

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Virtual Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, February 16, 2021, Virtual Meeting, 7 P.M.

Zoom Participants/Attendees (in bold)

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

Associate (nonvoting) members: **Jon Campbell**, Andy Gatesman, **Josh Haines**, Everett Kenerson, **Philip Keyes**, Gary Kilpatrick, **Mel Lima, Jim Salem**, Jason Temple, Todd Tsakiris

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), **Dean Charter** (Acton Board of Selectmen LSC liaison), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT) President)

Opening

Zanna opened the meeting at 7 p.m. with all nine voting members present. Zanna read the script provided by the Town for remotely-conducted open meetings.

Regular Business

Review and approval of January 19 minutes

Approval of the minutes was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously by roll call.

Citizens' concerns

Susan invites all to the Sunday, March 14, 7 pm Annual Meeting of the ACT (via zoom). Lifelong beekeeper Ken Warchol will give a presentation on “The Role of the Honeybee in Our Environment.” Also, Bruce will be recognized as the recipient of the ACT’s 2021 Carol Holley Conservation Volunteer award, with an award ceremony to occur in October.

New/Special Business

Possible trail link with Carlisle

Bob reported on his contact with Robbins Mill Estate Conservation and Marshall Crossing Condominium Trustees and with residents of the Robbins Mill and Marshall Crossing neighborhoods regarding possible cooperative trail development in their neighborhood and Carlisle’s adjacent Lion’s Gate neighborhood. (See LSC January Minutes.) The trails being considered involve five entry points from public roads (Canterbury Hill Road, Blueberry Path, and Marshall Path) in Acton, and four entry points from West Street in Carlisle. Of the nine entry points, two in Acton (over properties of the Robbins Mill and Marshall Crossing Trusts) and one in Carlisle would require easements over private land.

Bob reached out to the 106 households on the Acton side and received feedback summarized here:

	Robbins Mill	Marshall Crossing	Total
Households queried	90	16	106
Households responding	66	11	77
Oppose trails <u>and</u> entry points	59	8	67
Oppose entry points; favor trails	3	3	6
Favor entry points and trails	4	0	4
Oppose trails <u>or</u> entry points	62	11	73

So, 73 of 77 (95%) would not support the proposed easements — quite a bit of pushback.

Discussion points:

- It is not shocking that folks don't want traffic in their private neighborhoods.
- That much resistance is disappointing. It seems impractical to go forward with this.
- Per Phil: It is understandable why people feel this way. This is not uncommon. It takes place with any trail that is proposed next to a neighborhood. People love trails, but not in their backyards, something faced by every proposal like this.
- Could we drop the number of access points to reduce some of the resistance?
- The data show that 6 of the 77 households favor the trails but not the entry points, so dropping some of the entry points wouldn't change the other 71.
- Trail access for out-of-the-neighborhood public is needed only where there would be parking; right now two locations.
- This seems too much of an uphill battle.
- It's kind of a done deal that a trail can't happen without the support of the neighborhood and the trusts.
- Part of the proposed trail would go directly behind and be pretty close to some homes.
- It's possible to continue discussion with Carlisle about trails on town-owned land, but a trail over private land would require approval votes of the Trusts and the homeowners' associations.
- To ease access concerns, perhaps there could be "Bob Guba boardwalks" on the Tenneco gas pipeline easement. This wouldn't require the approval of neighborhoods.
- Any boardwalks we build would have to be removable to allow the gas company to mow.
- To follow up on Phil's comments about neighborhood pushback, we could ask that folks come forward at the next LSC meeting with strategies that historically have been used to solve issues like this.

Land Stewards' Field Guide

Jim had shared with the LSC the "Cape Anne Trail Stewards Field Manual" (CATSFM) Could we integrate its contents with that of the LSC's guide for stewards? Does the LSC guide have perceived gaps, like pruning information, that the CATSFM could help us address? Discussion points:

- It's might be a good thing, but a bunch of work. Someone has to step up to do it.
- Jim has the CATSFM as a Word document and a little time to put into it. He would like to hear from the LSC as to what's in CATSFM that would be good for the LSC guide. Bettina would be happy to help with the Wordsmithing.
- Per John: It's a great idea and he could help edit. He also has some ideas of what's missing from the current LSC guide.
- The CATSFM has some good guidance, especially on the pruning. However, what's put into the LSC guide should not be overly prescriptive. There has to be some leeway for our stewards.
- The LSC "Task Maintenance Guidelines" for stewards should not be confused with Acton's current Trail Guide, which needs to be reprinted.
- The LSC "Boardwalk Building Guide" and "Kiosk Building Guide" would not be part of this. Those are too specialized. Construction guidance should be separate from what Jim would be doing.
- Jim will follow up with John and Bettina on this, but others wanting to participate should let Jim know. After some work by a small group, Jim will send out a working document to everyone
- This sounds really good, particularly for someone learning the ropes at being a land steward. What kind of time frame are we looking at?
- Bettina will try to facilitate and crank something out for the March LSC meeting.

TrailCare App

There is a "TrailCare" app. Someone sent it to Bettina and Bettina sent it to the stewards so they could get it if they want. TrailCare allows you to personalize your parcel so that public users of the app can notify you on certain matters about your parcel. Phil knows the person who developed the app. Phil has been testing it for the last 3-4 years and he is very "jazzed" about it. It's a way to engage users of our parcels to

report issues of concern in real time. It's an amazing crowd-sourcing tool that can help us understand what's happening on our parcels. Phil uses it for Spring Hill and sees no downside. TrailCare gives the public a way to immediately report, and a steward a way to immediately learn, in real time, trail maintenance issues, and geolocations, on the steward's parcel, and then for the steward to let the public know when the issues have been addressed. Phil sees no downside to giving the app a try.

Discussion points:

- Are there any fees for its use? The app is free for stewards, other individuals, and small community groups like ours. There would be fees for large agencies that would want aggregate data.
- Something like a blowdown notification seems valuable, but something like "This is muddy section" isn't. Would a steward have to figure out the "noise" that s/he shouldn't have to be deal with?
- Most of six categories of reports are "cut and dried": tree blocking trail, broken structure, water problem (a possible gray zone), missing or broken sign, vandalism, large volume of trash.
- The app has a front end for the public and a back end for the steward. The back end allows the steward, and only the steward, to geofence her/his parcel (which takes about 12 seconds).
- An individual steward using the app would have to add relevant information to the current Stewards' Spreadsheet in order for other stewards to learn of a problem referenced by the app on a particular parcel.
- Would there be advertising of TrailCare, say on kiosks? Possibly, to help get the word out.
- Whether one wants to use the app, it's up to each of us.
- Anyone wanting to use this app should let Bettina know.
- Stewards could check out TrailCare and in a month or two (say, the April agenda) we could discuss. A steward should use it to see how simple, and powerful, it is.

(Clerk's note: Following the meeting, Phil emailed the LSC with the following information:

After creating a TrailCare user account, one can email info@TrailCare.com to request access as a land steward. The steward can then create a "geo-fence" around her/his parcel so that notification and GPS link for is a reported trail issue are sent to the steward. Find a how-to section here: <https://TrailCare.com/howto>. To geo-fence one's parcel, go to www.TrailCare.com, click on My TrailCare Areas, and use your cursor to define your fence.)

Additional Regular Business

Parcel issues

• QR codes

- Joe H shared an example of an "old" QR code to show its background map. Joe can generate background maps for new QR codes so that they are more interesting than a QR code all by itself. Caution: Not all parcels have online maps.
- The "old" QR codes are outdated. The new ones will be linked to online maps. Caution: If we are to put a QR code out in public, it has to have permanent, not transient, urls (purls). An offline discussion on this might be appropriate.
- Bettina can create an information background for a QR code that explains where the QR code will take you.

• Blue and Green Trail

Joe H, Bettina, and Tom Tidman marked out the proposed parking lot on Parker Street. Others have checked out the trails and agree that there is no reasonable way to re-route current trails or build new trails without creating trails that are "incredibly redundant."

• Jenks

Josh asks if the LSC would support having someone look into beaver remediation at the Fort Pond Brook bridge on the red trail that enters from Central Street. For the past 3-4 years, Josh has had to clear out beaver blockage under that bridge. This year the problem has been particularly harsh as the beavers are coming back each night to rebuild after Josh has cleared the way. If this clearing would not be done, water could eventually flow over the bridge and eventually require that part of the trail having to be rebuilt.

Bettina will talk with Tom Tidman who would have to approve the expenditure (~\$65) for Mike Callahan of Beaver Solutions to have a look and suggest remediation possibilities.

A motion that the Town contract for a Jenks site visit by a beaver control professional was made, seconded, and voted unanimously by roll call.

- **Miscellany**

– Dean commented on a trail marker he saw in Leominster, a photo of which he had shared with the stewards. Per Dean, Leominster seems to have put a lot out — a really nice job — perhaps with some sort of grant. The signs are very well coordinated. They made it easy to get oriented, even for a stranger. There was a master map on a kiosk so you could work your way ‘round the trails, helped by the numbers on the sign post.

Dale: Many parks are using signs like this to help people get around. They are incredibly helpful for emergency dispatchers to locate where help is needed.

– Laurie confirms that developers of the Valentine property in both North Acton and Carlisle are close to figuring out what to do with that property. There will be a zoom meeting coming up to help finalize the Bay Circuit Trail easement across the property. Laurie may have more information on this in time for the LSC March meeting.



Covid19-related issues

None.

Website issues

None.

Maps update

Joe H: There are no changes on the maps.

Next month’s (March 16) agenda

NIMBY resolutions; Valentine easement.

Notify Joe W and Zanna with any other items.

Evaluate meeting

“Well done!” and thumbs up (virtual).

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8 p.m.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, March 16, at 7 p.m.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft Meeting Minutes of January 19, 2020