

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 26, 2014, Town Hall, Room 126, 7 P.M.

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Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Jim Snyder-Grant (Chair), Laurie Ullmann

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Ann Shubert, Joe Will (Minutes)

Nonmembers: John Watlington (Acton resident)

Jim called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M.

Given that there was not a quorum of regular members, Jim noted that, per the Town of Acton Committee Handbook, the associate members present are to be counted toward the quorum and are entitled to vote at this meeting.

Review and approval of February 25 minutes

Minutes moved and voted unanimously.

Open Space and Recreation Plan update

- Acton's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) meeting for townsfolk occurred a couple weeks ago. There was lots of feedback from the townsfolk and it's being incorporated into the OSRP as appropriate. Additional comments will still be welcomed.
- Based on a discussion with the state, it was determined that it's better to have a seven-year OSRP. Acton got permission to make its OSRP a seven-year plan, so now it will be for 2014–2021.
- The downside of a town having no OSRP is that the town cannot apply for certain state funds, particularly for land purchases. With an OSRP, a town can get some self-help funds back.
- More OSRP information follows in other agenda notes.

Review accessibility matrix

- The Acton OSRP has been sorely lacking in accessibility information. The state has sent Acton the information it needs and we've been scrambling to assemble this information. Accessibility information has two parts:

Part 1: Accessibility Features and Challenges

Part 2: Transition Plans to Address Challenges

- Jim presented a "matrix of accessibility" (laid out large on the table) that includes both Conservation and Recreation facilities. Jim reviewed and said that he would e-send matrix rows (for different parcels) to the respective stewards for their comments. Stewards will have to make some judgment calls. The matrix will be compressed and folded to be part of the OSRP. The matrix spreadsheet is also in the Cloud.
- Jim is not sure how to communicate the accessibility information to people who will be using the trails. Perhaps we could post it at trailheads.
- The matrix is to include benches and their locations. We went over benches we could recall:
 - Nashoba Brook has three; two at Wheeler Lane and an "unauthorized" bench near the pencil factory kiosk. It also has the benches that are part of the pencil factory kiosk itself.

- Wills Hole/Town Forest has three.
 - Pratt's Brook has two in the Senior Park grassy area. They are new and embedded, along with a picnic table.
 - The Arboretum has several. Bettina will supply the matrix information for these.
 - Grassy Pond has two on the boardwalk viewing deck.
 - Other parcels have benches associated with tables such as Camp Acton and Great Hill.
- Action:** Jim will e-mail matrix rows (for different parcels) to Stewards.

Review accessibility future plans

Jim has a document of possible future accessibility upgrades for the various parcels. Bettina and Tom Tidman brainstormed the document. Jim reviewed the document at this meeting.

- Camp Acton: Make the toilet handicapped accessible (HA). This is a priority and a simple fix. Campsite 1 is easy to get to, so make it HA. There could be a policy for unlocking the gate for people who need it, but, in general, we don't want cars in the campsite.
- Grassy Pond: Make a HA space at the Nagog Hill parking, and a solid surface trail from that parking to the meadow. A bench under the apple trees would be nice. It would be nice to do the boardwalk too, but to get there would be tough. To connect with Anderson parcel, there could be dry corridor from a parcel on Newtown Road that is currently privately owned but is on the high-priority acquisition list for the town.
- Great Hill: Could make HA access to the fishing pond. There could be a bench near the pond; also an upgrade to a HA porta potty at the parking behind the Firehouse.
- Guggins Brook: A road used to go straight in from the Mass Avenue entrance. Improving the road and clearing out a view of the wetlands could lead to a scenic overlook of the marsh that could be at an accessible grade.
- Heath Hen Meadow: Per David, it would be nice to have access to the bridge from the meadow side. HA would require a widening of part of the bridge. Even HA improvement a "little ways" from Robbins Street parking would get you to the meadows.
- Jenks: Consider paving a short trail down from the parking area to a scenic overlook at the brook. Bob says that the grade is too steep for the ADA. We might be able to make this workable, such as with railings and one or more landing areas.
- Nashoba Brook: Jim's document acknowledges current HA features at the end of Wheeler Lane associated with Trail Through Time improvements. The Town has a waiver from the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board for the foundation stairs at Wheeler Lane.
- Pratt's Brook: The picnic table there is not yet a HA cantilevered one. Is there a scout making a HA table? Jim will check w/Bettina and, if so, will put it in the plan.
- Wills Hole/Town Forest: There's a trench in the middle of the esker: That will make it a challenge to level the trail from Nagog Park to the benches and to Wills Hole.
- For some of the parcels, e.g., Wetherbee, there are no plans for accessibility.

Review bench donation application

- Bettina has applied for a bench in memory of her dog, Luna, who died about 1.5 months ago. She sees the bench as being near the stone bridge. The preferred type would be wood. Bettina has offered plaque wording.
- As we consider benches in general, we have to regard this request as if it's from an applicant we don't know.
- We should think about where benches belong on a parcel. (See accessibility matrix discussion above for where benches are currently.) Bob would like to hear from LSC members whether they've seen

anyone sitting on the benches. Some members themselves have used them.

- Seeing water from a bench is positive.
- Where, in addition to Bettina's suggested location, are good locations at Pratt's Brook? Possibilities: One or two at high points along the trail that goes over the ridges at the south end so that you look out over the swamp; a bench overlooking the pond below the railroad tracks (noted that there is still a piece of a car there); a bench in the blueberry barrens. So, there are a number of places possible at Pratt's Brook, the preceding list not necessarily being final.
- Benches should be anchored on concrete platforms which would help hold down surrounding weeds. Concern: If benches are too far in, how do we get a concrete footing to the site? Virtually total agreement that that would be no problem.
- Who installs a bench? Probably the Cemetery Department. A bench and installation are not cheap. The installation fee in our bench policy is \$500.
- For Luna, Bettina is suggesting a wooden bench. Could it be stone? Bettina probably is looking for comfort, but a concern with wooden benches is vandalism. By policy, we are not required to maintain a bench so wood would be okay. In any case, we can learn from whatever we do.
- Jim is hearing a cautious sense of moving ahead with Bettina's request. Are we asking for approval tonight? No, we can address this again at the next meeting when Bettina can be here. Jim will ask Theresa to check out the site suggested by Bettina.

Community Service worker available (work to be done by 4/20, up to 20 hours)

This is a court-mandated action for a 16-year-old who is holding down part-time job. Suggestions:

- Trash needs removal from Robbins Mill; so do the hunting stand and the plastic percolation pipes. The latter would be better dealt with when the ground is not frozen.
- The worker could spend a couple hours picking up trash along Route 2 or at other sites within Acton. There is no formal cleanup day this year.
- The sign at Nashoba Brook (Wheeler Lane) needs installing. The sign is to be rebuilt. The posts are out there; they need to be put back into ground (two holes have to be dug). The ground has to be "diggable." (The paint on the signs is peeling because no primer was used. Bettina is looking into this with a paint company.) Laurie could supervise hole digging at Nashoba Brook for the sign erection. This sounds like the Number 1 project for this worker.

High School Senior Community Service Day

- This is Friday, May 2.
- At Guggins, we could add more boardwalks. Jim reminded us of Ed Russell's project to add boardwalks to a muddy portion of the blue trail at Guggins brook near Inches Brook Lane.
- Bob said that he has committed to an Eagle Scout project (Sid is the name of the Scout) that will add 24 feet of standard boardwalk. Sid's plans are almost done and the stakes are already there. (Sid has yet to send Bob his final drawings.) Bob wants to make sure that the seniors building boardwalks with Ed do not disrupt Sid's project: they need to skip those 24 feet of the blue trail.
- Ed Russell knows about the Scout project and would have his high school crew work before or beyond the Scout project's location. Ed is making a list of his needs and the Town is buying the wood. Jim will talk to Ed to see that the form to get a Senior Service day crew gets filled out. Should Ed recruit Bob for the day? (Last year Bob called Ed to offer assistance.) There is a role for someone to direct where the frames could go. Laurie could do it, but Linda McElroy has recruited him for Wheeler Lane. Laurie will check on what he'll be doing. John Watlington (meeting guest) may be available.
- Another possible project: Garlic mustard picking. Jim can supervise one Great Hill site. Jim expects to train two people from the volunteer list. They could supervise the picking of garlic mustard at

Wheeler Lane.

- Bettina has a project at the Arboretum.

Action: Jim will publicize garlic mustard training.

Garlic mustard picking

Starting in April, Jim will spend weekends recruiting people to pick garlic mustard. The focus will be the Arboretum with some work at Wheeler Lane. Scouts have done amazing picking work at Camp Acton. Jim can give them more to do this year. Nagog Hill has never been fully picked. This year, we will try to weed whack there to keep the plant from going to seed. We will also remove stuff (like rose bushes) that gets in the way. Jim will take care of smaller infestations on weekdays. Jim will send out signup lists to any group he can think of. Volunteers can contact Jim. Jim has been doing this for six years now. Some infestations have been eliminated at the Arboretum. Some at Wheeler Lane have been significantly reduced in size.

Cemetery agreement update

Jim reviewed the agreement. Brewster Conant, Chair of the Cemetery Commission, contacted Jim and they had a “fine” talk. Brewster had talked with Shawn O’Malley who is in charge of the cemetery crew.

- As a next step, Jim will send a slightly edited agreement to Brewster and Brewster will take it up with the Cemetery Commission. The agreement will relate to Mt. Hope Cemetery only. Current agreement says “no signs.” Jim discussed with Brewster the possibility of a sign at the bridge explaining the cemetery land and Brewster was fine with such a sign. Jim will delete from the agreement the part about removing the bridge. He will also suggest extending the lifetime of the agreement to, say, five years, and making it renewable.
- The parking area at the back of Mt. Hope has been working okay except for dog issues, so the draft agreement will remove the mention of ‘no parking’ and replace it with a generic acknowledgment that any trail users must respect Cemetery rules with respect to parking, dogs, etc.
- It was suggested that Jim might talk with Brewster about the notion of the bridge being somehow made HAHAHA with the possibility of platforms at both ends.
- Dogs will not be part of the agreement. At Mt. Hope, the cemetery is scheduled to be developed near where people park to use the woodland trails. Jim hopes that dog owners will not let dogs run free where there are cemetery stones. If dogs go right off into the woods from the parking, there should be no problem. Laurie: Dogs mess all over the trails. People should carry bags and pick up after their dogs.
- Jim did not talk with Brewster about the idea of a similar agreement involving Woodlawn Cemetery.

Volunteer/Committee member update

- Turnover occurs at the end of June. Terms end for all associate members and one-third of the regular members. The regular members with terms terminating in 2014 are Tom Arnold, Phillip Keyes, and Nan Towle Millett.
- We are allowed 9 regular members and 11 associates. Now we have 9 and 9.
- The change in the meeting time(s) affects things. There will be some further changes. Jim is discussing with a few folks the idea of them becoming members.
- Do we need new stewards? We would for Wright Hill; also, for Anderson. Anderson would be a continuation of Bulette. Andy Gatesman would do this. Jim couldn’t take on Wright Hill unless he stopped being Chair.
- Jim would give up being Chair, but no one has stepped forward. Sometime during the next year, Jim

will try to figure out some transition. Right now, Dave is Co-Chair.

Discussion of Town Meeting warrant articles that impact the Committee's work

There are two that affect the LSC.

1. Wright Hill

2. A consent item on trail easements from Guggins Brook to Wright Hill.

- Between New View and Gregory Lane, there's a bunch of land that's owned in common by the New View and Gregory Lane Homeowners Associations. Both associations are willing to grant trail easements between Guggins Brook and Wright Hill. (Jim diagramed the easement trails on the white board.) The Town Manager says this requires a vote. So there is a warrant article about "accepting the trail easements." It is a consent article. Eventually the actual easements will have to be written up formally. A trail easement doesn't have to be surveyed. A sketch works if both parties are comfortable with it. There are no finance issues related to easements.
- Laurie moved, and it was seconded, that we support Warrant Article 19, the purchase of the Wright Hill property. Vote was unanimous.

Chainsaw training

- There is three-day training in Maynard, May 14–16. Is it still open? We don't know. Jim had asked Bettina and Tom Tidman about attending one day (Would one day be enough?) vs. all three days. Jim said that Bettina thought "Maybe not," and he hasn't heard from Tom.
- Jim asked if anyone at this meeting would be interested in one day. Laurie has already signed up. There was no other response.

Edits to parcel narratives

- This involves updating the Web write-ups. Jim has sent file links and also actual Word files to appropriate peoples. Bob has given comments on seven parcels.
- Bob would like better descriptions of plants. Right now it's too general.
- Laurie: Pictures in online versions would be helpful. Any facts should be researched.
- Ann gave Jim her notes on the Grassy Pond write-up.
- Laurie has to coordinate Bay Circuit Trail write-ups with ours.
- Laurie: We have these Trail Through Time panels going up. What's the difference between what we show at a kiosk and what we show on an information panel (the term Linda McElroy uses for the smaller presentations)? We could call the pencil kiosk an "informational kiosk." The panels at Wills Hole are information panels.
- What about the Milldam access? Are we going to mark it at all?
- The Milldam road cul-de-sac goes right down to a stone chamber. There is agreement with the landowner that there's to be no sign there, but there is a pedestrian easement.
- Which is it: Wheeler Mill or Robbins Mill, 18th century or 20th century, respectively, but one and the same sites? We should explain that both are names for the same place.

Parcel updates

Bob sent an email on Robbins Mill. Ann will check out Grassy Pond this weekend.

At this point, departures eliminated a quorum.

Evaluate this meeting

David: One of the best.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, April 22, at 7 P.M., in Room 121.

Items that serve as background for today's meeting are here: <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-6147>. They are titled as follows:

- 00 - Agenda as filed.**
- 01 - LSC minutes 2014 02 25 draft**
- 02 - Open Space And Recreation Plan - link to latest drafts**
- 03 - Link to draft Accessibility Matrix**
- 04 - Brainstorm from NR on accessibility improvements**
- 05.1 - Bench Donation - Abe**
- 05.2 - Bench Policy**
- 07 - High School Senior Service Day**
- 08 - Garlic mustard picking announcement and signup**