

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 21, 2021, 7 P.M., Town Hall, Room 9; also, hybrid Zoom

Attendees (in person in *bold italic*, remote in **bold)**

Regular (voting) members: **Jon Campbell, Dale Chayes, Zanna Gruber** (Vice-Chair), **Aaron Moore**, Bruce Rachman, **Laurie Ullmann**, John Watlington (Chair), **Joe Will** (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) members: Josh Haines, Everett Kenerson, Philip Keyes, **Gary Kilpatrick**, Mel Lima, **Bob Mackin, Bethany Nichols**, Jim Salem, **Bill Smith**, Todd Tsakiris, **Tom Wolf**

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Bob Walton** (Acton citizen)

Opening

Zanna opened the meeting at 7 p.m.

Regular Business

Review and approval of November 16 minutes

November minutes are not ready; available, hopefully, at the January meeting.

Concerns from the public

None.

New/Special Business

LSC personnel updates

Welcome Bethany and Tom as new Associate members (through June, 2022). Jon is a voting member now (through June, 2024). Bob Mackin is a new Associate member (through June, 2022) and new steward for the expanding Bulette/Town Forest parcel. Bill has been approved as an Associate but still needs to be sworn in. There are a lot of volunteers who are not members of the LSC. One, Scott Longley, wants to help out at Pratts Brook. Another, Patrick Cavanaugh from Maynard, is helping out at the Canoe Launch. And a fellow named Amir, who Bettina will be meeting with shortly, wants to help out with the blazing team.

Updating Acton's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)

The current OSRP is for 2014 to 2021, so it "expires" in one week. Many folks will be working with the Recreation Director (Melissa Rier — in charge), the Town Manager, Tom Tidman, the new Sustainability Director (Andrea Becerra), and other staff members to update it. There is a timeline and the sections are being divided among different parties. Right now, Bettina is working on the inventory of land in Section 5. There will be public outreach, and drafts to review. The current OSRP is on the Town website. Feel free to go there and send any comments you want to share to Bettina. Eventually, proposed new content will be posted there for review. Bettina will let the LSC know when this happens.

Chainsaw training update

Bettina has been nagging and nagging and nagging for training but hasn't gotten anywhere yet. She will continue to nag, hoping for some fruitful results at some point. Dale pointed out that the LSC has some aspiring sawyers (Aaron, Jon, Bethany, Bill) and would like to add them to the sawyers' mailing list so they could see what's going on and have an opportunity to come along and help. Adding them to the list seems okay to the LSC.

Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) update

Joe attended the 11/21 Annual Meeting of the Friends of the BFRT.

- The Friends donated \$7200 to Acton for construction (by Bruce Rachman) and maintenance of interpretive panels on the East Acton Village Green. This follows an earlier donation of about \$5K for tree removal on the site.
- Joe shared with Paul Malchodi, Acton's rep on the Friends, information on the upcoming changes at Town Hall that could possibly result in the Town's attention to its rail trails becoming the responsibility of Acton's DPW. Paul expressed concern about how this would work out as he holds that rail trails are public parks. He will make inquiries about this.
- The bridge over Route 2 is on schedule to open in July, 2022.
- Approval of the revised easement across the Valentine land in North Acton that would allow a portion of the Bay Circuit Trail to vacate a portion of the BFRT is on the January 5 agenda of Acton's Conservation Commission. Dale expects to attend that meeting and is to remind Bettina to remind him of the meeting when the time approaches.
- The last component of the Ice House Pond parking area on the west side of Ice House Pond is now being installed. It's a post-and-beam kiosk like the one at Wheeler Lane. It will have four panels, two telling the history of Ice House Pond and the ice business. One will tell the history of the adjacent Morrison Farm and show the Morrison Farm map, and the other one will be about the BFRT. Another single-stanchion panel will be built at the Capt. Robbins cellar hole site, further west from the parking lot on Concord Road.

Community Preservation Act (CPA) update

Proposals are in for 2022 CPA funding in its four categories. Following amounts are approximate.

- Housing \$480K, including Habitat for Humanity rebuild of the house on the north side of Carlisle Road not far from the entrance to Robbins Mill Conservation Land.
- Open Space \$500K, which is typical of the annual Open Space proposal.
- Recreation \$378K, including construction of the Heath Hen Meadow bridge (\$38K), fixing the Elm Street tennis courts, Gardner Field work, and a new small playground at the Recreation Building.
- Historic Resources \$472K, including work at Iron Work Farm, Shoddy Mill (53 River Street), and Woodlawn Cemetery (gravestones and chapel). A fifth project in this category is work on the Asa Parlin House and grounds behind Town Hall, \$1063K.

Total amount requested without the last item is \$1.8M; with the last item \$2.9M. An estimate of the CPA amount that will be available is \$1.6M. Project presentations are scheduled to begin 01/11/22. The Heath Hen Meadow bridge proposal will be presented 01/25, and Community Preservation Committee (CPC) deliberations are scheduled to begin in March. (More on the Heath Hen Meadow bridge below.)

Invasives (possibly continued)

John Watlington, presenter, could not attend this meeting.

Additional Regular Business

Parcel issues

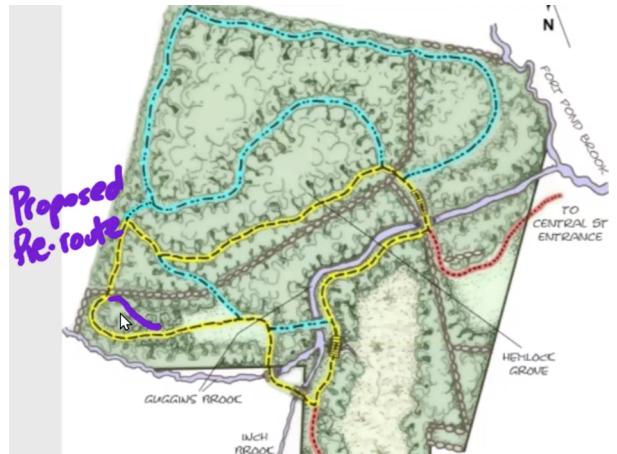
- Arboretum upper meadow mowing; volunteer recognition

The former is a John Watlington item. John was absent. Re volunteer recognition, Joe suggested to Tom Tidman that the Arboretum kiosk, or thereabouts, include some form of recognition of volunteers who have contributed so much extraordinary work on projects in the Arboretum. This would include recognition of Scout projects, suggested by such acknowledgments on Scout projects in other parcels. Tom has a record of all such work. Bettina and Joe will talk about this offline as such a list would be extraordinarily long.

– Great Hill trail modifications, old cistern
John Watlington, presenter, could not attend this meeting.

– Guggins Brook beavers and trail rerouting

Jon showed a photo of the flooding caused by beavers at the southwest edge of the parcel. Their dam has raised the water level a couple feet to interfere with the yellow loop trail, e.g., a new bog bridge is floating or under water. Jon proposes a temporary rerouting of the trail, as shown, to get the trail away from the water's edge and follow the high route of a drumlin. He suggests to then wait and see what happens next spring if the beavers hang around. In the meantime, there would be a way provided for the public to comment on the rerouting.



– Heath Hen Meadow bridge

The beavers have built back better, and the water is up to the bridge planks. It was a fantastic crew that repaired the bridge to its current state. The CPA presentation for a new bridge is January 25 at 7:30 pm. It will be virtual. The new bridge will be raised 18 inches higher than the current bridge. Bettina described how it will be built, including the use of pre-cast aluminum rather than pressure-treated wood. She pointed out that one CPC member suggested that Trex material (recycled plastic that will last a long time) be used as deck board. She raises that possibility now so that stewards won't be surprised when they hear her presentation January 25 at 7:30 pm. Is Trex used anywhere? (The Arboretum bog-walk uses fiberglass decking.) Laurie pointed out that Carlisle did a lot with non-wooden walkways along the Concord River (check with Steve Tobin of the Carlisle Conservation Foundation). Tom cites the use of trex on "a big chunk of bridge" on the Assabet River Rail Trail as it bends along Main Street in South Acton. Is slipperiness an issue with trex? A google site says that it is less slippery than wood and it can be made even less slippery. Equally important to Bettina's presentation to the CPC — January 25 at 7:30 pm — is attendance by project supporters. Unlike an in-person meeting, virtual-meeting attendees are not seen, so attendees are encouraged to raise their hands and speak up; to give their own testimony of how essential the bridge is to connect the trail system, etc. The more supporters that are heard, the greater the impact possible on the CPC. Bettina presents to the CPC on January 25 at 7:30 pm.

– Morrison Farm/Ag Comm possibilities

The current idea is keep the house and barn within the same parcel and under Town ownership, supported by a nonprofit "Friends of" group. The house and barn would stay in place along what is turning out to be an historic corridor (BFRT, East Acton Village Green, Ice House Pond and the ice house artifacts, Morrison Farm, Capt. Robbins cellar hole, Woodlawn Cemetery with its Revolutionary War section and Woodlawn Chapel). The house would be a sealed shell with no public access, like those in Minuteman National Park. Essentially, nothing would change and future use would not be precluded. (The Town could really use the barn for equipment storage, but this would require some renovation.) Then, placing a Conservation or Agricultural Restriction on the property would protect it in perpetuity. Still to do: Bring the Town Manager on board with this idea.

– Trash update

- Bruce Rachman came across two fellows dumping a deer carcass at Camp Acton. The Acton police talked to the two fellows.
- Some structures for small fires are appearing in different places. They are not allowed (and they also support site-accumulation of trash), but it is unclear what can be done about this. Bob did disassemble one at Nashoba Brook and, in general, they should be disassembled. Re another particular site at Nashoba

Brook with a rather nice (“beautiful”) fireplace, Bob (microphone not working) and Laurie can address this offline and let Bettina know what they decide.

– Other

- Jon and Dale have talked with Tom Tidman about the orienteering course at Grassy Pond and Nashoba Brook. Dale will take a plan to the Conservation Commission soon.
- If someone wants to communicate a problem with the Sawyers, they should describe the problem and location, of course, but also take a picture and send it along. Whereas descriptions are open for interpretation, a picture can provide definitive information for the sawyers, such as the scale of a problem . . . whether to bring along a 25-lb chainsaw with a 3-ft bar or a 7-lb chainsaw with a 16-in. bar.

News from the shed

None.

Trail blazing needs

- Trails on the two new parts of Bulette/Town Forest will need blazing after they are established. First, Bettina will walk the parcels with Jon to plot the trails. They will then get together with Bob to determine trail colors. With LSC approval of the trails, Town IT will then build the map.
- How does one acquire new arrows of particular colors? Jody’s husband has made a boxful of arrows. They are in the Morrison Farm shed. Send an email to Jody or Bettina on what is needed and she will provide the information. Tom needs two arrows for Nashoba Brook. He should talk with Laurie on this offline and keep Bettina informed.

Website issues

Peg Sestrich has put a link to some “amazing” Acton wildlife videos on the website. Also, the beautiful, new Morrison Farm map is in place. Check it out.

Maps update

Jon presented Acton Trails map information, particularly for the newer members of the LSC. Joe Holmes and Jim Snyder-Grant used to be responsible for maintaining the LSC maps. Jon became involved with them pre-Covid as they started moving map maintenance to Town IT. Its first significant work is the new Morrison Farm map. A parcel steward should watch for problems on their parcel map and let Jon know of any map change needed.

Any map change is first made on the interactive OpenStreetMap (OSM), www.openstreetmap.org, a site that allows anyone to make any change on a map. (OSM does monitor changes and does not allow gross misrepresentations, but small local changes might not be “caught”.) Go to OSM map now, find Camp Acton, and you’ll see the two recent changes (Campsite 0 and the blue crossover trail by Campsite 3). Many interactive maps, including the Acton Trails maps, are based on OSM. Make a change on OSM and it will be transferred to your particular map. (Google Maps and Apple Maps maintain their own proprietary map data and are not changeable by the public.).

The Acton Trails parcel maps are run on “mapbox” software. It allows one to edit the map “locally” including the elimination of undesirable changes made on OSM. Go to the Acton Trails interactive map of Camp Acton and compare, for example, the representation of the blue crossover trail with its appearance on the OSM map. Outside of the LSC parcels, one sees the mapbox view of OSM. Inside an LSC parcel, the LSC controls what shows.

There are two other styles of maps on the Acton Trails site; most of them are pdf maps that Tom Tidman drew. They are beautiful, but 1) there is no connectivity with other parcels, and 2) they are quite static. Some changes can be “faked” on these maps, but that, in general, is not the best way to go.

If an “old” map is not salvageable, then it is best to move to a new map. At present, we give the Town accurate data and it will update the interactive map.

Another feature of the Acton Trails interactive maps: If you are in a parcel and load its map onto your cell phone, you will see a blue dot on the map that will move along with you on the trails.

Also, the Acton Trails interactive maps allows one to insert an arrow on the map to mark a location. One can drag the arrow around and provide a caption. (Alternative, one may have to drag the map around while the arrow stays stationary.) There are various ways to share the information, e.g., one can arrest the entire url and share it, or one can share a screen capture.

Next month's (January 18) agenda

- Update on the orienteering project at Nagog Hill and Grassy Pond
- Notify Joe, John Watlington, and Bettina with any other items.

Evaluate meeting

Well done! One hour, six minutes!!

Adjournment

8:06 pm

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, January 18, at 7 p.m.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft Meeting Minutes of November 16, 2021 were not available for this meeting.