

**Land Stewardship Committee Meeting Minutes
December 19, 2012
Acton Town Hall**

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

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

Nonmember present: Joe Will (Quaboag Road resident)

Meeting minutes: The November minutes were approved after Jim removed one line that he had belatedly added to the final version of the minutes. This sentence was about the “Use at your own risk” signs proposed for the Spring Hill boardwalk and read, “The concern is that a sign that says ‘use at your own risk’ might suggest that when signs are NOT there, the Town is somehow taking the risk, which is not what we want to communicate—trails are ALWAYS used at the trail users’ own risk.” He said that he has learned that this statement does not accurately reflect the concerns that were raised.

Meeting evaluation for November meeting: No meeting evaluation was done last month, so it was done at the beginning of this meeting. At the November meeting there was an angry exchange initiated by one committee member and responded to in kind by two others. At today’s evaluation several members stated that they had found the language and behavior of the initiating member (who was not in attendance during this discussion) to be unacceptable. Jim said that he, as meeting chair, felt later that he should have spoken up when it happened. Another member stated that he believed that the person in question felt repeatedly interrupted and perhaps not accorded enough respect, and he recommended that we all do a better job of allowing speakers to finish their thoughts.

On another subject, Peggy stated that it would help to be sure at the beginning of discussions involving specific locations on parcels that the location is clear, perhaps by pointing them out on the guidebook map.

Mapping group: In response to an email Jim sent out recently to committee members and the trail volunteers list, a small group that currently consists of three committee members (Jim, Bob, and Bruce Rachman) and three nonmember volunteers (Karen Mackin, Andrew Bodge, and Jason Carter) has formed a Google group to start work on a number of map-related issues that Jim has outlined:

- Over the winter help the Town get our GPS trail data into the Town’s GIS (Geographic Information System) system. The Town has allocated money for this work during this time period.
- Move our trail data to publicly accessible mapping sources such as Google maps and Nokia maps.
- Make small fixes to the JPEG/PDF maps currently on our website and gather GPS data for any trails that are missing data.
- Consider the possibilities for new maps of our conservation properties, since Bob and Jim have not been able to figure out how former member Rich Rhode made digital changes to Tom Tidman’s hand-drawn maps. Some of our maps need to be expanded to include new trails in new areas; others just need changes within their original borders.

Philip suggested the group also consider how our maps and trail information might be presented via our own smartphone app, similar to the National Park Service app.

Bob noted that the town of Groton has good online trail maps that could be a useful resource; he will provide a link. The system they use, Gmap4, allows users to see the whole town's trails at once or choose a specific conservation area. Gmap4 also allows for specific trails or points of interest to be highlighted, with longer descriptions available by clicking.

Guidebook revision discussion: Related to the mapping group discussion above is the question of what to do about our guidebook, a topic that has been discussed at several past meetings as our supply of guidebooks has dwindled. Those options have generally been characterized as a new print edition with updated maps and parcel descriptions vs. updated maps and parcel descriptions being available online only (for individual users to either download or view onscreen), although another possibility is reprinting a fairly small quantity of the current guidebook as a stopgap. At the beginning of today's discussion, Bettina announced that we have finally run out of guidebooks, and since the last meeting she and Tom Tidman have, in fact, made the decision to order 100 more of the current edition from Lynn Horsky, who helped design that edition, to tide us over; funds are available for this. It took about a year to sell the last 70 copies, and Bettina said she would keep track of sales of this new batch.

In discussing the print vs. online options, several people stated that there is still a demand by some for a print version, and also that it is good to have an actual physical book, even if only for special purposes or occasions. Bettina's tracking of sales of the reprints over the coming months can be used to get some sense of the current demand. Several suggested that we should consider raising the price if we do another print version. Jim noted another possibility for dealing with the desire for printed copies: there are "print-on-demand" businesses that have digital files of books that individuals can order for themselves as needed, thereby providing print copies (complete with bindings, in color, etc.) for those who want them without requiring us to stock and sell them. He has recently found a print-on-demand business that can provide spiral bindings. These copies would be a bit more expensive than our current ones, he noted.

Regardless of whether we print a new edition, sign up with a print-on-demand service, or go to online maps and descriptions only, revised versions of both maps and descriptions are needed. Peggy said that she has revised copies of the parcel descriptions and needs to send them out to stewards for their review, and she will do this over the winter months. Bettina offered to help with this. The map possibilities will be considered by the new mapping group (see item above).

As a possible addition to the guidebook, in whatever form we decide on, Joan suggested that we create a chart noting which parcels are especially good for certain types of activities (e.g., birding, cross-country skiing, camping, horseback riding).

Horse manure on trails: This agenda item was prompted by an observation by J.B. Sweeney, our temporary stewards at Wills Hole/Town Forest, that there has been a lot of horse manure on the trails recently, and her question about whether there are any rules or guidelines about this. The general consensus of those present was that, since horseback riding is allowed on our parcels, there will necessarily be occasional horse manure on the trails (mainly at Wills Hole/Town Forest and Nagog Hill) but that it isn't a serious problem. Bob stated that horse manure is less offensive and less of a problem than dog poop.

As background, Jim also noted that a while ago he, Bettina, and Joan began an examination of several versions of conservation land use rules in order to come up with a complete, consolidated list, and the last thing they worked on was this question. They have not met for a while, and he hopes this

discussion will help the process of completing a new set of rules to propose.

Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) discussion about townwide pedestrian and bicycle connections: Jim reported that TAC is looking for new areas to focus on now that the Town's transportation shuttle is up and running, and a group that includes people from the sidewalk, train station advisory, and 20/20 committees, among others, has met twice already. One idea that is related to LSCOM interests and concerns is to create walking loops that connect various destinations like commercial areas, schools, and the library/Town Hall as well as conservation areas. Philip added that the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail would fit into this. Another idea is to map out a good and safe bicycle route between the South Acton train station and the rail trail and to advocate for any construction or design that would be needed.

Volunteer appreciation event: People who attended the event said they enjoyed it, but it was noted that almost all who attended were stewards (with a few spouses and kids); as in the past, we didn't find a way to attract volunteers to the event, just as we haven't succeeded in attracting many to our work projects. It was suggested that perhaps we should go back to thinking of our yearly social get-together as predominantly a steward event to which volunteers would be invited, rather than trying to put the focus on the volunteers. The problem remains of how to successfully attract volunteers. Philip stated that organizations he knows of that do this well tend to invite them to fun events first, then have them get involved with work projects.

Winter trail prep: Jim wanted to provide time to discuss what stewards should do on their parcels in preparation for and/or during the winter months to keep trails passable as well as usable by cross-country skiers, for instance. Bob recommended cutting back small white pines that are close to the trail, as well as small trees that are leaning in the direction of the trail; both tend to get weighted down by snow and encroach on the trail after snowstorms. Tom noted that boardwalks can be a particular problem, building up a crown of hardened snow and ice toward the middle of the boardwalk, but he doesn't have a solution. Jim brought up an idea that was raised last winter of whether an attempt should be made (perhaps with signs) to ask people not to walk over cross-country ski tracks, but there appeared to be little interest in this at this time.

Parcel updates: Grassy Pond: Ann said she has found more spray-painted graffiti on rocks along the access trail from Newtown Road, as well as one by the observation deck. It is fluorescent green and the marks look like symbols of some kind. Bob mentioned again his graffiti-removing chemical but said it still takes some work to remove the paint. Bettina wondered about using this on graffiti at the Arboretum but questioned its toxicity and whether it should be used near ponds or wetlands; she may try metal brushes. It was recommended that we let police know about this, and Ann agreed to contact Det. Keith Campbell. There have been similar incidents elsewhere recently; Littleton was mentioned in addition to the Arboretum.

Also at Grassy Pond several Eagle Scouts have finished a bridge and some corduroying between the Willis Holden access trail and the pond.

Jenks: Bob mentioned invasives removal and tagging work being done at Jenks (also mentioned in Josh Haines's email report). Some of the species being targeted are honeysuckle, multiflora rose, autumn olive, and buckthorn. Jim added that a meadow management plan is being prepared for Jenks and said that we will cover this in a future meeting.

Nashoba Brook: Jim asked about Laurie Ullmann's email stating that the gate at Davis Road (between

the parking lot and the small meadow) has been removed and wondering if it should be replaced. Bob said it must have rusted out and doesn't think it needs to be replaced.

Stoneymeade: Nan reported that all is in order at Stoneymeade.

Meeting evaluation: Bob said he thinks we move too slowly through many agenda items and asked Jim to end discussions sooner and move on to the next agenda item. He also encouraged more people to offer solutions to problems and to take on those tasks rather than just suggest ideas or note problems.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15.

Documents that serve as background for these discussions can be found at <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-5107>. They are titled:

- 00 – LSCOM Agenda 2012 12 19
- 01 – Draft LSCOM minutes 2012 11 19
- 03 – Mapping group recruitment letter
- 05.1 – Email mentioning horse manure issue at Town Forest
- 05.2 – Paper on Horse Manure as a Risk to Human Health
- 05.3 – 2009 subgroup email on horse manure
- 06 – Email of report on meeting with TAC
- 09 – Parcel updates