

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting Minutes
April 27, 2011, 4:00 PM
Acton Town Hall

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe, Joan Cirillo, Peggy Liversidge (minute-taker), Ann Shubert, Jim Snyder-Grant (chair), Laurie Ullmann

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

Nonmembers present: Tom Tidman (Director of Natural Resources and LSCom's Town staff liaison)

Meeting minutes: After Jim reported one error (the possible new Town Forest steward is Theresa Portante, not Virginia), the March minutes were accepted and approved with that change.

Bench policy: Discussion began on developing a committee policy regarding benches on conservation lands and specifically at Jenks, where a request for a memorial bench has been made. Tom T. said that he has spoken with the people who made that request and they are still interested; he also noted that presently the Town's policy is that memorial plaques are not allowed on benches.

Jim stated that he has come up with some initial thoughts about elements that will need to be part of a Town bench policy, which he based on policies that Joan has provided, e.g., from Sudbury Valley Trustees and the Town of Arlington. Following some discussion, the list included:

- a price (*see more in first paragraph below*)
- a bench "lifetime," or period of time during which the Town would agree to maintain the bench, after which the donor could be given the option to pay for another period of maintenance or it could be removed
- the type(s) of benches (wood [probably cedar or teak], recycled plastic, granite; one consideration is whether we want just a horizontal slab for a seat or to include a back and arms to help those with some physical limitations) (*see more in second paragraph below*)
- the ability to vary elements (number of benches, siting options, and perhaps type of bench) from parcel to parcel, and full Committee (as opposed to donor) control of these decisions

Tom A. raised the question of whether to have the price include a specific fundraising component, above the price set for bench purchase, installation, and maintenance. Most people seemed to think that this could at least be a choice that the donor could be given. The possibility was also raised as to whether, if this option were chosen, it might include the option of a memorial plaque.

If people want to check out the bench types noted above, there are wooden benches with arms and backs at the Arboretum; recycled plastic benches in Bettina's yard and at NARA Park, between the bathhouse and the beach; and granite benches at Faulkner House and the Arboretum (two in the herb garden area near Main St.). (Bettina's house is at 125 School St.: the light yellow house at the corner of Chadwick and School. Feel free to pull into her driveway and take a look at the bench.)

Turning to the question of benches at Jenks, there was some discussion of location; Tom T. offered a general opinion that it should provide a good view for birding and that there should be some taller backdrop, such as a tree, so that the bench doesn't stand out visually. A straw vote was taken to get a quick sense of what those present think of the number benches that we should stipulate for Jenks (none, one, or two), and one seemed to be most popular; a second straw vote on a slab bench vs. one with

arms and back went for the latter.

Jim asked if there were any volunteers to start the process of drafting (1) a general bench policy and (2) suggestions specifically for Jenks. Joan volunteered for the first, Tom A. for the latter.

Background on raising the question of hunting on conservation land: Tom T. began by saying that he thinks (though he isn't certain) that, with BoS permission, there could be hunting on specific conservation lands, and he is suggesting a future discussion of this idea by this Committee. He then provided background about what sparked his interest in such a discussion: The Fish and Wildlife office on Harris Street is now vacant and the State is interested in getting rid of the property. Tom thinks that it would be a good place for the Town's recreation office, so he has made initial inquiries to the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and they have suggested the general idea of transferring the buildings to the Town in return for a conservation restriction on a parcel or parcels of Town land, which would be held by Fish and Wildlife and would allow hunting. Tom has had the Fish and Wildlife buildings assessed, but it is not immediately clear how a fair financial exchange might be structured.

Tom T. noted that a side benefit of allowing hunting would be a reduction in the number of both deer and deer ticks. Tom A. added that the deer-hunting season is short (two-weeks), it would cover a limited area, and it is probable that only a small number of permits would be issued.

It was suggested that Tom T. gather more information about the land-swap idea and that stewards think about the possibility of allowing hunting on a small portion of our conservation lands for future discussion.

Great Hill blazing: As a follow-up to discussion at the February and March meetings, Peggy said that she and Bettina have agreed on a recommendation that the four trails within the loop trail (this includes the new one that is flagged but not yet cut on the east side of the hill) all have blue blazes but be distinguished by different blaze shapes: standard vertical rectangle, horizontal rectangle, triangle, and circle. The map would show blue trails with the addition of small shape icons. She said the triangle and circle (particularly the triangle) might be a bit more difficult than the rectangle to paint when the tree bark is deeply grooved, as it often is, but they hope to be able to do an acceptable job and will use triangles on the shortest trail (on the west side of the hill). Jim raised the question of whether "You Are Here" maps with the new icons might also be posted on trees on the hill (as was suggested at the February meeting), and Peggy agreed that this could be done and would be a good idea at the three blue trail junctions. Laurie confirmed that the "You Are Here" maps that had been posted on trees at Spring Hill last fall are still in place and intact after the winter. A vote was taken and this change from our usual blazing protocol was unanimously agreed to.

Guidebook revisions: Peggy reiterated the basics of the email directions she sent out requesting that stewards look over their parcel maps and two parcel descriptions (guidebook and website) and send her, by May 1, notes about differences between the two versions, opinions (if any) about what should or shouldn't be included, and changes to parcel boundaries or trails since the current guidebook was published. This is *not* a request for a rewrite but just a way to get the process started.

A short discussion followed in which the idea that a print version might not be necessary was stated again, this time by Laurie, who noted that a website-based guide would allow us to keep up-to-date on changes. Peggy stated that we at least want to get a single description for each parcel as a starting point, rather than the two we currently have, and that even if we do publish another print version, we can update the web version as subsequent changes occur.

One change suggested was a “features” chart indicating which parcels are good for various activities, such as cross-country skiing, birding, easy walks, etc.; Jim said he would be willing to work on this. Joan said that it would be helpful to have the bulleted information located in the current print version at the beginning of parcel descriptions available online, and Jim responded that we should be able to have a full downloadable version of the guidebook online, whether or not we also have a print version.

Invasives update: Jim reported that his main invasives activity this year will again focus on garlic mustard removal. Picking has already started at Camp Acton and the Arboretum, and he has sent out a schedule of when work will be occurring at which locations. The picking season goes through early June.

Joan mentioned that autumn olive was not addressed in Jim’s 2006 report to ConsCom, and therefore LSCCom has no written guidelines approved by ConsCom regarding management or removal of autumn olive. Jim said that he didn’t know the particulars about autumn olive in 2006, but he plans to investigate it at some point.

Camp Acton firewood sheds: Bettina reported that an Eagle Scout, Louis Widom, has been in discussions with Tom T., Cathy Fochtman, Bruce Rachman, and herself about a possible Eagle project to design and build small firewood sheds on concrete platforms at Camp Acton, probably at campsites 1-3. The purpose is to provide a place for left-over firewood to be stored out of the weather so that it will be less subject to rotting. The design hasn’t been finalized yet, but Bettina will report in again when that happens, and Louis will perhaps come to a meeting to give a short presentation.

Wood Lane kiosk: Bettina reported that the kiosk at the Arboretum entrance at the end of Wood Lane, though still standing, is rotting at the base and in danger of toppling. Bob will put it on the repair list.

Parcels: Grassy Pond: Laurie reported that the blowdown reported by Ann near the Newtown Rd. entrance will require a chainsaw. Nagog Hill: Heidi reported that there are two blowdowns that need to be removed. Also, she said that the bridge on the loop trail south of Egg Rock has some soft boards and might be in need of repair.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 18, at 4 P.M.

Documents that serve as background for these discussions can be found at <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-4233>. These documents are titled:

- 0 – Agenda
- 01 – Minutes for March 16, 2011
- 02 – Great Hill blazing: see these Feb emails for some background
- 03 – Guidebook revisions of parcel descriptions by stewards (emails)
- 031 – 2003 guidebook text (link)
- 04 – Invasives update (Acton Invasives blog)
- 05 – firewood box eagle idea at Camp Acton
- 06 – bench policy (emails)
- 07 – Permitting hunting on conservation lands (email)
- 08 – Parcel updates