

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 19, 2018, Town Hall, Room 9, 7 P.M.

Attendance

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

Associate (nonvoting) member present: Sherman Smith

Others: Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), Janet Adachi (Acton Board of Selectmen LSC liaison), Dave Ebitson (Westford Conservation Trust former Director), Bill Harman (Westford Conservation Trust Honorary Director), Susan Mitchell-Hardt (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT) President)

Bruce called the meeting to order at 7:01 P.M.

Review and approval of May minutes

Approval was moved and voted unanimously.

Westford/Acton inter-town trail connection

Bill presented a map of Westford's Richard Emmet Conservation Land and Mass Audubon's Nashoba Brook Sanctuary ("wonderful areas to explore"). Together they comprise nearly 600 acres of protected open space in the southern part of Westford.

(See https://westfordconservationtrust.org/tws_holding/nashoba-brook-watershed/)

Their proximity to NARA and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) suggested to Bill that it may be worthwhile to investigate possible connections between the two towns' public lands. Bill has no specific proposal for now, but wanted to raise the LSC's awareness of an opportunity for an expanded trail network benefitting both towns. Subsequent discussion focused on the private land between the Westford conservation land and NARA. Major private landowners are "the Kennedys." A key feature is an abandoned rail bed from the Nashoba (Kennedy) Pond in Westford to the rail bed's link with the BFRT in Acton. Part of the rail bed is owned by the Kennedys and part by Acton's Nashoba Sportsman's Club. Trails, including the rail bed, shown on an LSC map of land in Acton north of NARA are walkable today, but not legally so. Also, the rail bed passes directly behind the firing range of the Sportsman's Club, so walking on that portion of it is discouraged. There is an informal trail out of NARA that could parent a connection with the Westford trail system. From NARA to the Nashoba Pond is an estimated few thousand feet — more than half a mile, but less than a mile.

Dan will next spend some time with the Westford and Acton maps and hopefully will be able to meet again with the LSC, which would love to have him and Richard back at a future meeting, hopefully with a more definitive routing possibility.

Chair, Vice-Chair, Clerk, Heath Hen Meadow (HHM) Steward for 2018-19

Dale Chayes is in the Town's "volunteer process". He should be an appointed Associate member (and Steward of Nagog Hill) by the July meeting.

Nominations for 2018-2019: Joe H Chair; Bruce Vice-Chair, Joe W Clerk. Jezanna (Zanna) Gruber was nominated to be Steward of all of HHM (original HHM plus the recently-acquired CL with an address

of 176 Central Street, and sometimes referred to as HHM North).

Approval of the nominated slate was moved and voted unanimously.

New shed at Morrison Farm

Tom Tidman located a shed that its owners would give to the Town. The Town would have to relocate it.

Mary Ann Ashton, Chair of the Morrison Farm Committee, has given her permission for the shed to be located at Morrison Farm. At the Farm, the shed would be locked, have its own electrical service, and contain the new wellhead and a 50-gal water tank. It would otherwise be the LSC's shed and house the field mower. (The field mower was left outdoors for the winter. Shawn O'Malley couldn't start it yesterday. Maybe the Town will have to get a new one!)



Acton Trails Map

Joe H projected the current version. It showed the BFRT labeled, highlighted in beige (the same color that the Friends of the BFRT uses on its map), and remaining on the map as one zooms out. A discussion ensued about rail trail safety, notably at road crossings and where the BFRT passes through NARA. There are plans to put the Assabet River Rail Trail on the map, but that has not yet been done. A discussion ensued about the (non-rail) trail on the land by the Assabet River, and an observation that this past Friday Joe was presented with a River Stewardship Award at the Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council's 2018 Riverfest. Joe reported that all CL sites reached via the Acton Trails home page now have links to the Acton Trails map. Bob pointed out that it is not clear to a viewer of the Acton Trails home page how one gets to the Acton Trails map (showing the whole town). A discussion ensued on how to do this with a single click. Bob also wanted a clear definition of what a red access trail is, namely it is an entrance to a CL's trail system and comes from a road where there is parking, or a sidewalk; two ways for the public to gain access to the CL. Others pointed out that there are many examples of red trails that would not fit that definition.

Acton and Bruce Freeman Rail Trails "connections"

Laurie would like to see a connection that would give access to the pencil factory site (including the kiosk), something better than the downed tree that is currently at the site. His most recent thinking: a suspension bridge (serving pedestrians only) — the cable kind. A discussion ensued. Points made:

- Such a bridge, if long enough, doesn't depend on foundations.
- Problem: Such a bridge needs to be maintained, inspected, looked after. A failure would be catastrophic.
- There's a huge variety of this type of bridge. It can be made out of anything you want.
- Could it be made accessible? Would it be wide enough for a wheel chair?
- Such a bridge can be made any width you want.
- Such a bridge should be ADA-compliant. This could allow for more grant money being available.
- How long would this bridge be? Maybe 100 ft. That would be expensive, and a major, major project.
- It's an historic area which adds another dimension to this.
- A bridge would need new abutments.

What about zip lines? No discussion ensued.

It was noted that Linda McElroy is backing off from giving BFRT people direct access to the stone

chamber as traffic straight off the BFRT into the stone chamber may invite vandalism. Example: A pencil factory turbine shaft that has been recently displayed has been twice thrown into the brook. A discussion ensued on increased traffic and vandalism. Joe H asked whether access to the stone chamber should be added to the Acton Trails map. The question is, do we want people going there? If “yes”, we publicize it. If “no”, we don’t, and leave its BFRT proximity to word of mouth.

There was discussion about the easement across the Valentine property that would get the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) off the BFRT just inside the Acton line in North Acton. It currently is a bad easement. It currently would require large amounts of trail construction. A new easement would require a redoing of the projected development package. One possible option would be for the BCT to temporarily route its trail further south along the BFRT to the Nashoba Sportsman’s Club entrance. Then have BCT users walk public sidewalks to the Robbins Mill (North) trailhead (and the established BCT) off Carlisle Road. This would be temporary, but any developments with the Valentine land could be years in the future.

It was noted that this still leaves the “Scoutland problem”, with a portion of the Robbins Mill/Bay Circuit Trail crossing the privately-owned Scoutland. It’s been suggested to Scoutland Trustee Bill Klauer that that parcel be sold to the Town, given to the Town, or an easement be granted that would make the trail crossing legal. Perhaps Scoutland could be turned into another Camp Acton!

Parcel Business — Wright Hill-Guggins Brook easement trail on Conservation Commission agenda
Tomorrow night, Jim and Sherman will present easement information to the Conservation Commission. Then an easement would have to be reviewed by Town Counsel, approved by the Board of Selectmen and the neighbors, and signed by relevant parties to become official. The trail is shown on OpenStreetMap, but not on the Acton Trails map as it is not yet a public trail.

Parcel Business — Canoe Launch thistle invasion

Joe H is mowing once a year; but at that rate you end up with thistles 5 ft tall. Joe is having a work day on Saturday with 14 *live blue* Ambassadors from the New England Aquarium. They will attack the knotweed. Joe wants to know if it’s okay with the LSC to try to eradicate the thistle that’s growing in the meadow (where folks will be parking). Yes, it’s okay.

Parcel Business — Wills Hole/Town Forest “Acton Town Forest” sign

The sign was attached to two trees. One tree broke off and part of the sign fell to the ground. Will it be replaced? Bettina will ask Shawn O’Malley to recover the pieces of the sign when his crew installs the pathway lights for the July 4 celebration at NARA. She will ask that he measure the pieces and then make a new one. The pieces can go to Bill Klauer. Bettina now has a machine that will allow replication of the fir trees shown on the original sign.

Other parcel information

- Camp Acton:

Bruce wants some gravel at the bottom of the Camp Acton driveway (at the Pope Road end). Bruce will send Bettina a picture. Bettina will pass the information on to Shawn O’Malley. Also, there are some boards left over from some bench building. Dale Chayes could perhaps use them for repairing boardwalk sections at Nagog Hill. Bruce will deliver them to wherever they will be needed.

- Pratts Brook:

Scouts built two bog bridges last week, spread a massive pile of wood chips, and did a great job (bog

bridge: two parallel 12-in. wide boards). The bridges are anchored, and filled in all around with wood chips. At the access to Pratts Brook from the end of Broadview Street, should there be board stairs? Per Bob, the access there is not an authorized trail. A discussion ensued about this “entrance”; also, about “cut throughs”.

- Heath Hen Meadow:

Bettina drafted a trail description for HHM North and HHM, given that it has been decided to call the combined parcels Heath Hen Meadow. She will send her draft to the Committee. A sign at the Central Street trail entrance will read something to the effect, “Heath Hen Meadow Trails and Mt. Hope Cemetery Trails”. Bob reported that he has dragged heavy logs onto the short, now informal, cutoff trail at the north end of the yellow trail on cemetery land in an effort to block its use.

Someone has cleaned it out — twice! Bob asks whether Bettina can check as to whether Shawn still has log carriers that makes it easier to move logs. Bettina will let Bob know if the Committee can get hold of them. Another possibility to solve this problem would be to move the yellow trail closer to the cemetery. In the meantime, Bob has posted signs at each end of what would be the cutoff trail.



- Nagog Hill

Dale Chayes walked the trails and gave a report to Bruce, but not to the whole Committee as Dale is not yet Nagog Hill’s official Steward. Bob noted a tree down on CL near the cleared stone wall. When Dale is Steward, Bob will go over with Dale the mowing routine to be followed on land near the stone wall. Bob also noted some difficulty with the nearby long boardwalk, and what he feels should be a boardwalk extension. Bob will also review the Nagog Hill boardwalks with Dale.

- Nagog Hill (proximity):

Bob and Tom Tidman marked a trail (tracking it with GPS) to show the Town of Concord where a trail (including a bridge over Nagog Brook) could be that would give residents on Breezy Point Road access to Nagog Hill, part of the Nagog Pond water agreement with Concord.

- Spring Hill:

Consider the junction of the yellow trail with the red access trail from Jay Lane. Also, consider the nearby yellow trail junction with the blue crossover trail. Bruce suggests that 1) the yellow trail from the red trail junction westward to the nearby stone wall corner be closed 2) the yellow trail from the red trail junction to the blue trail junction become part of the red trail, and 3) a new yellow trail be built from the blue trail junction to the stone wall corner (see 1) inside the stone wall (to bypass rocks and water). Bruce has talked and will talk more with Phil Keyes (who would be the “right guy to do this”) on this possible relocation of the yellow trail if the Committee would agree to the change. There was unanimous Committee support. (A sign at the current red trail junction would have to be moved. Also, the trail-sharing BCT would be unaffected by this.)

- Great Hill

John Watlington’s new summit trail is “pretty good!” Check it out.

- Wills Hole/Town Forest

Per Bob: Tom Tidman will put rocks on other side of Quarry Road where the pipeline goes. Bob tried some filling in of the informal trail paralleling the private drive to the artist’s home. Bob’s debris was cleared out soon thereafter. Bob will do nothing more like this until the rocks are in place.

New Business

None

July agenda

- The revised blazing at Morrison Farm
- The Wright Hill-Guggins Brook trail easement presentation to the Conservation Commission

Evaluate meeting

Too much commotion.

The meeting adjourned at 8:43 P.M. The next meeting will be Tuesday, July 17, at 7 P.M., in Room 9.