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Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC)
Wednesday, July 29, 2013, Meeting Minutes
Town Hall, Room 126, 4 pm

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe, Tom Arnold, Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Philip Keyes, Nan Towle Millett, Bruce Rachman, Jim Snyder-Grant (Chair), Laurie Ullmann

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Joe Will (minutes)

Nonmembers: Janet Adachi (Board of Selectmen LSC liaison)

Jim called the meeting to order at 4:11 pm.

Previous meeting minutes

The LSC approved by unanimous vote the June minutes as presented.

Officer elections

Board of Selectmen will do committee re-appointments August 5. After that, LSC will hold elections (Chair, Vice-Chair, Clerk). For this meeting, Joe volunteered to do the minutes.

New proposed trail at Sachem Way

To get the Certificate of Occupancy for new homes at the end of Sachem Way, the Acton Housing Authority must provide a trail from the end of Sachem Way into the Wills Hole/Town Forest (WH/TF) Land. The LSC agreed to the trail last year. Jim presented a WH/TF map with the proposed trail in purple (see DocuShare). Jim, Phil, and Joe have walked the proposed trail and all three are okay with it. The final trail will be a red trail.

Vote: The LSC approved cutting this new trail by unanimous vote.

Action: Jim will notify the person (likely Peggy Liversidge) who will blaze the trail. Jim will also move the town-made sign "No public access to Nonset Path" from its current location on the proposed trail to a location that's more appropriate for serving its suggested purpose.

Whether to blaze existing trails at WH/TF

Jim's WH/TF map (see previous item) shows two other trails in purple that could possibly be blue-blazed trails.

1) A trail providing a shortcut from yellow trail to yellow trail not far from the Sachem Way purple trail: This trail through a pine grove seems to be used quite a bit, but likely mostly by "locals." Comments for blazing: "Nice trail, let's blaze it." "Make it an official trail so people can find their way." "Having an informal trail that's not blazed and shown on the map can be confusing." Comments for not blazing: "Those in the know, know how to use it." "Trail is so well defined and short, no one will get lost." "Because of the vegetation through which it passes, blazing would be a challenge. We would have to erect posts to show the blazes." "There is a similar trail at Nashoba Brook that cuts from the upper trail down to the pencil factory and the notion of blazing it hasn't occurred." "We should be against chopping up parcels (with trails) in principle."

The group appeared to be split on blazing. Jim asked who would prefer that we blaze it. No hands raised. Jim declared that we will take no action now and leave it as is.

2) Trail joining blue and yellow trails: This trail has not been used for some time now and no one on the LSC supports blazing it.

In addition to the discussion re the three “purple” trails listed above,

- Bob favors eliminating the red trail that is adjacent to the driveway road from Quarry Road to the private quarries. Phil discourages eliminating it because many people from NARA take it to access WH/TF. Not having it as a trail could encourage use of the private driveway, which would not be desirable.
- There was considerable discussion/comment on the “other” trail heading north from the Nagog Park Drive entrance (roughly, and briefly, parallel to the yellow trail). It generally is not on conservation land. Following it leads to an animal kennel; further to an abandoned rail bed. It seems to be fairly heavily used (so it wouldn’t be right to drop a couple trees across it), including by horses and riders (including from Bobby’s Ranch in Westford). Go beyond the kennels and you can find an old railroad bed with connections to Kennedy Pond and other places in Westford.

Action: Let’s explore this trail and come back and talk about it. There were cautions that if you go beyond the dog kennel you will get lost . . . at least until you get to the rail bed.

The discussion above (on the informal trail to the kennel) prompted discussion on possible signage for trails that leave Acton Conservation land. Bruce suggested a sign saying, “Leaving Acton Conservation land.” Jim pointed out that we do have signs saying, “Entering Acton Conservation land” and that we also have a minimal sign policy. Bettina suggested “Entering private property” along with arrows pointing in the trail direction.

Committee members disagreed on whether people get lost on trails that go onto private property from Acton Conservation lands.

Advice for taking on a new parcel assignment

The committee brainstormed this list:

- Learn best practices on how/what to do.
- Be in touch with former steward(s) of that parcel.
- Talk to Bob, who will tell you everything he knows, which is a lot.
- Look at meeting minutes and “Search” for the name of your parcel.
- Develop a sense of awareness as to what to look for.
- Learn potential “hot spots” where troubles occur.
- Know where to go first in the parcel if you have only a few minutes.

Plaques on projects — policy

Some think a plaque would be appropriate for the new bridge at Guggins Brook, but what to say on it, and on plaques in general? Bob points out that as of now we have no policy on plaques, either their design or wording (e.g., who does the work, who provides financial support). It’s important that each plaque show a date. We are not getting any outside pressure on this.

Action: We will save this for a future meeting.

Cooperating with Commission on Disabilities to document the relative accessibility of our trails

Can we document the relative accessibility of our trails and how difficult they are? Can we talk with Commission on Disabilities about this and possibly get some ideas from the Commission? Note that this would be about documenting our current trails, not about changing any trails to meet ADA requirements.

Action: Tom will check whether his wife would be willing to get involved, as she has worked with people with disabilities.

A new requirement from ADA says that people who maintain public trails need a policy for power-driven mobility devices, e.g., segways, golf carts, that help people get around. Perhaps the Commission on Disabilities could help with policy on this. Jim has a copy of Carlisle's policy.

Tom says it would be helpful to have a matrix of parcels with types of trails on the parcels. We could build accessibility information into such a chart. Jim, Tom, and Tom's wife will be discussing this over the next few months.

Janet suggests that Tom's wife talk with the Building Commissioner on official disability requirements. Bettina should be involved with Tom's wife on this as well, as this is high on the Arboretum's list and she has already done some of this with the Arboretum.

We do have a chart on all our trails and the maximum grade on them, such as the one shown on the back of the Carlisle report.

Agreement in process with Harvard Town Forest to make a small part of Nagog Hill Conservation Area a garlic mustard test site

This agenda item not addressed in the interest of time.

August Meeting date

It appears that a quorum is not possible for meeting on 08/21 (the regular date). However, one is possible for 08/28, so we will aim for that date for the August meeting.

Action: Jim to reserve a room for 8/28.

Continued review of summer maintenance

There was brief discussion. Notes are merged with parcel updates below.

June 4 Volunteer Fair and upcoming summer volunteer work

This agenda item not addressed in the interest of time.

Parcel updates / Reports of signs needing repair

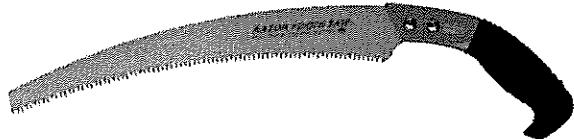
- Pratt's Brook: Blueberry Barrens paths are narrow. Bob widened all the trails in that area this a.m. with mower. It might still need a walkthrough with hedge clippers for higher growth. Theresa was told this. (Someone wondered whether there are blueberries in the Blueberry Barrens. Answer: Yes.)
- Great Hill: Sign at Kelley Road is leaning against a rock. There should be a sign there. Bob says that any such sign at Great Hill should say "Great Hill Conservation and Recreation Land" as the greater amount of Great Hill land is Recreation land.

Action: Bettina will look into this.

Bruce points out that Great Hill tables at both ends of the soccer fields are falling apart, particularly the two by the pond. Bettina reports that the Recreation Department has ordered replacements.

The Main Street parking lot is getting overgrown. Jim says we might have to improvise for a while because our Great Hill Steward is still out of commission. Bob just got a tree remover and may try it out here.

- Nashoba Brook: Laurie says that if a steward has a good pruning saw, s/he can take out some of the blowdowns. He has one. It's about 2 ft long (likely like the one shown here). He says a pruning saw can go through a blowdown easily, and every steward should have a pruning saw that they can carry on their walks.



The town did buy folding saws for some stewards a few years ago.

Bob says that if stewards want to do the maintenance, then the town should buy them the equipment. Jim agrees that if any steward is being held back from doing trail maintenance due to lack of equipment then the town (Department of Natural Resources) should buy the equipment. If town does buy equipment, then LSC should keep an inventory of the equipment. Related questions: Will town pay for sharpening chainsaw chains? Will town pay for weed whacker strings? The Town does have a budget for buying equipment for stewards, and has used it recently. Stewards should identify the equipment they need (price and where to buy it), and contact Jim for review and Bettina for the process of actually buying the equipment.

Bob bought a stump vice to sharpen his chainsaw chain while in the woods. (To help explain a stump vice, here's a video on how to build your own stump vice: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoNDVKdQX_A.)

The Wheeler Lane kiosk has been erected. Bob says it was the hardest installation ever (ran into rock ledge). Bettina, husband, and son were critical on this.

Laurie asked whether there is a kiosk package (maps) for Nashoba Brook. Jim and Laurie agreed that Jim will send the PDFs to Laurie, and Laurie can print and laminate them at the Recreation Department. Jim has an online chart with links to all parcel notices.

Re the Trail Through Time (TTT), Linda McElroy says that she has three information panels ready to install and asks whether the LSC wants to review locations (one overlooking the foundation at the end of Wheeler Lane, one at foot of Old Road to Concord just across the bridge below Wheeler Lane, and one by the stone piles)? Answer: No.

She also asks, "There is stove wood possible at the end of Wheeler Lane. Does anyone on the LSC want this? The burnable stuff has been separated out." Linda says that the town will burn it when winter comes if she would like. Laurie will take some of the wood.

- WH/TF: Laurie has eased the blight of downed "NARA Trail" signs along the lighted "Pedestrian Walkway" by erecting them as they were meant to be.

Someone weed whacked the Captain Handley trail at WH/TF (Anyone know who?), then Bob mowed it. Bob couldn't take his mower across the leaching field mud.

The ash tree threatening the Captain Handley parking lot (where some trees are tagged) should be cut down by the town. Question: Can the cemetery crew remove standing trees? Bettina is not sure. Tom Tidman hires Axe Bros or other companies if removal of a tree is too difficult for town workers, or if there is a time crunch.

- Camp Acton: The kiosk has insect damage on lower right support (rotting post that is not in the ground) and will need replacing in couple years. The LSC suggested that Bruce could spray it. It's not falling over any time soon so this may be an issue for another year.

There is poison ivy near the porta-john. Part-time town employee Bruce Carley is certified sprayer of insecticides.

Action: Bettina will make sure Bruce Carley sprays the ivy near the porta-john.

At Camp Acton, the upper gate is unlocked and left open. (Bruce assumes that this is by the town.) All boardwalk sections for Spring Hill are still there. Big black plastic pipes are also there now.

Actions: Bettina will talk to Shawn O'Malley about progress on the boardwalk replacement. Bettina will get Bruce a Recreation key (unlocks any lock on Recreation land) for the gate.

There are lots of groups camping at Camp Acton this year. Tom wondered if we get a "use" report.

Action: Tom will ask Cheryl Getsick about this.

- Wetherbee: Tom says the trail in from Wetherbee Street has a section (20–40 yd long and 4–6 ft deep on side opposite the corn side) that is overgrown with poison ivy. Grass whip won't work on such a large section. Bob has mowed the trail and didn't notice it. People avoiding the corn would be in the poison ivy. Could Shawn O'Malley use the brush hog on this? Bob thought that Natural Resources was to do it. Bettina didn't recall this. Bob suggested that Shawn look at it to see if he can use the cemetery mower on it.

Action: Bettina to talk to Shawn about his crew using the cemetery mower there.

- Spring Hill: The "closed" boardwalk is almost impassable now. Phil says it's getting to be seriously dangerous and he is tempted to remove sections to make it truly impassable. Jim says to go ahead and tip over sections that are dangerous.

Actions: Bettina will check with Shawn O'Malley if we could use the town ATV (w/wagon connection) to help speed up the process of dealing with this. Philip will tip over some sections that are too unstable.

- Grassy Pond: Ann Shubert reports that at the Newtown Road entrance you can move the kiosk back and forth. Also, there are plenty of bottles and cans in the swamp near the end of the boardwalk at the pond.

Action: Bruce will use waders and check this out from the observation deck at the end of the boardwalk. No action on kiosk until it breaks or falls over

- Heath Hen Meadow: Bob ran his mower over the “grassed-in” trails at the first meadow in from Robbins Street. Trail standard is 4 ft width and 8 ft height.
- Guggins Brook: Guggins Brook has grassed in trails too. At Guggins, when the grass grows, poison ivy accompanies it, so the 4-ft standard width is particularly appropriate. Bob raises the general question, “At what point (with respect to height of grass) do we decide that a particular trail needs work?”

Jim pointed out that Guggins is still behind in maintenance. This happened in the spring when he was keeping up his garlic mustard work, and so he scheduled workdays in June, July, and August to catch up. On 2 of his scheduled 3 workdays (one of which is still to happen (08/10)), 1 person came out to help. Lesson for next year: Jim will find a volunteer to keep up with maintenance in the spring, or find time to do it himself, so the trails stay acceptable.

Bob and the LSC extend thanks to Bruce and Boy Scout Troop 284 for the beautiful new bridge at Guggins Brook.

Meeting evaluation

Tom says that to help focus what we do, we should prioritize the agenda, including getting all vote items at the top. Jim did a good job on clamping down on the Laurie-Janet conversation at the start of the meeting. Before the “Meeting evaluation” agenda item, there should be an “Other business” item.

The meeting adjourned at 5:41 by unanimous vote.

The next meeting will be at 4 pm on Wednesday, August 28.

Documents that serve as background for these discussions can be found at
<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-5533>.

They are titled:

- 0 - posted agenda for 2013 July 29
- 01 - draft LSCOM minutes 2013 06 26
- 03 - email re trails at Wills Hole
- 06 - Guggins bridge
- 07 - ACC Community Transformation Report.pdf
- 08 - email about garlic mustard control at Nagog
- 10 - summer maintenance email (copied from June packet)
- 11 - outdoor summer volunteer projects
- 12 - spreadsheet to links to kiosk notices