

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 28, 2014, Town Hall, Room 126, 7 P.M.

Attendance

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

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Bob Farra, Elan Riesman, Joe Will (Minutes)

Nonmembers:

Janet Adachi (LSC's Board of Selectmen liaison), John Watlington (Acton resident, possible member)
Sherman Smith (Acton resident, possible member)

Jim called the meeting to order at 7:18 P.M.

Review and approval of April 22 minutes

Minutes as corrected moved and voted unanimously.

National Trails Day scout crew

June 7. There are Scouts doing work this day. Originally they were to attack the garlic mustard at Camp Acton but there is not enough there to pick. What's there is in poison ivy and by June 7 any garlic mustard will have died and released its seed. Jim suggested other projects including distributing wood chips at Pratt's Brook, and that's what they'll do. Bettina has been communicating with the Scouts and they have been directed to Allen Warner for backpacks. Bettina has requested chips, asking that they be dumped to the left of the kiosk by the stone wall so they don't block the trail. Perhaps there should be some police tape put up with a sign "Dump chips here." The Scouts are Cub Scouts. Cubs can't carry that much but their parents will be coming too. The Cubs did a huge pile of chips last year at Grassy Pond.

Robbins Mill still has a pile of wood chips in the parking lot. These chips were there all winter. Some of the chips were used for the playground. Bettina will ask the Recreation Department about these. One option: put more of them onto the playground.

Grassy Pond (Newtown Road) parking review

Jim shared diagrams of proposed improvements to the parking area. The proposed parking for three cars is similar to the parking at Jenks. Other features include removal of a big tree (a beautiful beech tree that would be in the middle of the parking), and the addition of a wooden guardrail. Jim noticed for a second time a car stuck in the current parking. Having an actual parking area will allow people to discover the Conservation Area. Did Tom Tidman find out what the "utility gate" indicated on the plan is? It is left over from a base map. It's not anything that we are planning to put in.

Jim would like to tell Tom of any questions or concerns so that he could work things out with the Conservation Commission. Bob Guba pointed out that the parking would not impact wetlands. However the wetlands bylaw does specify a 100-ft boundary extending from wetlands. Also, the new parking would require bringing in lots of fill to elevate it. After you park (on filled-in parking), there's going to be quite a drop. How will Tom manage this? Bob suggests there is room for a switchback. Jim says there are lots of possibilities: stairs, a ramp, a swing rope, a zip line, for examples. It's things like

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this that the Conservation Commission has to deal with.

Motion: We recommend the plan for this new parking lot. Passed unanimously.

Committee membership update

Jim's thinking: This is a 3-part puzzle:

1. Who works on which parcel? There are some new ones coming on line (but not yet ready to be discussed):

- Wright Hill
- We've started conversations about trails in back of Morrison Farm, could LSC steward them informally, or under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission
- Not a new parcel, but Bettina is willing to be assigned to one parcel instead of two, so she could give up the Canoe Launch.

2. People? There are up to four people (Sherman and John (see Attendance at top), Joe Holmes, and Amanda Stern possibly interested in joining as stewards. There are people for reappointment: All associate members, plus regular members Nan, Philip, and Tom Arnold.

Nan is happy to go back to being an associate. She likes to walk Stonymeade and needs to get back to sending a monthly report. Phil would prefer to come to meetings. He understands the "why" of evening meetings. He would be an associate. Joe Will is willing to be a regular member but doesn't want to take away a slot from anyone else. Josh Haines is not sure about being a regular member. He is still deciding where to spend his time. He may become a Cub Scout leader, and his work requires that he travel fairly often. Bob Farra (associate) would prefer to wait another year to become acclimated to the LSC. Bettina is happy to be either regular or associate. Elan will stay an associate.

Laurie: Why the membership numbers? The Board of Selectmen set maximums of 9 regular members and 11 associates. Jim and the BOS invented the numbers a while ago. We could adjust this.

3. When do we meet?

Meeting day:

It appears to basically be a choice between Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Checking the current group: Dave has Acton Conservation Trust meeting on the fourth Tuesday. Bob Guba prefers Tuesday and the fourth Tuesday seems to work but he could switch to a different Tuesday. Second Tuesdays are out; third Tuesdays would work.

Meeting day and time:

There's been poor turnout at the evening meetings. Turnout for this evening's meeting is okay. Three regular members have time problems with evening meetings: Philip can make none; Bruce can't make Wednesday evenings (this one is an exception); Tom Arnold can't make Tuesday evenings; Nan doesn't do evening meetings. There have been associates who have expressed interest, but who haven't been coming to evening meetings.

Meeting time:

Jim is trying to get a sense of a best time for meetings. Bob points out that there have been lots of reasons published recently about meeting times. We can't continue to depend on retired people. We need young blood and new ideas, so we should stick to evenings and to the same day. If you want to attract people, you need to fix the details. If people want to join us, they have to work within our rules.

Bettina wondered about 5:30. People like to eat, so 5:30 might not work with working people. We could do 5:30 and do the "pizza thing." Bruce has a 7 o'clock activity on Wednesdays; so earlier in the evening may get him here. We can ask Tom and Philip about this.

Jim thinks we need to fall back to afternoon meetings for the coming year with the understanding that we will go back to evenings next year. If we stick with evenings, Philip would become an associate. Jim has asked the four potential new members about coming to evening meetings, sharing the possible meeting times with them. Sherman is relatively free. He volunteers with HGRM on Tuesdays and Thursdays. His HGRM shift ends at 4 P.M. and he is free evenings. John can't answer right now. Joe Holmes is available during the day. Per Bettina, Joe has been volunteering at the Arboretum a lot this summer.

Jim pointed out that our afternoon meetings have been from 4 to 5:30 or 6.

Do we know why people can't make a 7 P.M. meeting? No answer.

Bruce: So, it's either 4 P. M. or 7? Either of those times is okay with David, as he doesn't work any more. Laurie: I'm resigned to not going hiking on Wednesdays if we would meet in the afternoon. However, he thinks evenings would be better because we might get more people dropping in.

Jim expects to hear more yet from the four potential members and the associates.

Jim will continue to work on all three parts of the puzzle.

Summer meetings or events

Do we want to meet in the summer?

Bob Guba never agreed to take a summer off when he joined this group and wonders what's wrong with meeting in the summer. Jim is just discussing with the group as to what it wants to do.

If summer meetings would be on third Tuesdays, the meetings would be June 17, July 15, and August 19. We'll schedule these meetings for this summer.

Re June 17, Dave is missing that day.

Jim is here July 15. Any objections to meeting then? No.

Jim is elsewhere on 8/19, so we'll need a Chair. Dave is not sure about being here that day. Bruce will be around on 8/19 but he doesn't want to be Chair. Bettina would be Chair if she were here. The August meeting may be cancelled.

Does anyone want to host or organize a social event in June, July, or August? September would be a good time. Bruce would have it at his place, date to be determined by the Committee.

Field meeting with Concord Water Department

Jim shared four pictures of areas around Nagog Pond that Jim, Bettina, and Tom Tidman walked with two people from the Concord Water Department (CWD). The CWD concern is for discouraging people from being right next to Nagog Pond, the largest unfiltered public water supply in Massachusetts. The CWD is concerned about keeping the water clean. It also seems to be realistic about not being able to keep people off the trails near the pond. The CWD wants to discourage the public now. If they are able to get a full filtration system installed in the future, there may be some relaxing of rules. A relaxing of rules would be important for making an eventual connection through CWD land between Nagog Hill and the Littleton Conservation lands.

It was noted that

- people and horses live on Breezy Point Road adjacent to CWD land. They are frequent users of that land.
- our current yellow loop trail goes on CWD land near the pond. The CWD recognizes this, and is okay with the trail staying where it is, but is not offering a formal easement.
- kids swim in Nagog Pond.
- there are plenty of horses that travel these trails. There are miniature horses at Breezy Point, there are private owners, and there are also the horse farms along Nagog Hill Road. Some of the horse people are responsive; some aren't. Nobody has posted "No Horses" signs yet.
- there is one part of the trail system that goes off into Acton Water District (AWD) land. It would be great to discourage people from going on that little extension as well.

The CWD has given up on stopping people from walking the trail right beside the pond. The trail that the CWD would like people to stop using is the one that goes straight to the dam. CWD will try to discourage that. Bob Guba: Why not rebuild the stone wall that crossed the trail? Jim will mention this to the CWD.

The CWD is happy with the new red trail that links Hazelnut Lane to Nagog Woods. We told the CWD that the current "No Trespassing" signs are too large. The Quail Ridge developers put those in.

The Acton group sent pictures of signs and arrows to the CWD for its consideration. We're encouraging the CWD to put up more signs.

We could use arrows to get people to stay on the official yellow trail rather than the eroded extension that goes onto AWD land.

We should take out the "Acton Conservation Land" sign that's pointed in the wrong direction. Also, some of these signs are being "eaten" by the trees.

Bettina has a more marked-up map. She will write up her copious notes and more may come out of them.

Bench request(s)

Bettina has to come back yet with her application – she has some more research to do. Jim got a call from Cathy Fochtman (Recreation Department Director) about a bench at Great Hill, so there may be such an application coming. This means that we may have to agree on benches at Great Hill.

Potential Eagle Scout project review

Bettina and Bruce know which ones are underway. There are nine with a tenth being a boardwalk at Grassy Pond that's broken. This has not yet been accepted as a project.

- There could be one at Robbins Mill.
- The north Piper Road entrance to Great Hill could use boardwalks, or boardwalk fixing. Fixes so far have been improvised. One boardwalk has a gap in the middle.
- At Robbins Mill, one Eagle project is the Spring Hill access boardwalk. Philip has indicated that he has the place flagged but it probably is not long enough. Bruce has seen no plans yet, but when the Scout submits plans, Bruce will suggest extending the boardwalk.
- For the access from Canterbury Hill Road, you need an extended boardwalk for the second brook crossing. There are no plans yet for this boardwalk either. A discussion ensued about bridge-building details, the size of nails used, and the apparent fact that Littleton Lumber is not providing the nail sizes requested. Details were too technical to record. Apparently, three-inch is the correct nail size.

- There is another possible project coming for the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT), Acton section. It would involve a section of trail through a trail easement on land owned by the Valentine family in both Acton and Carlisle. The trail easement ends at the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT), and the BCT would continue north on the BFRT at that point.
- What about a kiosk for the playground entrance at Robbins Mill? There was one built at Pacy. There was a second one at Nashoba Brook for a Scout's Quartermaster project.
- A proposed trail relocation at Robbins Mill will have a stream crossing that will require a bridge. It won't be too big, as Bob Guba has picked out a spot where the stream is relatively narrow because it is split into two parts. This is the same stream that goes through Camp Acton and is not too wide.
- An Eagle candidate has proposed a video for his Eagle project that would be like a video version of our handicapped accessibility spreadsheet (showing marked fields, playgrounds, other recreation spaces, and conservation areas). Bettina will share our spreadsheet with the Scout. The video would show on Acton TV and be available at the library in DVD format. The Scout will share with us his proposal and script. Jim suggests pointing him to our Website noting, however, that some things on the Website are not up to date. Bettina says she will be sure that the Scout has up-to-date information. When done, will this be public property? Anything done as an Eagle project is for the public. It's not copyrighted stuff, but Bettina will figure out ownership for a more definitive answer.

Cemetery agreement

Jim is signing the Mt. Hope agreement on behalf of the LSC. Jim will have Terry Maitland sign off on it for the Conservation Commission. Why is the Conservation Commission a signee? Per Bob Guba, the LSC is an advisory committee (we haven't seen a charter yet), so we don't have authority to sign off on something like this. The Conservation Commission does, so it should be signing. David points out that Mt. Hope Cemetery is not Conservation Land.

Jim will communicate with the Conservation Commission and get Terry to sign.

Robbins Mill trails

Bob Farra submitted a fine report with an elaborate list of items that Jim and Bob Farra discussed. Three trails need flagging. Two are relocations and one is new. Jim has started flagging and Bob Farra will be helping.

- One relocation (Eagle project referred to earlier) is to avoid a gigantic wet spot over the gas line easement. The relocated trail will go further south and cut through where the gas line right of way is dry. Jim has flagged a bit of it based on Bob Guba's map. Getting it completely flagged and visited by members is a June meeting thing.
- There is a slight relocation to avoid a cut through. It is not flagged yet. Jim will go out with Bob Guba to do this.
- The new trail would be one through Scoutland linking Wheeler Lane (old road to Concord) and the Carlisle Road parking area. Jim walked a possible trail recently and, after putting up a few flags, got frustrated with the ankle-breaking, basketball-size boulders with which he had to contend. Also, the property line of Robbins Mill is confusing, but there are property markers present that are not too visible in summer. Jim did flag a trail close to the boundary. Bob Guba suggests that if you go closer to the pond it's easier. Jim will check out a possible trail down near the pond before considering whether the boulders can be relocated. Per Laurie, this will be part of the BCT so there is money available. We could have this by the end of the calendar year. Can we get an agreement from the Scoutland trustees? Jim will mention to Scoutland Trustee Bill Klauer that we'll be flagging a trail across Scoutland.

In early June, Carlisle will have a brief ceremony at the join of the Acton and Carlisle trails. Jim will

send out an email with details. It will be on National Trails Day, June 7.

Changes to meeting records process

This is complicated and not interesting so there will be no conversation tonight. This is a problem for Jim and Joe.

Parcel reports

• Canoe Launch

Bettina can't work Saturday morning at the Canoe Launch. Brian Summers would help this weekend. Bruce and Bettina will talk offline about work there this weekend.

• Nashoba Brook

A while back there was a try to establish a garden at the end of Wheeler Lane, on the left, past the gate. Linda McElroy would like to revive this. (See Linda's email.) How do we feel about this? The question is who would maintain such a garden, once started? Linda needs to develop a plan as to how it will be cared for in the future. Otherwise the idea sounds okay.

• Camp Acton

There is some artwork at Campsite 7.

Bettina and Bruce are working out how to replace or repair the broken bench.

• Nagog Hill

Elan's grass whip is bent. Jim: It's going to get worse. Jim will set in process the acquisition of a new one. The trails that are open to sunlight are the ones that need maintenance. We need to stay on top of them.

• Heath Hen Meadow

Dave: Ditto (trails open to sunlight).

• Robbins Mill

– What about the informal paving at the Robbins Mill parking (adjacent to Carlisle Road)? Jim assumes it will start falling apart. We may need town crews to take it apart eventually.

– What about the percolation pipes? Bob Farra can't pull them out so the next thing to consider would be to cut them. The Committee has a *sawzall* to do this below ground level. Bob and Bob will work out how and when Bob Farra would like to do this.

– Robbins Mill has posts marking its boundaries. The Town should require this be done on all private parcels.

• Great Hill

Bob Guba shared his observations about some informal blazing. Near the downhill turn just north of the water tower there are white blazes that go in about 40 ft, then stop. The trail they mark goes down hill and enters the back yards of two houses on Main Street. Bob thinks we should get the blazes off the trees. We can't stop the people who live in the houses from using this trail, but it should not be blazed. Jim: We could use brown paint to cover them and/or scrape them off.

• Wetherbee

Town Engineering surveyed and marked the boundary at 4 Berry Lane and rebuilt the stone wall. The owner of 2 Berry Lane has not given permission yet, something needed in order to survey. May have to survey from the Wetherbee side. The boundary at 4 Berry Lane is short. At 2 Berry Lane, it's 50–60 ft.

• Pratt's Brook

– Trails are being widened. Bettina: It's the ice in the winter that causes this. However, mountain bikers are also creating trails by cutting off switchbacks. Also, there is a new "avenue" through the pine grove. Bettina: The trail just after the Valley Road entrance is too steep and there's plenty of trail erosion. Jim recommends that Bob Guba and Bettina visit these sites, preferably with Theresa Portante-Lyle. There are possibly other problem places. There is another steep situation by the pond below the railroad tracks. Jim says that we can get a crew out there to work on these problems once solutions are agreed on.

– Like Berry Lane (see Wetherbee immediately above), there is an encroachment problem at the Parker Street access. As you go up the hill past the well, the rocks on the right should be over another 10 ft.

Evaluate this meeting

Running late, so not done.

The meeting adjourned at 9:07 P.M.

The next meeting was to be Tuesday, June 24, at 7 P.M., in Room 121, but, per the above notes, this is changed to Tuesday, June 17 at 7 P.M., in Room 126.

These documents that served as background to this meeting were sent by email to the lsc@acton-ma.gov list:

- *April Minutes Draft* May 26 Joe Will
- *Newtown Rd - Grassy Pond lot* May 22 Jim Snyder-Grant
- *Nagog Pond Trail Discouragement* May 28 Jim Snyder-Grant
- *Robbins Mill Update* May 28 Bob Farra
- *New Abutter Access Trail at Great Hill* May 9 Bob Guba
- *Robbin Mill "Parking" Lot Dumping* May 19 Philip Keyes
- *Wildflower garden at Wheeler* May 28 Jim Snyder-Grant