

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 17, 2015, Town Hall, Room 126, 7 P.M.

Attendance

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

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Paula Goodwin, Joe Holmes, Sherman Smith, Jim Salem

Nonmembers: Susan Mitchell-Hardt (President, Acton Conservation Trust)

Bettina called the meeting to order at 7:06 P.M. and thanked Paula for bringing cookies and pretzels.

Review and approval of September and October minutes

Approval of the September minutes was postponed until this meeting due to lateness of availability. Changes in September minutes include reference to Milldam Road dumping, to construction of two bridges at Nashoba Brook, and a one-word correction re mowing at the Canoe Launch. Changes to October minutes include fixing the approximate cost of a bench on Conservation Land (~\$1000 – \$1200, including \$500 for installation), and noting that Mill Corner will allow the LSC to clear path-blocking tree debris on Mill Corner property.

With corrections noted above, approval of both minutes was moved and voted unanimously.

Adoption of LSC Charter

- Jim has been working (with Janet Adachi) on a Mission Statement for a number of years. Jim had updated us in December 2014. We approved it and this was the last time we saw it. After that it went to the Conservation Commission (Cons Comm), which had lots of comments. Then it went to Town counsel for its evaluation. Jim shared a document showing the few small changes made. The Town designee in the Mission Statement was confusing. It is Tom Tidman now, but terminology used in the Statement accounts for someone else in control.

Adoption of the Mission Statement was moved, seconded, and approved unanimously with no further discussion.

Per Jim, the next step is for Janet to take the Mission Statement to the Board of Selectmen (BoS) for BoS approval. Bettina will notify the Cons Comm that we passed this tonight. Jim will send a memo to the Cons Comm to show what we did with the changes it suggested.

Acton Trail Volunteers — Jim

- The Acton Trail Volunteers (ATV) is a Yahoo group of around 80 people who (having usually found out about the list via our website) signed up to be on the ATV list. Upon signup, Jim writes a message to the person signing up. Then he waits for a response. Usually there is silence. Generally there is a lot of silence from the list; typically 0 or 1 respond to a steward's request. Jim thinks that it's time for a change.

He suggests a redo of the Acton Trails website that will include a signup page. At some point then we go to the Yahoo list and offer the opportunity to sign up anew via the signup page. After that, we shut down the Yahoo group. This should give us a better listing of volunteers and contact information. It

should be a much smaller list, but that's okay.

Jim suggests that we have the ATV list as an agenda item in the next month or two.

Bettina attended a Massachusetts Trails conference that included a seminar on attracting and retaining volunteers. She will write up her notes to help us install a new methodology that would include an interview process for volunteers. Bettina would want to test this as soon as a prospective volunteer applies to the new list.

Bruce shared his thoughts on the Boy Scout “calendar” process of soliciting volunteers with which he has had good experience. He maintains an online calendar about events and their details along with a signup list.

Bob maintains a list of people he knows who help on projects.

In any case, once we have a new system working, Jim will send a message to the old list.

He suggests that instead of the initial contact being the LSC Chair, we have a “membership coordinator” who will be the initial contact for volunteers so that we can move around this task. However, Bettina does not mind starting this off while she is Chair, and next year would pass on the responsibility.

“WildAware” — Natural Resources’ program to raise awareness of Town wildlife crossings and shared habitats, as well as to foster an appreciation for biological diversity in town — Bettina, Paula

- Bettina gave the presentation that she and Paula had given to the BoS, and she and Paula told of the program’s current activities. They brought WildAware buttons for this meeting’s attendees, urging all to tell everyone of this program. The program would also like to receive pictures of local wildlife.

Bettina and Paula will try to make WildAware signs for kiosks.

The LSC thanked Bettina and Paula for doing the WildAware program.

Laurie wondered if there is a number to call if someone has a problem with wildlife. No, not through WildAware at least. Bettina suggests that a person with a problem call the Natural Resources office . . . or the police if there should be an issue in the middle of the night.

Other parcel information

- Canoe Launch

Joe H brought an ~18-in.-long log sample showing bittersweet attacking a tree of heaven. Joe also wondered what to do with syringes found on Town land (he has found a couple). The Town refers to them as “sharps” and provides a collection station at Town Hall. The sharps should be put into a container, if possible, before being brought to Town Hall.

- Grassy Pond

Dawn Dayton King is proceeding with her bench donation, to be installed at Grassy Pond. The wording on the new bench will be “In memory of Shelley Dayton-Jones” along with the years of her life.

- Spring Hill/Nashoba Brook

The sign entering Spring Hill from Nashoba Brook is starting to rot. This is the sign with the Conservation Land triangle logo. The back side (viewed from the opposite direction) is perfectly good. If a sign is rotting (or otherwise in distress), send information to Bettina who will have Shawn O’Malley deal with it.

– Joe H observed that at Nashoba Brook there could be up to four blazes on some trees and wondered if we need a “blazing bylaw” that could deal with “overblazing.” It was observed that at Nashoba Brook

the LSC put up the LSC signs and the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) signs, but not the Trail Through Time signs. The BCT will be re-blazed over the next couple years with its own circular signs.

– North of the Wheeler Lane parking, you can see where beavers are working on two large trees by the Robbins Mill pond.

– There are new planks on the bridge over Nashoba Brook.

• Guggins Brook (and Fort Pond Greenbelt discussion)

Jim observed that he will remove the one “Fort Pond Greenbelt” sign at Guggins Brook that is rotting and will let a second one go until it rots. Jim’s oral lore on the Fort Pond Greenbelt: In the early 90s, Tom Tidman introduced the idea of a Fort Pond Greenbelt. The Town Manager at the time was concerned that such a “zone of protection” in town would be not good for developers. He had the signs taken down and stored in cemetery buildings. Could we resurrect the notion of having a Fort Pond Greenbelt? Bettina and Paula will talk to Tom about this and get some sense of whether it can be rejuvenated. This could be a future agenda item.

• Nagog Hill

Bob G measured the plank needed for one broken on a boardwalk. Elan got it from Bob and finished the fix.

– Natural Resources will mow the meadow at Nagog Hill that the McConnons had been mowing.

• Robbins Mill

There was a general discussion about signage on Acton Conservation Lands (CL), which led to a discussion about signs at Robbins Mill. In general, Bob G recommends that all our parcel CL signs be standardized; that there be a template so that in the future all we need for a new sign is the lettering that would be unique to it. Bob F wondered about such signs for Robbins Mill. Any new CL sign request should go to Bettina who will first talk to Bob G about the signage before she makes any request of Shawn (who would make the sign). Bob F also wondered whether he could get other signs for Robbins Mill. A discussion ensued about other possible signs, e.g., arrows, “transition” signs, signs referring to adjacent CLs in other towns.

– Also, Bettina will make maps of Robbins Mill for Bob F.

• General

– Bettina handed out laminated deer tick signs for stewards to post on kiosks.

– There is still a need for “No Dumping” signs, in particular, one at Milldam and one at Jay Lane.

Bettina will put one up at each of those places. Bob G suggests that there needs to be further efforts to stop the dumping at Milldam and on Prescott Street.

– We will need a sign plan for Wright Hill, as well as a map of the parcel showing its trails. A discussion of Wright Hill trails ensued. Laurie and Jim described the LSC trail-building/map-making process

– Bettina got a license plate for the mower today. We can start mowing next summer, although there is nothing wrong with mowing now.

– There now is a 2-in. ball on the trailer and it is good to go.

– Paula and Bettina have learned of a Massachusetts Wildlife meadow and forestry grant related to early “successional” habitat. They would like to pursue the grant. On lands that convert to forest quickly, certain animals suffer. They need more scrub and meadow habitat than the land sustains. Land qualifying for the grant has to be called Conservation Land, or it has to have a Conservation Restriction. There may be five parcels in Acton to which this could apply. Such a grant would provide money for tree cutters and brush cutting that would push meadows out to their fullest extent. The grant is a one-time thing and would be a huge head start for Acton’s Meadow Management Plan. The deadline for submitting a proposal is 11/30/15, and projects should be finished by June 2016. Paula and Bettina would show the proposal to Tom and the Conservation Commission first, and would try for this

grant before applying for any local Community Preservation Act funds.

– The grant possibility mentioned above generated a discussion on Acton's Meadow Management plan.

2016 calendar

• Come January, we'll be meeting in Town Hall Room 9 on the third Tuesday of each month.

December agenda

- A Fort Pond Greenbelt. See Guggins Brook notes above.
- In December or January, Jim and Bruce would like to talk about the LSC Website and offer a replacement proposal.
- In December or January, Jim would like to share some ideas for the little internal meadow at Guggins Brook.
- At the December meeting, have a schedule of future workdays. One is already scheduled for May, but what it's about has not yet been specified.
- A new mower
- Per Jim, in the future, we should talk about leveling huge overgrown areas like the one at Nagog Hill near the junction of the yellow trail with the red trail to the Newtown Road parking. Laurie suggested that this would be a nice project with which to involve volunteers. Also, we could take existing Meadow Management plans and add professional work for plant control.

Evaluate meeting

- A fun meeting; Bettina is developing a nice mix of authority and charm. Absence of time restrictions is appreciated.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, December 15, at 7 P.M., in Room 126.