

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting Minutes
February 16, 2011, 4:00 PM
Acton Town Hall

Regular (voting) members present: Joan Cirillo, Philip Keyes, Peggy Liversidge (minute-taker), Ann Shubert, Jim Snyder-Grant (chair)

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Tom Arnold, Bob Guba

Nonmembers present: Janet Adachi (LSCCom's Board of Selectmen liaison), Tom Tidman (Director of Natural Resources/LSCCom's Town staff liaison)

Meeting minutes: The alternate December meeting minutes (link emailed to the committee by Jim on February 9) were approved.

Committee roles: Jim initiated a discussion of what roles, in addition to parcel stewardship, each member is currently filling and whether he or she wants to continue with these roles or to make changes. Each member present briefly gave this information, and all indicated they are generally satisfied with their current roles:

Ann: Minute-taking; forwarding of volunteer requests; letter-writing (though this is seldom needed).

Tom A.: Committee liaison to Conservation Commission; helping with the issue of the Hybrid Farm lease; photo contest coordinator.

Bob: Trails and projects coordinator for all parcels, including doing maintenance and repairs by himself or with stewards/volunteers and guiding/overseeing Eagle Scout projects.

Philip: Grant-writing, as needed; lecture publicity and logistics, as needed; trail design and cutting; photo contest co-judge.

Joan: Research, writing, and assistance exploring options related to legal and other topics (e.g., presentations to other boards/committees, interpreting and drafting "legalistic" documents such as easements, volunteer disclosure form, and charter; liability/insurance issues; other towns' bench policies, etc.); upkeep of committee member roster; informal liaison with dog owners who use conservation lands.

Peggy: Helping Jim draw up agenda and posting with Town Clerk; minute-taking and posting of minutes on Town website; trail blazing.

Jim: Committee chair, which includes setting meeting agendas and running meetings, keeping track of various unassigned issues and tasks, participating in the Open Space and Recreation Plan process, and working to finalize a Committee charter and to clarify liability/insurance issues. Activities not related to his role as committee chair include garlic mustard removal and keeping track of invasives. Jim noted that he likes most of these roles, including running meetings, but he dislikes tracking the unassigned/undone issues and tasks.

Roles of other members who were not present today will be reviewed at future meetings.

Items for future consideration: During the committee roles discussion, two issues came up that were identified as needing further discussion in the future: (1) the need to add conservation restrictions to existing conservation lands; (2) the question of whether hunting should be permitted on conservation lands.

Wills Hole/Town Forest steward: Maura Herlihy delivered her resignation as Wills Hole/Town Forest steward to Jim last fall. (This was announced at a meeting but didn't get into the minutes.) Jim noted

that LSCom is currently authorized to have nine regular and up to nine associate members. Because Bruce Rachman has assumed the steward position for Camp Acton, all 18 of these member slots are now filled without including a Wills Hole/Town Forest steward; if an existing member does not assume responsibility for that parcel, we will need to ask the Board of Selectmen to authorize an increase in the number of associate members. Since Janet Adachi was present at the meeting, Jim asked her whether she thought we would be able to get this BOS authorization before the next fiscal year begins on July 1. She answered yes, so it was agreed that we would send an email to the volunteer list as a first step in trying to fill this position. Philip stated his willingness to serve as temporary steward for the parcel.

Camp Acton gates and locks: Tom A. reported that he has spoken with Terry Maitland, chair of the Conservation Commission, about whether LSCom has the authority to make any decisions about locking the Camp Acton access road gate. The answer was no, although we can make recommendations. Jim suggested that we wait until after the snow has melted and then assess the situation, with Bruce Rachman's input, before making any recommendations.

Possible changes to Great Hill blazing: Having started Great Hill reblazing last fall and in the hope of finishing it in the coming season, Peggy has raised the issue of blazing colors within the main loop trail. Currently there is a three-pronged blue trail and a red trail, plus a new trail down the east side of the hill (currently flagged but not yet cut) that will need to be blazed, for a total of four or five trails (depending on whether the three-pronged trail is counted as two or three trails) that need differentiation within the main loop. She said she would like to gather suggestions, have time for those to be considered, and have a decision sometime in the spring. She noted that Linda McElroy has indicated that she has some ideas and that these could be described next month if Linda attends that meeting, as expected. Additional suggestions from others are also still welcome. Jim suggested that Peggy and Bettina consider the possibilities, once they're all on the table, and make a recommendation.

Suggestions offered today included blazes that are all blue but have different shapes (rectangle, circle, triangle); blue-bordered rectangles with different inset colors; the standard blue rectangles on all trails in conjunction with "You Are Here" maps at the three junctions; and reversing the blazing colors of the two north-south prongs that are currently blazed blue (change blue to yellow) and the western part of the loop trail between those two ends of the current blue trails (change yellow to blue). In reference to this last suggestion, Joan noted that because similar exceptions to the general pattern that "the outermost loop is yellow" also happen to exist at, for example, Wetherbee, Bulette, Guggins Brook, and Pratt's Brook, the confusion of multiple blue trails branching off each other is currently avoided on those parcels.

Conservation parcel management plans: Tom A. reported that the idea of writing management plans for the Town's conservation properties (previously noted in the September 2010 minutes and concerned with such activities as timber cutting and meadow mowing) is slowly moving forward within ConsCom. He will keep us in the loop as things develop.

Proposed volunteer disclosure language: Joan's first draft of a volunteer disclosure form, which she based in part on discussion at the December 2010 meeting and emailed to the committee on January 28, was briefly discussed but no action was taken. Joan noted that wording might also be included about volunteers releasing rights to photos taken of them during events so that the photos could be used on our website or in the Town's printed materials. Jim reiterated Joan's note in the document that the Town needs to decide on policy about underage volunteers (up to age 16 or 18) and added that the Town also needs to consider and decide on the related issue of insurance coverage for volunteers. Jim will pursue these questions with Janet.

Guidebook revision and reprinting: Jim reported that we are down to our last box of guidebooks (approximately 75 or 80 copies), so we need to be planning for a reprinting. Parcel descriptions need to be reviewed and may need to be updated; Tom T. needs to update some maps for trail changes and parcel additions; and a description needs to be written and a map drawn for the Pacy Land.

Tom A. then raised the question of whether, with all the new technology that is available and being widely used, we even need to have a print version or to print out map copies for kiosks, especially if the website version is well advertised. Joan noted that, although paper prices have increased and we may need to raise the price of a print version (if we do one) to cover the printing cost, she thinks a tangible, visible product may be a valuable asset to the Town; she suggested that we request input from the Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee and the Acton 2020 Committee, which seems focused on cataloguing “Town Assets.”

Regardless of what the Committee’s eventual decision about this is, however, we do need to update both parcel descriptions and maps. It was suggested that each steward read over and make suggested revisions by May 1.

Parcel news: *Grassy Pond*: Ann reported that people have been ice fishing and skating on the pond. *Spring Hill*: Philip said there were no problems at Spring Hill when he checked it two weeks ago. *Wetherbee*: Bob provided an addendum to Joan’s emailed report, noting that he had recently snowshoed through the entire parcel and it was fine.

Snow-walking “etiquette”: Walking on top of cross-country ski tracks, with resulting “postholes,” was mentioned as a problem on some parcels. The idea of putting up signs to encourage proper winter track behavior was discussed.

Parking lots: The state of the parking lots was discussed. Some lots that need to be cleared of snow have not been cleared yet, but it was also noted that some accesses are not cleared of snow in the winter because of the difficulty of doing so. For instance, Tom T. stated that, in his opinion, the current condition of Camp Acton’s access road is too poor to withstand continual snow plowing. We reviewed the recommendation of the committee that certain parking areas, such as at Jenks, be improved.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 16, at 4:00 PM.

The meeting adjourned at 5:35 PM.

List of documents used: Documents that served as background for these discussions can be found at <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-4104>. These documents are titled:

- Draft volunteer disclosure language
- Link to LSC parcel reports
- Link to volunteer disclosure draft cover letter email
- LSCOM minutes 2010 12 15
- LSCOM minutes 2010 12 15 - alternate
- Questions re: GH blazing colors
- Roster 1-11-11