

Land Stewardship Committee Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2008, 4:00 PM

Acton Town Hall

Present: Bettina Abe, Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Philip Keyes, Peggy Liversidge (minute-taker), Nan Towle Millett, Rich Rhode, Ann Shubert, Jim Snyder-Grant (chair), Tom Tidman, Laurie Ullmann
Guest: Linda McElroy

Meeting minutes: The February minutes were approved.

Restoration project at Wheeler Farm cellar hole (and environs): Linda gave a report on the restoration work that is planned to begin this season at the end of Wheeler Lane, noting that it will eventually be one site along the proposed Trail Through Time. The basic plan has just been approved by the CPC, which will provide \$30,000 for the project. LSCom and the Conservation Commission, however, will need to approve the landscaping portion of the plan. This includes relocation of the parking lot, an enhanced, handicapped accessible trail system around the site, conversion of the current parking lot and kiosk area into a central hub with larger kiosk and panels, and an overlook near the sluiceways, all of which will entail some earth moving and a lot of brushing out and cutting of saplings. In addition, the abutting neighbors will have to approve the parking lot relocation.

The aim will be to create a parklike area around a historical site—specifically, the farmhouse cellar hole, the serpentine-shaped stone walls (which served as a droving corridor for cattle), the stone walls that enclosed areas used as cattle corrals, and a stone ramp that probably led to a barn. These areas will be cleared of underbrush (by volunteers, hopefully including some LSCom members), and restoration of the cellar hole masonry and some repair of walls generally will be done (by the same masons who helped with the chamber). A few additional paths will be laid out, all of which will be handicapped accessible. The parking lot will be relocated to the right side of Wheeler Lane, beside the last abutter, and the current kiosk replaced with a larger educational display (probably four-sided and similar to the pencil factory kiosk). Restoration of the dam, mill, and sluiceways will comprise a future project proposal.

To bring the Wheeler Lane abutters into the process, Linda suggested inviting them to one of our meetings, getting feedback, and then taking the issue to the Conservation Commission. She clarified that she thinks this group should include all Wheeler Lane homeowners as well as some Milldam Road homeowners. Philip suggested that we instead arrange an onsite meeting on a weekend, and the consensus was that this was a good idea, at least as a first step. Several dates were mentioned but no decision was made. Linda and Jim, and perhaps Tom, will choose a date for that meeting.

A few other things came up in the discussion: (1) In addition to the stone artifacts that Linda mentioned, Laurie reported that there is a gravestone with the Wheeler name on it near the cellar hole, and Bob mentioned a second cellar hole located in the woods on the opposite side of the brook. This is so far unidentified and not part of the current project. (2) The USGS's proposed plan to move and upgrade the stream gauge (reported to the LSCom meeting on Nov. 1, 2006, by USGS representative Roy Socolow), which could involve digging a trench across the present parking lot, will need to be taken into consideration, although Tom stated that they have never followed up on this plan by filing with the Conservation Commission.

High school senior service day: Ann reported that this year's senior service day is Friday, May 2, from 9:00 to 2:00; the deadline for getting forms in to the school's project coordinator, Judi Bowes, is Friday, April 4. Ann will email the application form to stewards. Anyone wishing to participate should return the filled out form to Ann in time for her to submit it to Judi Bowes by the deadline.

Ron McAdow lecture: Philip brought along a provisional flyer advertising the April 30 presentation by Ron McAdow about local wildlife as recorded by the motion-sensitive cameras installed in the culvert underpasses along Route 2 in Concord. The room still has to be reserved, however, so those flyers may be inaccurate (the library is specified as the location, but we hope to be able to book Room 204 in Town Hall instead). When the arrangements have been made, Philip will email a final version, which people can print out and post around town (including on kiosks). Please let him know where you post them.

Chamber trail: It was reported that Eagle Scout Andrew Kappel is ready to cut the short new trails (one of which is a re-route) at the chamber if the routes have been finalized. Philip stated that he and Linda plan to meet very soon to make a final decision about this.

Bay Circuit Trail: Laurie reported that he had received a letter from someone at the BCT organization mentioning that a few people had gotten lost last fall on the Acton portion of the trail and recommending that more BCT blazes be added. Laurie noted that he has already made sure that all junctions have BCT logo blazes and has affixed an additional white blaze beyond that point and at certain sharp turns, but it appears that the BCT people want more frequent white blazes. Laurie said he is willing to add these (probably to trees that have our own yellow, blue, and red blazes), and there were no objections. He and Nan will talk about "blazing" on the street portion of the trail in the Stoneymeade subdivision.

Meadow mowing and management: It was requested that Tom make sure that the Grassy Pond and Jenks meadows and the Nagog Hill meadow adjacent to the long boardwalk are mowed this spring, since they were not done in the fall. Nan and Jim also mentioned that they plan to investigate information about meadow management.

Water on trails: Jim mentioned his concern about the state of some trails on hilly terrain that are subject to erosion when water channels directly down the trail and is wondering whether we can do anything to improve these areas. This happens especially at Nagog Hill, and also at Great Hill. Philip said that digging small dips to interrupt the downward gradient and directing the water to the side of the trail at these points (similar to the waterbar technique, but without using wooden bars) was one possibility; he also mentioned "turnpike" and "punchon" techniques. Laurie mentioned the success a few years ago at Nashoba Brook of moving stones to serve as steppingstones or to create channels to direct water away from the trail. Philip suggested that he and Jim go together to look at the Nagog Hill trail.

Thoughts about chairing LSCom: Jim stated that, as committee chair, he has found his to-do list getting longer and longer and feels he is agreeing to take on too many of the things that need to be done. He would like to have tasks be better distributed. It would also be useful for him to have someone to brainstorm with before each meeting to help create the agenda and talk over things that are going on.

Grassy Pond boardwalk: Bob wants to finish off the boardwalk, which will involve putting down 50 feet to provide the transition between the old and new boardwalks. It should cost around \$700. We don't know how much is left in the 2008 budget, but Bob was given the go-ahead to use that amount if it is presently available or, if there is less than \$700, to use whatever is available, with the rest to come from the 2009 budget.

Arboretum bog boardwalk: Bettina reported that the Friends of the Acton Arboretum want the bog boardwalk to be fixed. Bob responded that he thinks all the bad boards have been

replaced and that the boardwalk is in decent shape, though he thinks that people jogging on it might be weakening it. Bettina said she will take this information back to the group.

Canoe launch tarp: Bob suggested that the large tarp, which was put down a couple of years ago to try to suppress the Japanese knotweed, be moved to a different spot. Nan replied that she thinks that the tarp will probably shred if moved and that the knotweed will probably return; she suggests putting wood chips over the remains of the tarp. Others thought it was a bad idea to leave the material to decay even further.

Parcels: Wetherbee: Bob noted that there are two uncovered well holes at Wetherbee (south of the blue trail as it approaches Rt. 2, fairly close to the vernal pool), and he is concerned that they could be a safety hazard. It was suggested that a square movable boardwalk segment that is presently in place in Guggins, along the blue trail behind the Boxborough residential area, might be moved and used as a cover for one of the wells.
Spring Hill: Philip has just received a report that there is a downed tree at Spring Hill that may have damaged a boardwalk. He will be checking this out shortly.

Photo calendar idea: Philip is proposing to put together a calendar featuring photos of LSCoM properties, which he suggests we might use for PR purposes. Anyone with interesting, high-resolution photos (preferably horizontal, or ones that could be cropped to make good horizontal pictures) should submit them to him. Ann has said she will help him select the pictures, and others are welcome to help.

Website formatting: Philip reported that our current website format (inherited from the Town's old website) is out of date and makes editing difficult. He would like us to install a more modern format.

Morrison Farm tool storage idea: Jim raised again the idea of moving LSCoM tools from Bob's house to the Morrison Farm barn. It was noted that a stall would need to be cleaned out and a basic system for signing out items would need to be put in place. Interest in doing anything at the moment seemed low, however, so the project is, at least temporarily, being demoted to low-priority status.

Meeting with Concord Trails Committee: Philip and Linda had a good meeting recently with the newly organized Concord Trails Committee to discuss blazing and other basic issues.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 16, at 4:00 P.M.