

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, August 20, 2019, Town Hall, Room 9, 7 P.M.

Attendees (in **bold**):

Regular (voting) members: **Dale Chayes, Bob Farra, Zanna Gruber** (Vice-Chair), **Bob Guba, Joe Holmes**, Bruce Rachman (Chair), **Laurie Ullmann, John Watlington, Joe Will** (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) members: Larry Boisvert, Andy Gatesman, Josh Haines, Philip Keyes, Gary Kilpatrick, Nan Towle Millett, Aaron Moore, Jim Salem, Sherman Smith, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant)

1. Opening

Zanna (as Vice-Chair) opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m. with a quorum of 7 voting members present — Dale, Bob F, Zanna, Bob G, Joe H, John, Joe W

2. Regular Business

Citizens' concerns

None

Review and approval of July minutes

Approval was moved and voted unanimously.

Parcel Issues: Nashoba Brook Sluice Bridge

Town employees put the sluice bridge in place. They likely used a backhoe. On a volunteer workday, five people screwed down the planks. Bettina will order the top and side rails on Thursday. The bridge is anchored at both ends with cement blocks. It “looks great!”

Parcel Issues: Nashoba Brook Recommendations

Three concerns about the south bridge (55-ft long, built in '96 or '97) at Nashoba Brook:

1. At its east end there is a pile of rocks for steps. This bridge access really should be improved — a wooden ramp would even work. Enough people have commented on it (e.g. the present situation is not good for bikers or cross-country skiers). Access at the west end is okay. This would be a challenge as an Eagle Scout project.
2. Re the red access trail at the Milldam Road cul de sac: The person who had been living in the house there (and had been “tough” on not wanting anyone to use the access trail) is gone, so putting a sign in there now should be no problem. The LSC should first check with Town Planner Roland Bartl on the language of the access easement that was granted to the Town to see if it includes anything about signs. This should be done before any talk with the current homeowner.
3. At the Milldam Road junction with Northbriar Road, the LSC should move the sign out from its current location “way back in”.

Next steps for the three concerns:

1. Let's look for volunteer(s) for the bridge approach. Having scouts do it is a good idea. A fix could be a ramp or stairs. A ramp in winter time would be a lot slipperier than what is there now. A ramp would have to be long, probably at least 20 ft, as it is quite a drop from the bridge to the ground. Bettina and

Laurie will work on this.

2. Check the easement and, if okay, put up a sign. Bettina will help in making the sign.
3. Move the sign.

Parcel Issues: Heath Hen Meadow (HHM) Bridge/Dam/Beavers

Bettina received a quote from Mike Callahan of Beaver Solutions LLC: To build a couple beaver deceivers would be almost \$4K. Mike shared his concerns in an Overview that he provided. The LSC has also talked about elevating the bridge high enough so that it wouldn't have to worry about beavers anymore. Bruce Rachman looked at other structures in town (e.g., the 271-ft long bog bridge at the Arboretum) and did a cost analysis for an elevated bridge. The bridge would be about 42 ft long (could be 8-ft sections). Whether to have handrails is undecided. Actual bridge construction would be ~\$1K, but lumber for a 42-ft bridge would be several thousand dollars. Eagle Scouts could build boardwalks leading to the bridge. A discussion ensued about bridge footings, sinking pipes, cribs, rebar, beaver deceiver piping (wouldn't be needed if bridge is raised), and the state of the current bridge. Other points made:

Bruce's plan sounds like it would cost as much as Mike's. Let's pay Mike to put in the pipes.

Whatever Mike would install would need yearly maintenance. Mike could do the maintenance.

We should write a proposal for a Community Preservation Act grant for this, but for exactly what?

The bridge would not have to be handicapped accessible because of its location.

Bettina described the time and cost for building the recently-completed (by volunteers) 180-ft boardwalk along the Assabet River. Volunteers could probably build the HHM bridge, including the boardwalk and a step-up, or ramp.

The HHM bridge probably would need handrails because the water is at least 5 ft deep in places, there's a current, and one could drown. It would be good to have railings on both sides. (Reportedly Frank Ramsbottom, Town Building Commissioner, says the bridge would not have to have handrails.)

For elevating the bridge, we would need a more thorough proposal.

Bruce should come to the next meeting with his plan. Zanna will let Bruce know this.

Parcel Issues: Nagog Hill Orienteering proposal

Dale tried to meet with Discovery Museum person re the Discovery Museum's orienteering activities at Great Hill, but found her to be on vacation. He presented the Committee with information on three slides: 1) an example of a "well-done" orienteering course on public conservation land in the Cascades, 2) a "spitball estimate" on costs for a Nagog Hill course, and 3) an explanation of orienteering. The bottom-line estimate (with labor cost = \$0 if it were done with volunteers or as a Scout project) is \$270. Short of volunteer help, Dale would guess a total cost of \$500. This course would be a permanent orienteering course. It would not be for a place like Great Hill where one would run into too many people. There are a lot fewer at Nagog Hill. Dale has an "emerging collaborator" John Campbell, who is associated with a local Boy Scout troop. John presently is absent from town, but will be back the day before school starts. The course could be used for a Mass Wildlife hunter education course, and search and rescue training among other things. The closest course at this time is in Westminster, MA.

Discussion points:

What kind of maintenance would the orienteering course require? The meadow with the ground level plaques would need mowing so that one can find the plaques, and natural events (such as a tree falling)

in the forest that might knock over a marker would have to be tended to.

The only modification in putting in posts and (ground level) markers is that the course design steers clear of critical spaces, like vernal pools.

There will be cost for orientation training — a \$10 registration fee that pays for materials.

There are Conservation Commission rules that one cannot charge for an event held on conservation land.

What's happening next: When John Campbell is back in town, Dale and John will do an actual plan for something at Nagog Hill.

This will have to be proposed to the Conservation Commission for its approval.

Bettina will determine whether Dale needs to talk to the Conservation Commission on this.

If it's necessary to run this by the Conservation Commission, it would be need LSC support.

That an orienteering course, as proposed by Dale, is a good idea and has the support of the LSC was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously.

Parcel Issues: Town brush hogging

Joe W said that Shawn O'Malley indicated that the Town could do its significant meadow mowing (such as at Morrison Farm) by the end of August, so stewards should provide direction if there is something that shouldn't be mowed. John likes the plants at the head of the meadow at Great Hill so he puts out signs and cords off sections that he feels shouldn't be mowed. He also does this at Morrison Farm. Dale might want to write a note to Shawn if Dale would want a meadow mowed out to its edge. Would it be possible to get a "heads up" when mowing will actually occur? Not easily, as the crew will mow when it has the time to do so.

Parcel Issues: Other

Great Hill

John shared a concern about fishing folks breaking branches beside the Great Hill pond, apparently to make it easier for casting. On one hand, it can damage the trees. On the other hand, it makes sense to prune a tree to make room for casting so no more branches are broken. This can be an agenda item for September.

Nashoba Brook

At Wheeler Lane, the vegetation has grown up along the sluice and the edge of the meadow. Bob G and Andy Gatesman did a lot of cutting there with the brush cutter. They cleared about 6 ft back. Bob pointed out that old photos show that area to be all clear. There apparently has been no maintenance for 2 or 3 years. Someone should finish the job that he and Andy began.

Points in the ensuing discussion about the area at the end of Wheeler Lane:

There had been plans for information panels in this space; also for wildflowers. View of the bench in the space described by Bob has been "completely obliterated".

Linda McElroy has abandoned the wildflower garden idea.

There is an accessible trail to the bench described above by Bob, and Andy mowed it. Could a steward take on the task of regular mowing to this bench?

By the Robbins Mill dam, there had been a wooden plank big enough for someone to use for crossing

the breach in the dam. Last Sunday, Bob G walked the Scoutland trails to the dam, found the plank, cut it up to be unusable and threw the pieces into the woods. He wonders why, if the LSC wants people not to hurt themselves, the LSC seems to be so casual about something like this. Others agreed that Bob is correct on this. If an LSC member notices something of concern, s/he should do something about it.

Bob noted that beavers are active at the dam. On one day, Bob cut away half of a log that was across the dam opening. On another day, he cut away the other half. Bob showed a discharge chart for the dam that included the days he did this work. The chart showed the effects of his efforts (discharge going up) and suggests that beavers are trying to plug the gap (flow drops) between the two concrete remnants of the dam between which the water flows.

(Side note: On one occasion above, Bob walked the Bay Circuit Trail across Scoutland onto the Robbins Mill parcel and had a difficult time following the trail. He wonders if the current trail agrees with the original flagging. Laurie will check this.)

There is another bench and a picnic table down to the right from Wheeler Lane in an area that's not maintained. There are trails to this area. Bob and the Town have mowed all or part of it in the past. The picnic table had been hit by a tree but is repairable. This could be a Scout project.

Linda put in that table and bench. She took on the project without coordinating with Natural Resources and there was no maintenance plan. Some believe putting in the table and bench was a mistake, and "If we can't maintain it, we should abandon it." One idea: Move this bench and table to a spot beside the parking lot to suggest a picnic area.

There is one more element to install at this site, a walk-through kiosk that Bettina is trying to have placed right next to the parking lot. If the LSC wants, Bettina will ask Linda what she thinks of the possible activity near the parking.

Morrison Farm

Bob G moved usable lumber from his house to beside the Morrison Farm shed. He was told how he could get access to the shed even though not in possession of a key.

Acton Trails website issues: Progress with moving website to new server

Mark Hald, the Town's Chief Information Officer, apparently has done nothing yet (on moving the website to a Town server). Bettina will ask Bruce to join the several who are already "nagging" Mark about this.

Online maps new features

The new place-marks feature has worked on Chrome and some, but not all, Safari browsers. This suggests the possibility of a browser problem. Joe H will try to explore this.

3. New/Special Business (or other applicable agenda items)

Eagle Scout projects

Bettina wants stewards to tell her of potential Eagle Scout projects. Bettina pointed out that for Scout projects, the Scouts involved are contractors, and they "work for us" (the Town). We tell them what we want. A scout has to plan a project, and it should take 100 hours. Too small of a project won't get approved by the Scout Council. A brief discussion followed on what an Eagle Scout project is today.

Acton Dog Park status

Joe W provided an update — that the Acton Dog Park Committee will be proposing two sites to the

Board of Selectmen at its September 9 meeting. The preferred site is on Department of Public Works land abutting both the north side of NARA and the east side of the Miracle Field. An alternative site is at 80 Quarry Road, a municipal property through which the Wills Hole/Town Forest yellow trail passes.

4. Additional Regular Business

Next month's (September 17) agenda

- Bruce may be able to give a status report of the HHM bridge and also his plan for a new bridge.
- Angler issue at Great Hill (see Great Hill item above)
- Nagog Hill: Size and maintenance of the Quail Ridge parking lot

Evaluate meeting

Good meeting. Snacks (Bob F, Joe H) were excellent.

5. Adjournment

At 8:30 P.M., it was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, September 17, at 7 P.M., in Room 9.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft Meeting Minutes of July 16, 2019
- Documents provided by Mike Callahan of Beaver Deceivers
- Dale's three PowerPoint slides
- Bob G's Nashoba Brook discharge chart