

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 21, 2022, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

Regular (voting) members: **Jon Campbell, Dale Chayes, Zanna Gruber** (Vice-Chair), **Aaron Moore** (2022-2023 Chair), Bruce Rachman, **Laurie Ullmann, John Watlington** (2021-22 Chair), **Joe Will** (Minutes)

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

Others:

Bettina Abe (Acton Natural Resources), **Mike Gendron** (Acton Conservation Agent), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Rebecca Harvey** (Acton citizen), **Rachel Krebs** (Acton citizen), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Bob Walton** (Acton citizen)

Opening

John opened the meeting at 7 p.m. Bettina introduced Mike who is Acton's new Conservation Agent taking over Tom Tidman's conservation responsibilities.

Regular Business

Review and approval of May 24 minutes

Minutes are approved with two changes from Bettina: Remove Bethany Nichols name from the list of Associate members. Also, in response to a complaint about dog behavior at Nagog Hill, Bettina will order a new sign with the dog bylaw and install it at Nagog Hill.

Membership update

Hilary is joining the LSC as steward of Robbins Mill. Rachel, who is attending this meeting, is interested in possibly becoming the steward for the Canoe Launch. Bettina has received Rachel's application and will be submitting it to the Volunteer Coordinating Committee. Bettina reminded the Committee that Maynard resident Ken Appel, who helped significantly with development of the Assabet River Blue and Green Trail and does volunteer work with the ACT, might consider joining the LSC as a co-steward. Bettina is waiting to hear back from him.

The Select Board has agreed, but not yet formally voted, that Associate LSC members would serve a one-year first term. Subsequent appointments would be three-year terms. Bettina will summarize the situation by email to LSC members.

Election of officers

Nomination was made and seconded for Aaron as new Chair. Roll call vote was unanimous for Aaron, save for Dale who was attending while driving and was muted when his name was called. With that vote, John turned over chairing the meeting to Aaron. Nominations were made and seconded for Zanna as Vice-Chair and Joe as Clerk. Separate roll call votes were unanimous for Zanna and Joe.

Concerns from the public

None

Town Conservation Staff, tasks, and management; extending Bettina's list

Bettina reintroduced Mike whose first day as Acton Conservation Agent will be July 5. He will report to Kristen Guichard, Acton Planning Director. Mike outlined his background and is “excited” about getting involved in Acton, and “working with the land stewards may be the thing I’m most excited about.” Mike’s job will be narrower than Tom Tidman’s (Tom also oversaw the Acton Recreation and Cemetery Departments), primarily involving work related to the Wetlands Protection Act and the Conservation Commission (which oversees the LSC).

Invasive plants 2022, Part 4

John shared information on Multiflora Rose using this PowerPoint slide.

Rambler Rose (*Rosa multiflora*)

Both a bush and a vine which will grow up and over anything.

Spreads mostly by root, but also by seed.

Regrows from root fragments or buried stems.

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



Check: curved thorns, hairs on leaf stems

In addition to expanding on the information on the slide, John pointed out that this invasive is easier to remove than the others he has talked about, but this doesn’t mean it’s easy to remove. Right now is a great time to look around the edges of pastures and in the woods for its white flower — not to be confused with blackberries’ white flowers (which have been dropped by now). Be careful to correctly identify the plant before pulling, as the Virginia Rose and the Carolina Rose (which John now finds at Great Hill) have similar appearances.

Parcel issues

– Spring Hill trail reroute

Bettina shared information from Bruce Rachman.



Referring to the picture on the left and the picture on the right, above, the proposed reroute is the solid yellow path (right) that curves along the present blue trail (left, just below the “H” in “Spring Hill”) and

cuts straight down to the original yellow path along the stone wall. The red trail to Jay Lane would be extended along the current yellow trail (left, beside the red “X”) to its current junction with the blue trail. The new yellow-blue junction would be at the top “point” of the yellow trail (right). John suggests that Committee members have a look at the proposed reroute and it be on the July agenda. Bettina will ask Bruce if he can flag the proposed route. Committee members who check this out should send any comments to only Bettina and/or Bruce.

– Nashoba Brook, Wheeler Lane equipment, mugwort, bridge, . . .

Bettina set up a GoFundMe page seeking \$600. It has received \$300 so far and Bettina has a private donor who will pick up whatever the shortfall would be. With the donated funds, Bettina will buy an electric mower and weed whacker to be stored, and charged, in the nearby homes of Kelly McEwen and Tom. Kelly and Tom will mow and trim the periphery of the Nashoba Brook land at Wheeler Lane that Town workers can’t get to.

As for mugwort . . . Wheeler Lane is one of those places where regular mowing by the Town just another three feet over would do wonders for getting rid of the mugwort. Other points made during the ensuing mugwort discussion:

- Controlling mugwort is easiest if you mow or weed whack it when it's tender and young — less than a foot, or even two feet high. Once it gets taller than two feet, it really becomes a woody plant. It's much harder to cut, requiring a much stronger piece of equipment.
- A possible strategy, once we have our own equipment, is to mow wider because Town mowers only go “so close” to the edge, thus they get farther and farther away from the actual edge over time and the mugwort gets taller and taller.
- Mugwort . . .

. . . is very strong in the Wheeler Lane area and it's probably the predominant, prevalent weed at a lot of sites.

. . . should be included in John's presentations on invasives. John gave a brief history of his list of invasives and agreed that he should add mugwort to the list.

. . . has sort of a strong herbal smell. In some cultures, it is used successfully to treat different medical issues. It has anti-inflammatory properties.

. . . grows on a stalk with little leaves that go out flat to a side. The backsides of its leaves are sort of silvery. Run your hand over the back side and it's very aromatic.

. . . almost looks like a marijuana plant when it's young.

. . . is not too hard to cut.

. . . has some native plant look-a-likes so you must be careful of what you cut. Our native wild geranium looks a lot like mugwort when it's just the baby.

. . . can grow in very thick stands along the edges of a trail.

. . . is really hard to deal with in August because by then it's woody and harder to cut. You can even get splinters!

. . . is much more herbaceous when younger, and that's why you really want to keep after it in any area that you're planning to maintain. You should whack it at least once a week, or every other week, so it doesn't get too tall.

As for the bridge, built in the '90s by Laurie, Bob Guba, and probably Tom Tidman . . . there probably should be a “meet” at the bridge to assess how to go about fixing it and what kind of lumber is needed. Tom will send out an email to the committee suggesting a time, probably on either a Saturday or Sunday morning, to get some of the LSC bridge experts there to look at the bridge, to assess the condition of its components, and determine replacement needs. This should be done as soon as possible for planning purposes as we also have the Heath Hen Meadow bridge and boardwalk to do this summer. Autumn — Octoberish — might be a good time to do the work for various reasons including fewer bugs and lower water level.

– Heath Hen Meadow boardwalk project

Bettina reviewed that Town Meeting approved a Community Preservation Act grant of \$38,000 to help rebuild the boardwalk and bridge that Bob Guba built in 1997 or so. Prior to grant approval, Bettina had been in touch with RDS Dock Hardware of Franklin, NH, reminding RDS of its quote of around \$18K given to Bettina a while back for the aluminum frames and trex recycled plastic decking that would be used. Since that quote, however, ownership of RDS changed hands and owner Connor Ford of RDS told Bettina that the price had increased to \$60K. Bettina expressed amazement at the tripling of the cost, and that her grant was for only \$38K. Connor rather quickly was able to discount the price to \$33K. Bettina added up what she believed the project's total cost would be, winding up about \$4-5K short. Bettina stressed with Connor the good publicity she could provide with a little more help from RDS, and, after speaking to a higher up, Connor said that RDS would provide the material for \$29K. Next things Bettina needed to do was create the purchase order and find out a building schedule from the LSC.

LDS quoted that lead times on the aluminum would be nine weeks.

The boardwalk/bridge will be upstream a little bit from the current structure, it's going to be in a straight line and it's going to be elevated a little bit higher.

Bettina will check with the Conservation Commission as to whether this project will require a Wetlands filing.

John wonders whether anyone has done a depth profile across the stream right where the current bridge is because the stream drops just about eight to 10 feet deep on the downstream side of the bridge. He doesn't know what's happening in the upstream side. He does know that on the upstream side of the current bridge are the remains of the old stone dam that created Heath Hen Meadow. This suggests that perhaps the existing bridge was built to look down at that old stone dam right next to it. Consequently, there might be some concern about putting the new bridge immediately upstream because we may be trying to drive aluminum poles right through a pile of rocks. (Laurie confirms that one used to be able to walk across the stones before there ever was a boardwalk, but some stones probably were moved when the bridge was built.) John suggests that perhaps we should breach the dam again (dropping the water level by about two feet to possibly see the old dam), do a site survey, possibly try to get the beaver deceiver in place, and then do the planning. Bettina did test the water depth, upstream along the whole length of the existing boardwalk, so she has that data.

For this project, Bettina will update the LSC by email, try to figure out what people's plans are for July, August, and September, and put together a schedule, including purchase and delivery of the LDS materials.

– Nashoba Brook bridge at the Pencil Factory

What's its status? The bridge is regularly on the agenda of the Acton Historical Commission that meets every third Wednesday of each month. You can read about some (non-site) activity in the Commission's meeting minutes. That Commission has provided no information to the LSC.

– Field Mower

John reports that the field mower's motor is running quite well, but the front fork is bent again. The mower is still usable. John is working on getting another fork and swapping it out. In the meantime, just be gentle with the mower over the next month.

Updates

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

No update.

– Website

No update

– Maps

Jon had to leave this meeting, but put this note in the Chat Box:

Nagog Hill Yellow reroute from March, near Hybird Farm, is in OpenStreetMap, as is a citizen request for the northern stub trail in Jenks. About half the updates to Bulette-Anderson parcels are also done in OSM. Still need to add the new parking lot near Church of the Good Shepherd. Then all must go into Acton Trails, which is step 2, and onto updated PDFs (step 3).

Per Bettina, the Town is working on a bunch of maps. However, the Town lost Aaron Green who had been assigned to GIS in the IT Department. He did an amazing job and made our maps really fast. While the Town may be trying to fill that position, Bettina currently must work with Kristen Alexander in IT who, in turn, contracts with a GIS company, and there's a queue. So, the maps take “forever”. Bettina is also waiting for Jon to give her the KML file for a Bulette map.

– Valentine land

Steve Tobin of the Carlisle Conservation Foundation is ready to complete the trail that will reroute the Bay Circuit Trail onto an easement across the Valentine property to Carlisle Road and then to the Robbins Mill North parcel in North Acton. This will involve building boardwalks on the property sometime this Fall.

Next month's (07/19) agenda

The Heath Hen Meadow boardwalk, the Spring Hill reroute, the Nashoba Brook bridge.

Discuss that current stewards can be “first in line” to steward any parcel that needs a new steward.

Send any other items to Aaron or Joe.

Evaluate meeting

Great!

Adjournment

At 8:06 pm.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, July 19, at 7 p.m.