

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 18, 2016, Town Hall, Room 9, 7 P.M.

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Paula Goodwin, Bob Guba, Joe Holmes, Bruce Rachman (Chair), Jim Snyder-Grant, Laurie Ullmann, John Watlington, Joe Will (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) member present: Sherman Smith

Nonmembers:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), Janet Adachi (LSC's Board of Selectmen liaison), Maria and Jim Crowley (Spring Hill Road residents), James Engell (Breezy Point resident), Jezanna Gruber (176 Central Street abutter), Rich Harrington (Stamski and McNary), Julianne North (Acton Conservation Trust)

Bruce called the meeting to order at 7:04 P.M.

19 Spring Hill Road development adjacent to Camp Acton

Rich Harrington presented, and Maria and Jim Crowley, owners of the land, were present to help answer questions. Presentation included description of the natural buffer screening between the new homes and Camp Acton, and the developer's donations (~\$58K worth) for the Camp Acton handicapped-accessible campsite, including a solar-powered permanent handicapped-accessible composting toilet, and some campsite road excavation work. Also, it was pointed out that Maria and Jim C are willing to grant a formal easement for the small section of red-blazed trail from Spring Hill Road into the Spring Hill Conservation Land (CL) that is on their property, but Tom Tidman has indicated that the Town will try to move the trail so that it does not encroach on the private property.

Review and approval of September minutes

Approval was moved and voted unanimously.

Fall-related cleanup items, inspection of trail structures, kiosks, boardwalks, bridges. What to look for, signs of rot, estimate of life span remaining

Now that we have the ability to see everything (fall environment), we should give a good look at CL elements. We can look at structures: Do the kiosks need painting? Do any need to be torn down and rebuilt?

- Does the kiosk at Great Hill need a new roof? We've ignored it.
- The kiosk at Heath Hen Meadows needs re-shingling. Bruce pointed out that he can work on three kiosks at a time. Then he runs out of steam.
- Are we going to "sign" the Fort Pond Brook Greenbelt (FTBGB)? Jim S-G reviewed the history of the FTBGB and would like to either replace or remove the sign at Guggins Brook. Bettina pointed out that Natural Resources (NR) has batted this around and Tom Tidman is ambivalent one way or the other. We could keep the FTBGB around for WildAware. It might be referenced in the Open Space and Recreation Plan, but not sure. Would keeping the FTBGB signage be a Board of Selectmen decision? Not if the signs are on CL. Bettina and Paula will make this a winter discussion topic with NR.
- How are the bridges at Grassy Pond? They look fine, but the viewing platform may need some "tlc". There is a homemade canoe at the end of the boardwalk that's kind of trashy. It should be hauled out.

- At Great Hill, John gave up trying to keep his sign (re removing trash) near the picnic table by the pond in place and removed it rather than having to retrieve it regularly from the brush. The ice hockey goals are out of the pond and John expects to get the picnic table out of the pond soon. He'll leave it on the shore until the pond freezes, then he'll remove it from Great Hill via the frozen pond surface.

Maps

Joe H and Jim S-G are in the middle of working with OpenStreetMap data. They will come back with more information and then try to form a group of people to help. The plan is to create really “awesome” online maps with restyled trails to make them more appealing.

Bettina talked with Lynn Horsky about getting Acton’s “Guide to Conservation Lands” remade. We are getting ready to order 100 more. Bettina would like to use a better photo for the book and will pull one from the Archive. The new book will include Pacy CL and Robbins Mill CL maps and descriptions, a map of the combined North Acton CL, updated CL regulations, and other changes. It won’t include the recently purchased 176 Central Street land, and probably not the Canoe Launch. Bettina would like to add the Canoe Launch to the book but is not sure that this would still be possible. Per Jim S-G, a Canoe Launch map is “close.” (A discussion about a Canoe Launch map and problems with it ensued.) Bettina will take CL descriptions from their websites. What’s the timing for this new book? Bettina: Don’t stress out over this.

Why can’t we get the QR codes (posted on kiosks in some CL) working again? The codes currently link hikers to a dead link. Bruce will investigate and fix this.

Non-Parcel Updates:

a. Junior High School Workday follow-up

The day was “well worth it”.

- The group that moved the boardwalk sections to their new locations at Heath Hen Meadow was “amazing”. The LSC will have a follow-up workday for fixing the boardwalks in place.
- The crew at Camp Acton “worked like dogs.”
- At Morrison Farm, the crew hauled out an old diving board from Nashoba Brook.
- The Grassy Pond crew ran out of wood chips.

b. Field mower

The field mower does the job, cuts fairly high, doesn’t like rocks, and is hard to turn.

c. Nagog Pond and Concord, Assabet River Trail, 176 Central (adjacent Mt. Hope), Lazaro land purchase, Morrison Farm farmhouse (10/17 Board of Selectmen)

- Nagog Pond and Concord: The Nagog Pond hearing is November 1. James Engell provided the LSC with current information, including that Concord has done a great amount of surveying on its property for its 8-ft high, mile long fence. Bettina looked at the survey stakes this morning and noted that it looks as if our yellow trail crosses Concord land in Nagog Woods. Jim S-G confirmed this but noted that Concord has indicated that it will put the fence so our trails remain. Bettina will put up signs on Hazelnut Street and Skyline Drive to direct hikers to the Nagog Woods trails.
- Assabet River Trail: Bruce and Bob Ferra have designed a bridge to use on the parcel, but they need yet to get some lumber, and permits to show how the bridge will be anchored to the ground since the waterway is a river.
- 176 Central (adjacent Mt. Hope): A sign proposal is on tomorrow’s Cemetery Commission Agenda.

One goal for the parcel would be to clear it of a lot of deadfall. Paula had a map of the deadfall that she shared with sawyers. Paula also introduced Jezanna Gruber as someone who will help watch over the parcel — and some cemetery land, as Jim S-G pointed out.

Queries, observations, etc.:

- Can we cut (wood) on these lands? Yes.
- The 176 Central Street parcel includes some makeshift bridges over Muddy Brook.
- Jim S-G reviewed the sign that he had proposed a couple years ago to be placed on the trail entering cemetery land on the north side of the Heath Hen Meadow bridge.
- Can we put some sort of blaze on the trees (that would include cemetery trees)?
- Should there be a “You are here.” poster shelter or two? Jim observed that we can put these on CL without having to ask permission of the Cemetery Commission.
- Could there be a map box at the cemetery parking area used by trail walkers?
- Should there be signs showing rules? There are different rules for CL and cemetery land.

All these will be brought up at the Cemetery Commission meeting tomorrow.

- Lazaro land purchase: Can we explore this parcel? The Town doesn’t own it yet. Tom Tidman would know. As it’s still private property, there are no public walks yet of the parcel. It’s possible someone could walk it as part of due diligence.
- Morrison Farm farmhouse (10/17 Board of Selectmen (BoS)): Plot of farmhouse land will not be separated as a private parcel. Janet reviewed some details from the BoS meeting.

d. October 22 event at Rachman Place

The weather is supposed to be good. If weather doesn’t hold on Saturday, the event will be on Sunday. Guests should get there before the sun goes down so there can be some outdoor activities. Per Bruce: 3 p.m. would be “great”. Bruce will cook Jamaican jerk turkey.

Parcel(s) specific:

a. Great Hill — Crossover trail

Should the crossover trail at the top of Great Hill (GH) be added to the GH map as an official trail? Putting this trail on the map with blue blazes was moved and voted near unanimously. Jim S-G voted “No” saying that he is fine with it remaining “unofficial” but is “happy to be outvoted.”

During the discussion, it was pointed out that the privately owned Magoon parcel of land abutting GH on the southeast is now officially on the market. An informal but well-traveled trail crosses the parcel. Bettina provided details about the property.

b. Great Hill — 11/01 Planning Board Public Hearing

Jim S-G reviewed the situation: The landowner of the private parcel east of the CVS land on Route 111 simply wants to preserve its right to develop the land, with no development plans at present. The LSC would be interested in seeing the developer allow this land to provide an entrance to the GH trail system. John will try to attend that meeting.

LSC Website

Bob expressed a concern re Gmap4. Bob, Bruce, and Jim S-G discussed it. Bruce will look over what Bob’s concern is with Gmap4.

a. Brainstorming WildAware stories

Paula will write a story about bee colony collapse syndrome. She also would like to write about the

effects of the current drought but does not have enough local information for an 800-word article. Brian Butler, a wildlife biologist, could provide some ideas. Paula would welcome anything LSC members have noticed from the field. Members observed that Guggins and Inch Brooks are dry and that Fort Pond Brook has stopped flowing. There is more consumption now of succulent plants that tend to hold lots of water. Laurie suggested that OARS would have information. Perhaps some information could be found re the Nashoba Brook gauging station.

b. Workdate calendar

Joe H has a workday scheduled for next weekend to plant butterfly weed and other stuff at the Canoe Launch. Joe has talked to Tom Tidman and, yes, the LSC is allowed to plant on CL.

Bruce will be putting some items into the calendar.

2017 meeting schedule

(01/17, 02/21, 03/21, 04/18, 05/16, 06/20, 07/18, 08/15, 09/19, 10/17, 11/21, 12/19)

Bettina will submit these dates to the Town for scheduling.

November 15 agenda

Jim S-G is hoping to demonstrate OpenStreetMap. Bettina will bring a projector. There should be a discussion about the possibility of using CL as some sort of nursery whereby the LSC could move plants, say blueberry or sassafras, from one parcel to another. Another agenda idea: Things you can do in the fall to reduce invasives, e.g., how to kill buckthorn. Bruce will bring some sort of refreshment to the next meeting.

Evaluate meeting

It was a good mix of spontaneous fun and focused meeting. It may have drifted off-agenda more than some might have liked.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, November 15, at 7 p.m., in Room 9.