

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 16, 2021, Town Hall, Room 9; also hybrid Zoom, 7 P.M.

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

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

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

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources Assistant), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Bob Mackin** (Acton citizen), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Steve Tobin** (Director, Carlisle Conservation Foundation (CCF)), **Bob Walton** (Acton citizen)

Opening

John opened the meeting at 7:03 p.m.

Regular Business

Review and approval of October 19 minutes

Make the sentence at the top of page 2 read “The Land Use Department oversees the Health, Building (DPW), Planning, and Conservation Departments.” (Note: This is in a context of future, not present, organization.) There was one other wording change that did not affect the context.

A motion to approve the minutes as amended was made, seconded, and passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Concerns from the public

Steve, a CCF Board member, updated the LSC on the acquisition of an easement across the Valentine land in North Acton that would allow for a small change in the Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) between Acton Street in Carlisle (Carlisle Road in Acton) and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. A brief history: The Valentines placed a Conservation Restriction on the land in 2008 and part of the restriction was an easement. In 2015 the CCF in cooperation with the LSC came up with an alternate routing for the trail to simplify access to the BFRT. With the property ready for development, the CCF and the LSC could now work together to put in the trail. The trail includes a 30-ft crossing of a stream and a 150-ft crossing of wetlands, both requiring permission of the Acton Conservation Commission. This is on the Cons Comm agenda for tomorrow night. Members of the LSC should have received copies of the application. Steve asks if the LSC has any questions on it and also wants to renew contact with the LSC in hopes of keeping it on board as part of the process.

- How is this being funded? Steve: The developer will pay CCF for the materials for the boardwalks. The CCF hopes to use volunteer labor to build the boardwalks.
- It’s possible to get help from the BCT. Steve: I think we have enough funding to do the projects, so we’re in good shape there.
- Have the boardwalks been designed? Steve: Yes, the application shows the designs. Steve sees some good ideas in designs used by the LSC and thinks both parties can work back and forth to make any changes that seem necessary. The idea is just to get the boardwalks in.
- The trail has been staked and flagged. Steve would be happy to have a look anytime with anyone interested.
- Does it make sense for some of us to show up at the Cons Comm meeting tomorrow night to show support for the project? Steve: That would be great!

– What time tomorrow night? 7:15, first on the agenda. It's a virtual zoom meeting.

New/Special Business

LSC personnel updates

Jon Campbell is a new voting member. We still need a Robbins Mill steward. Bob W has been helping out at Nashoba Brook and Robbins Mill. Peg Sestrich did a website update on stewards still being sought. Some volunteers, particularly Patrick Cavanaugh of Maynard, are willing to help with the Assabet Blue & Green Trail and the Canoe Launch. We have quite a lot of help for blazing.

Clarify Town position on operating power equipment on conservation land

Bettina followed up with HR on Dale's question that he put to the Town Manager. It's an ongoing issue, so she will check with HR again.

Laurie: If I "officially" resign from the sawyer crew, does that mean I should never be out there again with a chainsaw? Bettina's opinion: Just resigning from a Google group does not mean you are no longer qualified, but you probably should put it away (for LSC tasks).

Chainsaw training update

Bettina has been working very hard with MIAA, the Town's insurance company, trying to set up a training class, but is not getting anywhere. HR says no one can be a sawyer for the LSC unless s/he has had in-person training. Virtual training, or watching a video will not suffice and no steward should be responsible for training another steward. Training has to come from a professional trainer.

Is the issue finding a trainer? Per Bettina, MIAA says its trainer is very "booked up". Is MIAA "stuck in a rut" that it only uses one trainer? There are other competent trainers around. This is also affecting lots of other Town employees, fire fighters, EMTs, the Tree Warden, the DPW, and so on.

Bettina related how she has organized chainsaw training twice and the sessions drew over 20 people from all over the state. Now it seems that the Town is relying on one name at one phone number and if that person can't come here, training can't occur. And that reliance is foolish. Dale provided some references in New England, suggesting that if a site had, say, 40 folks ready for training, the trainer would readily come to that site. That site would, of course, have to have resources (e.g., trees) available to use for the training. There are some such sites locally.

A discussion ensued among the sawyers present on their use of and opinions about personal protective equipment, segueing into . . .

Sawyers' Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The question was posed: Could the LSC buy some equipment and leave it in the shed? No one feels good about that. If one is to take chainsaw safety seriously, you use your own saw and gear.

Invasives, Part 6 (continued from the October meeting)

John continued his presentation on invasives . . . tonight's topics: Bush Honeysuckle and Norway Maple.

John shared the Bush Honeysuckle PowerPoint slide (shown on the next page) and discussed its points.

Bush Honeysuckle (e.g. Lonicera morrowii)

A low bush (although it may grow up to 8' tall)

Spreads mostly by seed, but also by buried stems.

Regrows from root fragments and buried stems.

Repeated cuttings at ground level and/or pulling of roots required to kill

Watch for non-white flowers, possibly indicating a more invasive variety



Check: larger stems are hollow, smooth leaf edges

Additional point made:

- The bush honeysuckle is an invasive that is incredibly easy to find right now. The leaves are turning a little bit yellow and it just stands out in the woods

John then shared this Norway Maple PowerPoint slide and discussed its points.

Norway Maple (Acer platanoides)

A fast growing tree, which crowds out native Maples and other native trees.

Spreads by (distinctive 180°) seed

Regrows from cut trunks

Girding, or repeated cuttings and/or pulling of roots required to kill.



Additional points made:

- Right now, if you see a maple tree that is bright yellow, it's likely a Norway maple.
- In two years after girding, a Norway maple will be dead and there will be no regrowth from its remains.
- Do not gird a tree that is right next to a trail as that could cause a problem on the trail in the future.

Additional Regular Business

Parcel issues

– Nashoba Brook boardwalk (done!)

Applause for Bruce . . . worn out from the work it took. Bruce still would like to level a couple of sections, but that would require \$ for gravel and also recuperation from the task just completed.

Also at Nashoba Brook

- The Friends of Pine Hawk had a major workday at Wheeler Lane trailhead, including efforts by John (brush hog) and Dale (mowing). A frequent volunteer at the Arboretum, Dave Kinniburgh, did a great job on rehabilitating a bench.

- Dale will be pruning a mulberry tree at Wheeler Lane per a request from Acton Tree Warden, Ryan Hunt.

– Heath Hen Meadow bridge repair

That's this coming Saturday.

There was discussion on the possibility of tearing out as much as possible of the downstream beaver dam and clearing the beaver deceivers ahead of Saturday.

There was further discussion (lengthy) on materials needed and what exactly will be the nature of the repair.

Needed: Signage (e.g., “Bridge closed for repair Saturday”) that warns people that the bridge will be inaccessible on Saturday; signage not to be placed on kiosks but rather in places where people would read it. Time on Saturday: 9 am; Volunteers: As many as we can get, all wearing chest waders.

– Morrison Farm/Agricultural Committee possibilities

The Ag Comm is still batting around ideas, already having some, and seeking more, information from Town Planning and Town Counsel. A lease of the house and barn to a non-profit simplifies things. The buildings would still be Town-owned. The house could be made into an unoccupied weather-tight shell (similar to what is done with the farmhouse at the CSA on Barrett’s Mill Road in Concord; also with some houses in Minute Man National Park). The barn could possibly be made structurally sound and used for storage of cemetery equipment. Morene Bodner of the Ag Comm is spearheading the idea. Town Manager John Mangiaratti does not like the idea of empty houses. Making it an empty weather-tight, however, does not affect what could happen in the future should there be a viable option (which John believes could be quite expensive). Bettina, Morene, John, Town Planning, and others will be meeting on this.

- Observation: Currently there is a lot of junk in the Morrison Farm sheds behind the barn.

- Re the Asa Parlin house behind Town Hall: Current plan is to make it the “Asa Parlin Cultural Center” to serve as another meeting place, as exist in the Acton Library, in the center of town.

– Great Hill trail modifications

There are two trails we are trying to open up. One is from the new Piper Lane parking lot on land previously known as the Magoon land. It is flagged with white, cleared with chainsaw, but not yet swept. It feeds into the red trail that runs parallel to Piper Road on the part of Great Hill previously known as the Gaebel land. The other is a white-flagged and chainsaw-cleared reroute of the really steep part of the yellow trail in the Northwest corner (near the large boulder) to make it a zig-zag route. Both trails await final approval.

– Great Hill & Camp Acton (and elsewhere) debris

- Camp Acton: After previous LSC discussions, there was a meeting on this with Melissa Rier of the Recreation Department (which manages permitted use of the Camp). She is now sending “heads up” messages along with the permits and that seems to have helped. Bettina has “no dumping” signs on order. There apparently has been no progress of getting a camera on site.

- Great Hill: Bettina received an e-mail from a Nylander Way abutter who took umbrage with all the painted rocks that are appearing. Someone left about 50 rocks and a sign saying “Please take a painted rock and disperse it on conservation land.” The abutter asked if they could clean it up and Bettina said “Yes”.
- Heath Hen Meadow: There were some painted rocks left near the Heath Hen Meadow bridge that appeared to be a memorial to a dog.
- Nagog Hill: There are some painted rocks scattered around Nagog Hill.
- Grassy Pond: There have been some spray paintings of phallic symbols.

– Nagog Hill

- There is a broken boardwalk that we have to do something about. A pine tree had fallen on the boardwalk that goes west from the small meadow about two weeks ago.
- We should reroute the very muddy part of the yellow trail that heads into the large meadow from the main parking lot. Take out the rotting boards and move the trail 15 ft. to the east to be beside the stone wall that sits at least 2 ft. higher than the current trail.
- On the cleanup around the conservation land used by Hybid Farm: Dale walked a lot of the fence locations two weeks ago. A lot of the fencing has been removed, but there still is a lot of debris. The Conservation Commission has made it clear to the former owner, who has a \$10K bond riding on the cleanup, about how it feels about the cleanup

– Grassy Pond

The land is particularly muddy — more than usual. Gary has tried to make it more passable, but would welcome suggestions.

- Everybody is having trouble with mud. The precipitation has been something like 50% over average.
- Woodchips and corduroying could work, although the large number of rocks might make corduroying difficult.
- Bettina will ask Shawn O’Malley for chips, and advised on at least 8 backpacks being available in the Morrison Farm shed.
- A brief discussion on the use of woodchips ensued.
- The use of gravel would be difficult.
- Is trail rerouting possible? It’s a watershed, so rerouting would be difficult.

Also at Grassy Pond

- In the corner of the Nagog Hill Road parking lot, there is a 10-in.-diameter oak limb hanging over three parking spaces that Dale expects to cut down this week.
- When the town mowed the meadow beside the parking lot, it apparently removed an unused guardrail pole from the ground. The hole got covered with oak leaves. Dale stepped on/in it and nearly broke an ankle. He filled the hole with a large rock.

– Heath Hen Meadow

- There are places that could use wood chips. In fact, there is a pile of wood chips at the Robbins Street entrance. Zanna can schedule, and supervise, a work day for a couple volunteers. E-mail Bettina with a day and time.
- The beavers at Muddy Brook — indeed at several sites all over town — have nearby residents freaking out. The Health Department has been advising that folks can apply to have the beavers ousted, but cautions that the problem should first be shared with Mike Callahan of Beaver Solutions to learn that a site is not viable for some form of beaver deceiving. However, Mike says that he is extremely busy at this time all over the state.

– Pratts Brook

We have not yet gotten around to fixing the broken boardwalk, but it is still functional.

News from the shed

The mower started right up, so it's happy. The shed could use some organization.

Trail blazing needs

Jody sent around a Google Docs spreadsheet for everyone. For any blazing needs, contact Jody. It's still too cold to blaze at Grassy Pond, but there is orange flagging tape around the trees where she intends to blaze. She also noted two boards on the long boardwalk that should be fixed.

Website issues

See next item.

Maps update

Jon Campbell is out of town, but when he comes back Bruce would like him to put the handicapped campsite on the Camp Acton map and the revised map on the website.

Next month's (December 21) agenda

- Holiday cookies
- Notify Joe and John with any other items.

Evaluate meeting

Well done, Mr. Chair!

Adjournment

8:17 pm

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, December 21, at 7 p.m.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft Meeting Minutes of October 19, 2021