

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting Minutes
November 17, 2010
Acton Town Hall

Present: Bettina Abe, Tom Arnold, Joan Cirillo, Philip Keyes, Peggy Liversidge (minute-taker), Nan Towle Millett, Heidi Sikina, Jim Snyder-Grant (chair), Tom Tidman, Laurie Ullmann (quorum present)
Guest: Bruce Rachman (associate member candidate)

Meeting minutes: After a statement in the October minutes about chain saw use was questioned, it was decided to remove that statement from the minutes; Jim also noted that the minutes should include a link to archived emails relevant to items in the month's minutes. With these revisions, the October minutes were approved. Jim will check into the chain-saw issue to determine whether two people must be present when chain saws are being used on Town land, and he will be sure that the wording for the email link is added.

New Camp Acton steward: Bruce Rachman, the Committee's choice to be the new Camp Acton steward, was present at today's meeting. Jim said he hopes to find out whether Bruce might be appointed by the Board of Selectmen before next July (the beginning of new terms), but it was also suggested that he might just be designated as acting steward until that time.

Bruce has made several suggestions for possible improvements to Camp Acton. These include providing cut firewood (in part as a way of reducing the likelihood that someone will bring in wood that is infested with long-horned beetles), building covered wood bins, repairing and numbering picnic tables, building a new boardwalk, relocating sections of the existing trail, and removing invasives.

Camp Acton trash, gates, and locks: The committee again discussed the problem of trash being found at campsites. Bruce reported that he has recently found more evidence of unlawful teen use of Camp Acton (with associated debris), spoken with the Acton police about it, and posted a sign on the kiosk about proper use of the property. In addition, the police, while patrolling the property last weekend, found 9 teens drinking around a campfire after midnight. The idea, raised at an earlier meeting, of charging a returnable deposit to people who register for camping was mentioned. Several objections were raised, including Bruce's observation that he couldn't promise to be able to check the area in a timely manner after all registered camping events and his sense that trash is not generally left by registered campers.

Bruce's initial thought about the situation was that a combination lock might be placed on the outer gate (nearest Pope Road). Tom T. indicated that he thought this was reasonable and said that the Recreation Department could take care of getting a lock. It was also suggested that a sign be posted on the gate to indicate who to contact about camping access. However, Joan objected to keeping this gate locked 24/7 for several reasons. She noted that Camp Acton is a multi-use property and described barring public access at the outer gate to all but those with camping permits as "overkill," saying it would penalize the overwhelming majority of users who do not misuse the property. She also expressed concern that locking the gate could create a safety hazard, since it could result in visitors parking on Pope Road, where cars sometimes drive very fast. Bruce, who lives in the area, shared that concern. She also questioned whether LSCom has the authority to decide on its own to lock the gate, as well as the basis on which the existing "Authorized Vehicles Only" sign is posted. She thinks that the sign and a locked outer gate are inconsistent with published materials about Acton's conservation lands being

open to the general public from one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset, and about Spring Hill, Nashoba Brook, and Camp Acton each having “its own parking.” She also stated that the Camp Acton permit itself contains some inconsistencies. Joan suggested addressing unlawful behavior at Camp Acton in a more tailored manner, e.g., intermittent police patrols and the Restorative Justice Program for underaged offenders. She suggested that the open area near the utility easement that crosses the entrance road might be used for parking, with the outer gate moved or a new gate constructed and placed just past this new parking area.

In the ensuing discussion Philip expressed his view that Camp Acton is a different type of property from the rest of our conservation properties and therefore might be handled differently, and he said that its parking lot’s location so far back from the paved road makes it an especially inviting gathering spot for teens. It was also suggested that, if the outer gate does get locked, the sign about who to contact about camping access could also direct walkers/hikers to the Spring Hill Road access trail. There was no general agreement as to how feasible it would be to move the outer gate or to build another one just beyond a new parking area in or closer to the utility easement; the idea of using the easement for parking would have to be checked with Town Counsel. Tom T. mentioned that it might be possible to expand the entrance road just after it passes the outer gate to accommodate parking and move the outer gate beyond that spot, but others thought the land might be too wet. There was also some debate as to whose “job” or primary responsibility it was—LSCOM's or the police's—to deal with the problems of after-hours trespassing, underage drinking, and littering on Acton's conservation lands.

Early in the discussion a vote was taken to authorize Tom T. and Bruce to decide together if and when a combination lock should be applied to the outer gate. Joan cast the one dissenting vote. Following the additional discussion, however, it was agreed that, for now, Bruce would see if increased police monitoring would have an effect, and the idea of locking the outer gate was put off.

It was noted that the inner gate, nearest the campsites, is now locked (with a key lock).

We will revisit Camp Acton issues at future meetings.

Spring Hill “You Are Here” maps: Philip brought 8 laminated “You Are Here” maps to the meeting, and Laurie agreed to nail them to trees in the appropriate locations. If this experiment proves successful, we will eventually install posts or small kiosks to provide a more permanent way of displaying the maps.

Trail raking: In response to an October email from Andy Gatesman, who said he had raked the loop trail at Bulette, Jim brought up the question of whether it is a good idea to rake trails. He wonders if this practice might increase the possibility of erosion. Philip stated that there are arguments on both sides and no firm consensus.

Quail Ridge: Jim stated that, despite the Quail Ridge bankruptcy, we still have the right to the easement trail, but no progress has been made on staking out a location for the boardwalk section. Jim said that he will get some pin flags and, together with Bob Guba, will stake out this section.

Jim also said that the auction of the land, the buildings, and the associated permits for senior housing has been put off because of the bankruptcy, that club members are still operating the golf course, and that the Selectmen are working on ideas for what to do with the land and buildings. Mike Gowing is taking the lead on this and any suggestions can be made to him.

Benches with memorial plaques: Following a request to place a bench with a memorial plaque at Jenks, Josh Haines has suggested a location on a ledge in the meadow if we decide to authorize this bench, or benches in general.

A general discussion covered the type of bench that might be used for memorial benches. Tom T. said that, for the Arboretum, they make bulk orders (usually five at a time) of good-quality benches that have arms and a back; they cost around \$500 apiece. The question was raised as to whether a person donating a bench would pay just this amount or be charged a bit more to cover the installation (which would involve attaching it to a concrete footing) or other costs. It was agreed that we should have control over the location of benches. No concerns were expressed about placing plaques on them.

It was unanimously agreed to authorize placement of one of these Arboretum-style benches at Jenks, with Tom T. deciding how much to charge. Tom A. agreed to draft a policy about benches; people can contact him with any ideas or concerns.

Eagle Scout project list: Bettina will disseminate the current Scout project list to individual stewards so that they can evaluate it for accuracy, update it, and return it to her. She will bring a revised draft to the next committee meeting.

Parcel news: Several parcel news items were briefly noted: Heidi requested help removing a tree across the blue trail nearest the pond at *Nagog Hill*; Laurie reported picking up several bags of trash at *Nashoba Brook*; Bettina reported finding a freshwater mussel shell at the *canoe launch* and said that this is indicative of a healthy ecosystem.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 15, at 4:00 PM.

List of documents used: Documents that served as background for these discussions can be found at <https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-3834>.

These documents are titled:

- Emails re: benches at Jenks
- Emails re: volunteering
- Link to LSC project list
- Recent emails re: Camp Acton