mowing to the full extent, and now it can't go to the full extent because stuff has grown too big. Could the Town use a highway trimmer (an arm attached to a truck on the road) out there to do the work?

Per Bob: A “good report” will indicate that all map boxes are full. Currently, several need maps.

Laurie: I don't mention maps in the Nashoba Brook reports because its map boxes are always supplied.

Per Bob: A report should indicate kiosk notices that are in poor condition and new ones are needed. Jim has the notices on line. Bettina can print and laminate them. This has been done for notices that have been reported as faded.

Per Bob: A report should also note “Conservation Land” signs that are in poor condition. Some currently are in “tough” shape.

Bettina will get a sign to Bob Farra for Robbins Mill.

Other parcel issues:

- Bettina went to the Canoe Launch today. It needs someone with a chain saw to deal with the invasive (“smells like peanut butter”) “Tree of Heaven.” Laurie said to contact him and he can help with a saw. Bettina would like to be there with a certified applicator to apply herbicide as there are a gazillion babies overcrowding the understory.

At the Canoe Launch we also need to go after the woody growth along the guardrails. This would be easier to do when bugs and bees are not around.

A discussion on knotweed ensued.

- Arboretum: The CPA-funded parking lot and bog boardwalk went before the Conservation Commission and drew pushback from half a dozen abutters on Taylor Rod and Minot Avenue. Bettina went over the negative things raised by the abutters (traffic caused by new parking lot, paved sidewalk leading to bog boardwalk entrance), which are unrelated to the Conservation Commission’s concerns about the projects. The bog boardwalk and its entrance ramp are in a wetland buffer zone so the Commission needs more information from Corey York. Bettina invited LSC members to come to the meeting continuation on Wednesday, November 5, to speak out on this if they wish. (It turned out that the 11/5 meeting was postponed.)
- Spring Hill: Joe inquired about the parking for the Jay Lane entrance and why it doesn’t have better identification. The parking is private property, but there is an easement for public parking.

Laurie replaced 7 or 8 of the “Venetian blind” blazes on the Jay Lane trail. The Bay Circuit group reported to Laurie that someone had ripped off the blazes. The Bay Circuit is working on a blazing system to replace the current one, but any new blazes still will not be painted on.

- Guggins Brook: Jim reported that beside the stream along the access trail from Central Street to the yellow trail, the buckthorn is so thick that he would like to clear out a couple spaces (removing invasives and some other things) to make a better view possible. He wondered what the process is for this. Such clearing out can’t be something that stewards can do “willy-nilly.” If it’s not regular trail maintenance, it has to be approved. Therefore, Jim will be restoring “by removing some invasives” only.

A discussion on invasives ensued. Jim declared that we will reserve time for discussion on invasives, strategies, do’s and don’ts, etc., at a future meeting.

- Pratt’s Brook: Sherm wondered whether trimming (living) roots is permissible. He should talk to Tom. John says if you can slide your foot under it, it’s a hazard. Bob says that he cuts off anything “trippable” down to ground level. Sherm will start doing this.
- Heath Hen Meadow: Bob G reports that at the beaver deceiver, beavers do sense that there is water leaving via the pipes, and the beavers are stuffing mud near the inlets to try to stop the flow.

Evaluate this meeting

Bob G: Timing of meeting topics is a good idea. Perhaps we should buy an audible timer.

Sherm has an app on his phone that will give an alarm.

Jim thought Bob's parcel report format was helpful.

Bob wondered if there could be a template made for parcel reports. Others said, yes, try it.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27 P.M. (moved and voted unanimously).

The next meeting will be Tuesday, November 18, at 7 P.M., in Room 126.