

Acton

Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, August 15, 2023, 7 P.M., Hybrid

Attendees (in bold)

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

Associate (nonvoting) members: **Ken Appel**, Josh Haines, **Rebecca Harvey**, Everett Kenerson, Gary Kilpatrick, Mel Lima, **Bob Mackin**, **Adam Nolde**, Jim Salem, Bill Smith, Jason Temple, **Steve Trimble**, Todd Tsakiris

Others: **Bettina Abe** (Acton Conservation), **Ian Bergemann** (Acton Land Stewardship Coordinator), **Mike Gendron** (Acton Conservation Agent), **Jody Harris** (Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), **Susan Mitchell-Hardt** (ACT), **Bob Walton** (Acton resident)

Aaron opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Review and acceptance of July 18 minutes

The minutes were accepted as presented. A check for a possible pronoun error showed none.

Concerns from the public

Regular member Zanna Gruber submitted her resignation from the LSC earlier today.

Joe gave an overview of what's happening in town re open spaces (not necessarily LSC parcels): Most know of the Acton Water District proposed acquisition of 549 Main Street (which may become an LSC parcel). A new Senior Park is under consideration for 352 Main Street, abutting Acton Housing Authority's McManus Manor (41 units of low-income housing for seniors and persons with disabilities). The Acton Community Dog Park has received a \$200+K grant for its 348 Main Street site (next to the Senior Park). And off Main Street in South Acton, the 53 River Street site is well on its way to becoming an historical park along Fort Pond Brook. Also, the former Douglas School site is becoming a softball field and a large parking lot, next to which will be the restored basketball courts.

Invasive plants 2023, Part 6

John presented on Norway Maple.

This is a popular tree and lots of people still have them in their yards, ignoring (and possibly unaware of) the fact that its seeds wash downhill into conservation, or open, areas and start seeding there. At Great Hill, there are large numbers around and above the main playing field and he's been girding them. You can tell a Norway maple by its 5 leaf lobes instead of 3 found on native maples. However, if it's regrowing from a cut stump it tends to show just 3 lobes distinctly.

The main way to determine a Norway maple is to break off the stem of a leaf. Wait 5-10 seconds. Then, if you see a white sap, it's a Norway maple. If you see a clear sap, it's a native maple. It also has a distinctive

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

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



Check: white sap at end of leaf stem when broken off

seed. The seeds grow directly apart from one another. Native maple seeds are much closer together. Norway maple leaves turn green earlier than do native maple leaves, and they stay green longer later in the season. To gird a Norway maple, remove a 6-inch ring of bark from around the tree. If you simply try to cut a Norway maple, it will regrow quite easily.

Question: Will native maples regrow from cut trunks? Not known because of lack of experience with cutting native maples.

Aside: John wondered if there is an organized effort to deal with all invasive areas on LSC parcels. Per Bob, we need more personpower than land stewards can provide to do extensive invasives work. He suggests that another organization is needed with which land stewards would work collaboratively. Bob will try to prepare an example of how this might work, possibly including an invasives *wiki* (a website or online resource that can be edited by multiple users). John suggests that perhaps something could be done with <https://actoninvasives.org>, a site originated by Jim Snyder-Grant but now in John's hands. Or, per Bob, we could combine a Google wiki with a Google spreadsheet. This will be on the September agenda.

Open Space and Recreation Plan sub-goals

Ian reviewed the subgoals and associated tasks of the Five-Year Plan (Section 9). The subgoals to date:

- Manage and control invasive and nuisance species
- Develop and extend trail networks
- Improve access to and use of managed conservation areas
- Protect existing open fields, meadows and agricultural parcels

If stewards know of any possible subgoals distinct from the above or that would modify the above, send them to Mike.

Discussion:

- Should “and nuisance” be deleted from the first subgoal? “Nuisance” is not restricted to plants. It could include other things, notably animals.
- We could consider a subgoal about actively engaging people in land stewardship as there clearly is a shortage of land stewards. One possibility could be outreach by the LSC that encourages others to get involved. Another might be an information effort to educate the public on our trails, where they come from, and who takes care of them as it is clear right now that land stewards are essentially unknown to the public.
- Perhaps there could be an adoption program where a parcel is adopted (and cared for) by, say, an organization like the Scouts or the Lions Club. A group caretaking activity would be less burdensome to individuals.
- We probably should make better use of our kiosks in providing more information about the land stewards, our meetings, how to get in touch with us, how to join us — an introduction to the LSC that stays on the kiosk, unlike the very effective but temporary signs that signal this parcel needs a new steward.
- A kiosk could have a permanent sign consisting of basic information plus a QR code, or the like, that would send one to an information site that could be kept up to date and possibly include information, like photos or videos, that would be too much for a kiosk.
- Building on that idea, could the QR codes currently in use take to you the parcel map, a link to the sawyers, *and* a link to information about the land stewards?

Ian will run with some of the ideas shared above, particularly invasives control and showcasing land stewardship activities. At the same time, each steward should think seriously about the subgoals (particularly those not discussed at this meeting) and send any thoughts to Ian and Mike. The OSRP group is really pushing hard to get the OSRP done!

Ian's Trails Tales, Part 1 — Pacy

Ian shared his thoughts and pictures re the Pacy Conservation Land (CL), something he hopes to do for other parcels, one at a time in upcoming meetings. He summarized his presentation with this slide:

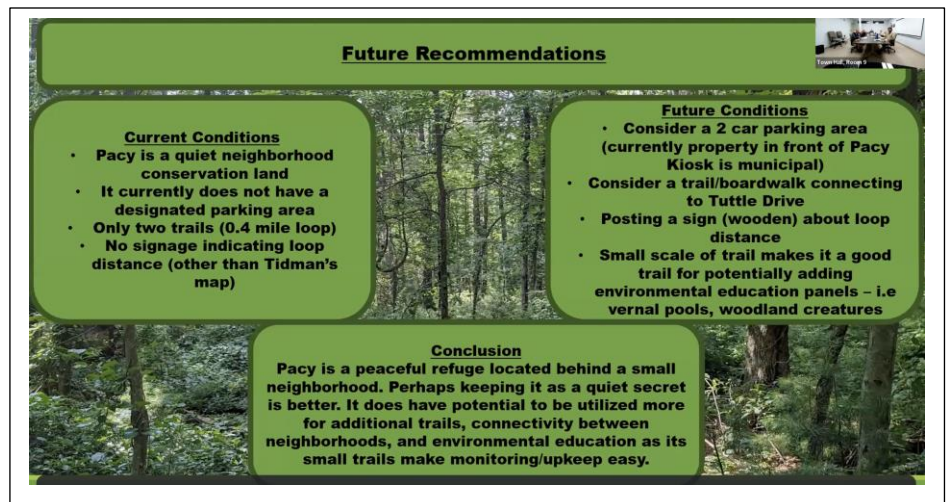
Discussion:

– Per the Town GIS, the Pacy land abuts municipal land which abuts the Hebert Farm (private property). An easement across the Hebert land, possibly at the Community Gardens, would in effect “connect” Pacy to Great Hill.

– Can the Pacy yellow trail connect to the Tuttle Drive entrance? The biggest impediment is water. Also, the private abutters on Tuttle

have not been in favor of such a connection. But that was a long time ago and perhaps the neighbors would be more amenable now. Bringing the yellow trail to Tuttle Drive would require lots of boardwalk. The LSC could do an exploration but that should wait until bug season is over and leaves fall off the trees.

– Pacy is where a dog was attacked by coyotes (probably a parent with pups) a few years ago.



Bulette description

Bettina sent an updated description to stewards on 07/25. Discussion is delayed to give folks more time to look at it.

Other parcel issues

– Nashoba Brook

Re the Community Preservation Act (CPA) project by the Historical Commission (HC) of a bridge over Nashoba Brook at the Pencil Factory: The HC's May minutes say that Bill Dickinson (HC Chair) has prepared applications for landscape architects but has not sent them out yet. He will be in touch with Mike on this. The HC June minutes say that Bill has sent an RFP to several structural engineering and landscape architectural firms, and he hopes to have responses by the next meeting. The only item in the HC July minutes suggest that someone named Larry Sorley should be consulted on appropriate signage for the project. Mike did meet with Bill and learned basic information about the project. Steve is on the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) and will be informed as to how the project is proceeding.

For general interest, at its August 22 meeting the CPC will review the 2024 CPA Plan and there should be more information on the 53 River Street project. On 9/26 the CPC will have a Public Hearing on the 2024 Plan. November 20 is the project submission deadline, in case the LSC has any project submission plans. Steve notes that he is suggesting that any Town project submitted in the CPA's recreation category must be prioritized by the Recreation Department, with analogous conditions for projects submitted in the Historical Resources, Open Space, and Housing categories.

– Heath Hen Meadow

John removed a significant “leaner” over the Mt. Hope service road to Heath Hen Meadow. This prompted Joe to suggest that the sawyers should report periodically on the tree work they've done simply because

there is a lot that they do that folks don't know about but should. Ditto a suggestion for folks that do the blazing.

– Grassy Pond

Steve reported a large tree (8-10" diameter) down on the yellow trail. He hasn't reported it officially yet but will send a report soon. Also, the pier in the pond is about an inch from being under water, and it is under water in a couple spots.

Gary Kilpatrick, Grassy Pond steward, was injured while hiking in New Hampshire and will be out of commission for a little while.

Downstream from Grassy Pond on Grassy Pond Brook, the Board of Health has approved some beaver removals.

– Bulette

Rebecca expressed concern re parking in the Arlington Street parking lot, noting that it (particularly leaving a crowded lot) can be a challenge for a large vehicle such as hers. She will take a picture the next time there and share it with the LSC. Bettina suggests that signage may be able to help the situation. Also needed at that lot is a "Bulette Conservation Land" sign.

"I Hiked Acton Trails" flyer

Ian shared a revamp of the flyer as shown at the right and is looking for LSC feedback on it. Should it be hung in kiosks? Ian also updated the corresponding participation form. The QR code on the flyer, lower left, allows one to access the form on the Town's website. The code on the lower right takes one to the Acton Trails maps. Feedback can be emailed to Ian. If the flyer is okay, he will print, laminate, and hang them himself, and leave some that can be picked up at Town Hall.

"Promoting Safe Trails"

Ian shared this brochure with the LSC a little while ago. They can be downloaded and printed for free using the URL shown below. They promote safe hiking and sharing the trail. The LSC could consider placing these in the kiosk boxes that have been used for maps and information on ticks. If a steward likes the brochure for their kiosk, Ian would be happy to print and fold them for the steward. The URL:

<https://www.trailpartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/sash-brochure-generic.pdf>

Discussion:

– The brochure seems to be one-third equestrian, one-third biker, and one-third walker related. For our trails it seems it should be one-third dog walker, one-third mountain biker, and one-third hiker. It doesn't seem to be a perfect fit for Acton. There has to be something else out there that has most of this without the equestrian concentration. Is this for hikers where there are horses, or is it for horse riders? Do we see the latter stopping to pick up a brochure?

– Others liked including the equestrian information: Everything's a two-way street. Educating both riders and non-riders are equally important. There are plenty of other trails in Massachusetts that have horses. This is just education.



Updates

– 549 Main Street: Mike has seen a copy of the draft baseline documentation report and the final version of the Conservation Restriction. The latter needs to be reviewed by the Town and Water District and approved by the State, so “We are getting close to getting that parcel up and running.”

– Morrison Farm Conservation Restriction: No update. The Water Resources Advisory Committee is meeting tomorrow night and is considering Morrison Farm as a possible site for helping with affluent (sewage) along Great Road. It would be good to find out more about that.

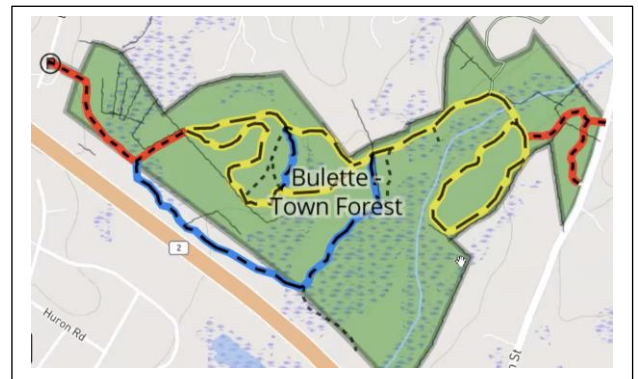
– Wetherbee land adjacent to the Wetherbee CL: Dale has tried to find out more about the “antenna farm” on the property without much success to date, but he hasn’t given up.

– Bridges, Board/Bogwalks, Maps, Mowing, Chain sawing, Website:

Bridges: Bettina provided an update on the bridge construction at Heath Hen Meadow . . . construction of section number 12 last week, details of upcoming work this Thursday, and some supply needs. Also, a Prescott Road neighbor who hikes Heath Hen Meadow has asked if pieces from the old bridge could be used to help with a wet, muddy portion of the red trail. Seems okay.

Projects: Ian gave an update on Eagle Scout projects. There is a new kiosk at the Arlington Street entrance to the expanded Bulette, and one will be put up at the Genevieve Lane trailhead whenever that trailhead site is established. Ian has prepared a document on what has to be done to prepare a trail into Bulette from the end of Genevieve Lane. He’s shared it with Bob Mackin and will send it to anyone else who is interested. We’ll let the scout know to hold off on the kiosk until a site is determined.

Helping establish trails on the new portions of Bulette might be a good fit for ACT’s Fall Community Service Day project. Jody and Mike or Ian should discuss this. Also, Ian should let sawyers know of any sawing that needs to be done (preferably ahead of time) for new Bulette trails. Ian used the Bulette map (at right) showing new trail colors to describe a trail that will be flagged soon and is dense in terms of shrubs and saplings but is not in terms of big trees. Sawyers will be notified if the flagging identifies any sawyer projects.



Ian and Bettina briefly reviewed the boardwalks and bog bridges that are ongoing Eagle Scout projects. A project on the Assabet River Blue and Green Trail is underway and one at Grassy Pond is imminent.

Mowing: It is good that the town seems to be mowing our meadows, but it should have started with meadows that haven’t been mowed in a few years (e.g., the Arboretum middle meadow) instead of with the easy ones in the first week of August, such as at Great Hill. At Great Hill we don’t get to see any of the fall changes to the meadow (e.g., the sumac turning red). It can’t be that good for that meadow to get mowed that early. Can the town try to do such mowing a little later in the fall?

Mike agrees that the mowing is occurring too early. However, Shawn O’Malley, who oversees the mowing for the town is “wildly understaffed”, especially this year. Mike has met with Shawn a couple times to try to figure out how to get done this year the mowing of every meadow. Shawn will try to do all the mowing himself, going from meadow to meadow as his time allows, which means there possibly could be weeks at a time when there is no mowing. A later start in the Fall would mean that mowing could be one interruption (e.g., a mechanical failure) away from some meadows being unmowed. So, the decision was to “start now” to hopefully get all meadows mowed this year. There probably should have been an effort to arrange an order to the mowings.

The Town contracts the mowing of three meadows each year. Whereas we have more control over the how and when of contracted services, Mike is searching the budget to see if there could be contracts also for Jenks and at least one Arboretum meadow. A reminder: Shawn is asking stewards who have meadows on their parcels to help remove logs from the meadows and mark any big rocks to help mowing go as smoothly as possible.

Website: Ian has experience with WordPress so he would like to connect with Peg Sestrich to find if he can help her with updating the Acton Trails site. Suggestion: Add website links that take one to Ian's Trail Tales and John's reports on invasive species.

Chain sawing: We need more sawyers, and we need more chainsaw training, both for newcomer and for those who have had a lower level of training. Bettina has informed Ian of the need for getting the really good training course and this is something that he will pursue. In particular, we have to be explicit that we are looking for Storm Cleanup as an advanced follow-up to the basic course. In fact, a Storm Cleanup course would be a good idea for all our sawyers. Such an effort though might require a grant, as there likely is not enough in the Town budget. (Or build such a cost into the budget.) Also, the better the training that sawyers have, the more likely it is that they will continue their volunteer service. Dale is willing to work with Mike on putting together a budget request for chainsaw training.

Maps: Bob has updated the North Acton map to include the Robbins Mill reroute and it can be swapped in place of the current version, ultimately to be used as a basis for putting the map into the form prototyped by the Morrison Farm map.

Jon noted that the color trails are now on the new Bulette parcel (see preceding page).

LSC membership

This is Bettina's last meeting while a member of the Town staff. On Thursday the VCC will be considering Bettina's application to join the LSC.

Next month's (09/19/23) agenda

No additional suggestions.

Evaluate meeting

Excellent meeting!

Adjournment

At 8:28 pm.

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