

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 18, 2014, Town Hall, Room 126, 7 P.M.

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe, Bob Farra, Bob Guba, Bruce Rachman (timekeeper), Jim Snyder-Grant (Chair), Jason Temple, Laurie Ullmann, Joe Will (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Philip Keyes, Sherman Smith, Nan Towle Millett, John Watlington

Nonmembers present: Janet Adachi (LSC's Board of Selectmen liaison), Joe Holmes (Acton resident), Hart Millett (Acton resident, gopher, and chauffeur)

Jim called the meeting to order at 7:07 P.M. Bruce volunteered to be timekeeper for this meeting. Jim had attendees introduce themselves.

Review and approval of October 21 minutes

- First item, first bullet: The “Valentine Conservation Restriction” was correctly identified. Approval of corrected minutes moved, seconded, and voted unanimously.

2014 Trails Conference

Jim: Meeting was “fabulous” but will summarize at a future meeting.

Clarify next steps on new parcels (Robbins, Wright Hill, Dunn land)

- Dunn parcel (Jim showed on a map.)
 - Dave Cochrane has worked on this acquisition for years. The Acton Conservation Trust (ACT), where Dave is now a Trustee, and the Stow Conservation Trust, worked together on this most recent push to protect this land that straddles the Stow/Acton border.
 - Recent Town Meeting voted in favor of acquisition. Town has a Purchase and Sale agreement, and should own it shortly.
 - A second (larger) part of the parcel is in Stow and has been purchased by Stow, with some \$ help from the Stow Conservation Trust, and organizational help from the Sudbury Valley Trustees. Land above the Dunn parcel belongs to the ACT. This creates a protected corridor along Heath Hen Meadow (HHM) Brook from Acton deep into Stow. There is already an informal trail: From the HHM island, you can go south through ACT land and join a hunting and fishing trail that gets to the edge of Stow's Captain Sargent Farm Conservation Land, or an easement that takes you to West Acton Road in Stow. Bob G outlined a plan for a trail—roughly following the old hunting and fishing route—that would go over a stone wall and a beaver dam.
 - The LSC will eventually be asked to do something with the Acton portion of this parcel, but Jim doesn't yet know what. It may become part of HHM and Dave would take charge of it.
- Wright Hill
 - ACT had a walk of the property on Sunday. 60 people showed up.
 - The Town does not yet own the land, but Janet thinks the closing will be this Friday.
 - Jim described the current trails situation. There is one existing cart path that runs up from Central Street, starting near Half Moon Hill. The town owns land that allows passage around the meadow

nearest the house on top of the hill. Jim hopes to have large maps in the future. Also, there will be some meadow maintenance. There are some small buildings on the land including a beautiful corn crib as well as a squalid building that may have been home to some people who lived in the woods. It probably will be coming down. There are lots of “cool” foundations. There are lots of invasive plants.

– We still don’t have a steward for this parcel but Jim is looking forward to having someone there who can be really involved.

– Jim did meet an enthusiastic neighbor who would like to expose some of the stone walls. He was definitely volunteering. Jim told him that there is a process for this and that the LSC will be in touch.

- Robbins Mill:

– Jim mentioned the list of parcel needs kept by Bob F. Bob added that there is one additional boardwalk needed — after the first waterway, entering from the playground. We also need a kiosk, but the boardwalk would be more important than a kiosk. Bruce: A Scout can’t do a boardwalk until summer.

– There’s an old trail leading to the small pond near the Carlisle border. The current path of this trail goes right by an abutter's yard. This neighbors reports that people are cutting towards their homes to go out to Log Hill Road. So we need to add a new portion of the trail that will complete a small loop for that trail, and a sign to keep people away from the homes. We have to talk to the two homeowners, Mike King and Kyle Clark about filling in the trail to their homes and putting up a sign. The trail is on town property enough so that we wouldn’t have to put a sign by the pond. Bob G sees a new trail going to the pond, then along the pond’s edge, and eventually cutting up and coming out on the cart path. People walking in and the houses will be (partially) shielded from each other. And where it comes out, there should be a sign, “No public access to Log Hill Road”. There could be “Private Property. No Trespassing” signs on the owners’ properties, but the onus for these would be on the owners.

– Jim had told Mike that the LSC would post a sign soon. Jim brought to this meeting the “No Public Access to Nonset Path” sign that formerly hung at Wills Hole. Discussion ensued on whether it could be adapted for this situation. Bob F said that we could take care of the sign business on the coming weekend. Bettina said that Natural Resources could make more “natural” signs if the neighbors would like them instead of a sign like that used for Nonset Path.

– Bettina: Would arrows help at Robbins Mill? Yes! It would be good to have a double arrow at the loop trail when entering from Canterbury Hill parking.

– What color should be used for a loop trail around the small pond? This will be decided at a future meeting.

– The three “stop-gap” “You are Here” maps posted at Robbins Mill are not in poster shelters. A discussion on poster shelters and their posted maps ensued (how to make the posted maps longer-lived, the use of staples) There are two poster frames at Phil's house.

– Re the potential trail from the end of Wheeler Lane that would go north through Scoutland to Robbins Mill land: Phil, Bob G, and Jim will meet at the Carlisle Road parking at 2 p.m. this Wednesday to affirm possible flagging. It will be easier now to see how boulders affect the trail. Others are welcome to join them. It was pointed out that the Appalachian Mountain Club could put some effort into this trail as it will become part of the Bay Circuit Trail when the Valentine Trail Easement is completed as a trail, allowing a complete re-route of the Bay Circuit Trail up to the Rail Trail near the Acton/Carlisle border.

Beaver issues at Heath Hen Meadow

According to Bob G, there were no beavers at Heath Hen Meadow in ’97 or ’98 and the bridge went in easily. Then the beavers came. They first built a dam above the bridge. Some folks on Willow Street or

Summer Street were bothered by Muddy Brook water backing up onto their property, so they opened the dam. That dam eventually got washed out. In the past two years, the beavers went downstream and built a dam 10 ft below the bridge. For 5 days in a row recently, Bob methodically wiped out the dam. Every day that he came back, the beavers had started rebuilding. (Now the dam is virtually restored.)

Beavers 1, Bob 0

Bob recommends we hire a beaver control professional, Beaver Solutions of Southampton, MA. Jim talked with Tom Tidman about this and Tom said “Yes.” Tom will pursue this. Tom is guessing that Beaver Solutions work might cost about \$1K.

A goal is to keep the water 1 ft below the bridge stringers. Bruce: Why not arch the bridge? Bob: It’s easy to suggest, hard to build. \$1K would be not (nearly) as much as an arched bridge. Phil thinks the price is “unlikely.”

Joe W: How permanent would the solution be? Jim: Beaver Solutions has been successful enough with water level control devices to make it livable for beavers. Jim shared more information about water level control devices. The one at Guggins Brook is working well.

We hope to be able to say: Bob 1, Beavers 1

Updating maps

Jim passed out updated prototype versions of maps he’s been working on. There are two kinds of updates needed. Online, Gmap 4 could be a solution. Also, we need new maps for Guidebooks. Current Guidebook maps are out of date. Right now we can’t re-create our maps. Tom Tidman has said that he could draw new or updated black/white master maps as needed. However, for the original maps Rich Rhode did “magic” with PaintShop Pro. Bob and Jim have been unable to recreate the steps that Rich took.

Jim has been exploring other solutions. TileMill/Mapbox seems like it could address the two kinds of updates mentioned above. With TileMill, we can style maps differently depending on how they are zoomed. Zoom out and you see styled outlines of Conservation Lands. As you zoom in, trails start to appear. Zoom in enough and TileMill can show markings that look like what we have on current maps.

John: What about resolution? The resolution on Jim’s handouts is “pretty awful.” Jim: We can get down to a much higher resolution than what shows on the handouts.

There are a bunch of sources we could use. Jim is basically using the Town’s GIS maps for boundaries. The state has the Town’s parcel boundaries. Jim is working to define boundaries with parcel data.

Jim: Nice things about Mapbox: the styling of each element can be controlled with a style language that’s pretty easy to use, and very flexible, including different styling at different zoom levels. It can take in data from a wide variety of sources. It has clients that can work on Mac, Windows, or Linux. Together with TileMill, it can create an online zoomable map. With a bit of programming, it can integrate with GPS-aware smartphones.

Phil recommends ViewRanger. It has an amazing level of detail. The trail data appears to be based on OpenStreetMaps. OpenStreetMaps’ data are pretty good. It’s open source (i.e., free, and openly editable). A problem is to update the data. If we have people who can update OpenStreetMaps’ data, that’s a win.

Bruce: We should try to re-create our maps because ours are elegant. But we do need an electronic one in the future. Our current maps “rock.” People who walk the trails really like the maps.

Jim would like to know who wants to work on this. Bruce will work on the old process. He will see if he can get the colorizing process working. Karen Mackin has made some changes (e.g., trail colors on Great Hill). Bruce needs pixel editing tools. Jim or Bob will send PaintShop Pro files to Bruce. Bob F will work on a new process. Jason is willing to help. Jim suggests that perhaps we should get together with laptops in a room somewhere.

Bob F says that there is probably \$1500–\$2000 software that should give us good maps. Jim notes that, if we used TileMill, software cost would be about \$5/month. MapBox is free. OpenStreetMap data would be a fine start. (It has some stone wall data.) Land-use data from the State would be helpful. The State divides data into wetlands, forests, and meadows, so it could probably help with a “beauty” effect. Does Town pull in state data? Jim will check on what the Town does.

Bob G wonders what the basic map is that Carlisle and the Sudbury Valley Trustees use? No one knows. Jim recommends that Bob contact Carlisle and ask how they do it. Bob has asked Steve Tobin of the Carlisle Conservation Foundation and they had a process like ours, relying on a volunteer who is no longer available.

Coverage for Wetherbee

Tom Arnold is no longer on LSC. He was the Wetherbee Steward. John sent this month’s Wetherbee report, as he is visiting the parcel about every other week. John can write about it until we find more stewards. Per John, Wetherbee needs lot of work. Invasives are out of control. Bob G has been tending to the meadow. John is willing to do the work, but he needs the right equipment. Bob recommends a new field mower. Jim will talk to Tom about the Town buying one.

Jim: Does anyone at this meeting want to be the Wetherbee Steward, before I ask more widely?
Silence.

Trail easement updates (Sachem Way, Wright Hill)

Town Counsel contacted Jim on the Sachem Way trail easement. The trail goes over Acton Housing Authority land. Town Counsel has all the information now and is writing it.

Question: Does public get access to Sachem Way itself? On Sachem Way there is pedestrian access but no public parking. Town Counsel will make sure that walkers have a right to walk on Sachem Way itself.

Bettina and Bob G are LSC advocates for trail easements to connect Guggins Brook and Wright Hill. Jim is homeowners’ advocate for Homeowners Associations. He could get drafts from Town Counsel in a week or two for both sides to examine. These are easements on non-Town owned properties. Jim shared copies of a map of Wright Hill showing proposed trails and described the easements. At the recent Special Town Meeting the Town accepted the easements, so closing on the sale of the land can now happen. Jim had mentioned to Tom Tidman and to the ACT that the LSC would like to have monuments to mark property corners, as shown on his maps.

Parcel review

- Bob: We had remarkable reporting — 100%.
- Bruce: Tom Tidman had said something to Bruce about the Town acquiring land between Camp Acton and Robbins Mill. This is a back lot at the far end of Triangle Hill Farm that never got developed. Acquiring it would better connect our parcels. Is town moving forward on this? Jim: No, but wouldn’t it be nice if it would. Bruce wants to proceed with this. Jim will get this into a future

agenda.

- Parcel reports suggested the possibility of chemical dumping; also some possible dog problems. On such problems, there is nothing wrong with calling Acton Police.
- Joe H will co-steward the Canoe Launch with Bettina. Joe is not sworn in. He has been doing things with the invasives at the Canoe Launch.
- Are cars staying in Canoe Launch parking area? Bettina: Yes. On open fishing session, she's seen the parking nearly full. Are they wearing out the meadow? No. The land is privately owned, but we have a right to be there. Moscariello Equipment may be mowing it to test its mowers, and this should be encouraged.
- Invasives around the edges of Stoneymeade are growing back. Stoneymeade needs work in the winter or spring to get back more to the stone walls. Everything around the lone oak should be taken down. Shawn O'Malley's crew has been mowing and removing brush in the Arboretum. Similar work should be done at Stoneymeade.
- Wetherbee has a faded "Rules and Regulations" poster. Bettina will print and laminate a new one.
- Bob G wonders what's to be done with rotted shingles on kiosks. The kiosk at the pencil factory has a hole in the roof. We can fix this with roofing shingles. For the pencil factory kiosk, Bettina will take care of permission. Bruce will do the shingling.
- Bob G suggests that everyone take time to look at the kiosk(s) in their parcels and include this in their December reports. Bruce or Jim will drop a note to the LSC on this.

Discuss which agenda items might be done next month

Is anyone waiting for an agenda item to show up? Silence.

Jim affirmed that the recent schedule for upcoming meetings includes meetings during the summer.

Jim: In a previous meeting, Dave and Bruce wanted to look out for the next version of the Guidebook. Jim, Dave, and Bruce will meet sometime to decide what to do about the booklets. We don't need Quark Express. Jim also will meet with the other new map mavens. (See item above on "Updating maps.")

Evaluate this meeting

- Send out the paper work earlier. Try at least for previous day.
- It would be nice to project information onto the wall in our meeting room. The Town can provide projection equipment. It had been in the Recreation Department office.
- We may need a larger room.
- More cookies, no candy.

The meeting adjourned at 8:51 P.M. (moved and voted unanimously).

The next meeting will be Tuesday, December 16, 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:

- "Canoe Launch Report" November 10, Bettina Abe

- “Nagog Hill Report” November 11, Elan Riesman
- “Pratt's Brook steward's report” November 14, Sherman Smith (forwarded by Jim Snyder-Grant)
- “Grassy Pond” November 16, Ann Shubert
- “Robbins Mill Trail November Update” November 16, Bob Farra
- “Nashoba Brook Report” November 17, Laurie Ullmann
- “Great Hill Trail Update – November” November 17, John Watlington
- “Acton Arboretum Parcel Report” November 17, Bettina Abe
- “Camp Acton Parcel Report November 2014” November 17, Bruce Rachman
- “Jenks Report” November 17, Josh Haines
- “Bulette/TF status” November 18, Andy Gatesman
- “Spring Hill Report” November 18, Phil Keyes
- “Guggins Report” November 18, Jim Snyder-Grant
- “Early first look at possible mapping strategy, for initial discussion at Tuesday's meeting” November 17, Jim Snyder-Grant
- “HHM Beaver Problem” November 18, Jim Snyder-Grant
- “HHM dam beavers” November 18, Joe Will
- “HH Meadow second beaver dam” November 3, Joe Will
- “HH Meadow second beaver dam” November 3, Bob Guba
- “Articles 18 + 19 from the town warrant” November 18, Jim Snyder-Grant
- “maps and map data for Guggins / Wright Hill proposed trails”, November 18, Jim Snyder-Grant
- “Egress from Log Hill Road”, November 18, Jim Snyder-Grant
- “Robbins Mill trail to Carlisle Road through Scoutlands - tagging trail?” November 18, Jim Snyder-Grant
- “Barrel found in camp Acton” November 18, Phil Keyes
- “October minutes (for tonight's meeting)” November 18, Joe Will