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Acton

Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 18, 2013, Town Hall, Room 126, 4 P.M.

TOWN CLERK, ACTON

Attendance

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

Associate (nonvoting) member present: Joe Will (Minutes)

Nonmembers: Bob Farra (President, Canterbury Hill Homeowners Association (CHHA), present through the discussion of the Robbins Mill trails), Luna Abe

Jim called the meeting to order at 4:07 P.M.

Review and approval of August 28 minutes

The minutes were accepted unanimously as presented.

Robbins Mill trails, proposed loop trail and access from Canterbury Hill (CH) Road

Jim presented a map that included the proposed loop trail (shown in yellow) and an access trail (shown in red) from the CH Road recreation area.

For map see 02.2 - Map of Proposed and Possible Robbins Mill Trails

Jim also introduced meeting guest Bob Farra, Acton resident since 1993 who moved in 2006 to the CH neighborhood. The CHHA has a trust to maintain the common property and adjacent conservation land, including the parking lot at Carlisle Road. Bob has been president of the CHHA since the CHHA took over trust in 2009.

The Carlisle Road parking and the parking by the CH recreation area (playground) both get trashed by people who lunch there, by drinkers, and others. The Town may help the CHHA with cleanup of the parking areas. The LSC plans to use the parking lot at Concord Road as the beginning of a trail into the area conservation lands, but such a trail is not part of this current planning.

Bob Farra and Jim have walked the CH woods several times. Bob may eventually be the LSC steward for this parcel. He's been updating neighbors of LSC activities and has gotten feedback that he has shared with the LSC. From his several conversations with neighbors, he has found

- most are excited about the LSC relationship with this parcel.
- concern about the number of children living in CH and additional traffic that the developed paths may bring.
- concern about construction equipment that may be brought in for building the path. Bob Guba said that this is a non-issue as the heaviest vehicle would be a pickup truck; the LSC basically uses hand tools, and there would be no heavy equipment going into the woods.
- concern about a parking lot off Carlisle Road (the one mentioned above).
- concern about the peoples who would be attracted to the neighborhood by additional paths. On interlopers the following thoughts: There really are not that many houses around the Carlisle Road or playground parking areas; also there are no streetlights. People could come in with car lights off, or they could trek in from the backwoods with backpacks. This would absolutely include teenagers.

Bob Farra himself is too far from the parking to have made personal observations. However, trash at the playground has been a problem.

Jim has had conversations with abutters in Carlisle. Abutters Mike and Clair King had been maintaining trails in the area for a few decades, primarily for cross-country skiing. They stopped when building of the development began. They are pleased that the land is protected and will be managed. They had two comments regarding trails:

- There is one place in the existing trail where they had put in very sharp turns very close together and they've never been happy with that.
- For the proposed (one-mile) trail, they would like to be able to loop back so one could choose a loop that would be shorter than one mile.

Regarding the first suggestion, Jim says that we can make a redirect and the Kings liked the idea. Jim has talked with trail designer Phil Keyes and he has agreed to this minor change.

Regarding the second suggestion, Jim hasn't checked this out yet and we don't have to decide today. It would be a blue trail. Bob and others would not agree to another trail that would parallel part of the loop but would be okay with one that crosses to the other side.

Jim's map shows some red trails in addition to the one connecting the CH recreation area to the yellow trail. One red trail to the east is shown crossing a gas company gas-line right of way, making a right-angle turn to go near the Acton-Carlisle line, and connecting to Carlisle conservation land. The part of this trail over the very wet gas-line right of way currently exists and has "informal" boardwalks. The LSC would have to improve these. The Town of Acton owns this land. The existing trail continues straight to the end of Log Hill Road but crosses private land near the end. A new trail will need to be signed to discourage travel over the private land. That land belongs to the Kings. They are fine with LSC maintenance workers coming in over their land, but they don't want it to become parking for regular walkers.

The long part of this suggested trail (after the right-angle turn) does not exist yet. It would end right at the "point" of the Acton property. Carlisle Conservation Foundation (CCF) owns Ben's Woods, the Carlisle land opposite the Acton "point." The CCF would be very interested in joining trails to join the Acton and Carlisle parcels. CCF has talked with a Carlisle private owner regarding crossing the corners of the properties. There are number of legal options for getting this access. The Carlisle landowner is new at that property and has been helpful. If a link can be worked out, then the LSC should do this red trail.

The red trail from the southwest portion of the proposed yellow trail would be a link with Acton's Spring Hill Conservation Land. It would most likely meet the Spring Hill yellow trail where a blue trail comes in, creating a new four-way intersection at Spring Hill. However, the LSC could make a Robbins Mill-Spring Hill connection anywhere its wants as Acton owns the separating land, but drainage issues stand in the way. The proposed red trail takes advantage of a "pinch point" in the drainage where stone walls are forcing the water.

Another possible new red trail just upstream of Nashoba Brook connects the Carlisle Road parking area (referenced above) with the Nashoba Brook trail at the east end of the Nashoba Brook footbridge at the end of Wheeler Lane. The area of this trail is very rocky, so this trail could be challenging. It would cross the privately owned Scoutland. Following discussions with Scoutland trustee Bill Klauer, the LSC has a draft of a renewable license. The license still needs a bit of work from the LSC, and then a review by the Scoutland trustees.

Laurie said that the Bay Circuit trail would love this new access trail from Nashoba Brook and the Bay Circuit folks may be able to give some legal advice regarding a Scoutland license. Currently there are dots on the Bay Circuit website suggesting this trail. The part of this trail from the parking lot is built already, as is an extension to the future site of a viewing platform that is to be built by developer Steve Marsh as part of a settlement with the Conservation Commission.

On the map, Laurie noted the narrow strip of land between CH land and Scoutland. This would potentially allow for a connection between the proposed loop access trail and the proposed Nashoba Brook / Carlisle Road connector. Jim and Bob Farra have walked it, but it is a very difficult walk.

Bob Farra explained the common land within and without the development, pointing out that behind the CH houses, the common land, town land, and Scoutland are all "packed together."

Comments on acceptance of the yellow trail itself:

- If this is to be primarily for walking and cross-country skiing, why not make it longer? Response: There's wet drainage areas, including an intermittent stream, in the way.
- We relocated the trail in Spring Hill to miss this drainage area.
- There is a possibility of a trail along a stone wall that would stay away from the drainage area, but we may not be able to use it because it may not be on public land.
- This proposed trail is part of our larger goal to have more inter-town trails.
- Trying to add up acreage in our minds, Acton has 600-700 of contiguous acres, Carlisle has about 300 almost-contiguous protected acres, so we have the possibility for 1000 acres of almost-contiguous conservation land.
- The Carlisle land includes cranberry bogs.
- Nashoba Brook flows into the Acton land. Spencer Brook flows into the Carlisle land.
- It could be a good idea to think up a name for this space; Bruce suggested "Acton-Carlisle Brooks Trail". On the other hand, this is not a corridor; it's vast. It would make sense to have common name for all of this land.

It was moved and seconded: We accept the yellow trail and the red trail (from the CH recreation area).
Voted: Unanimous in favor.

Jim thanked Bob Farra for coming. Tom urged Bob to come back with any problems he confronts regarding the above.

Wills Hole/Town Forest (WH/TF): "No Access to Nonset Path" sign location

Jim shared a WH/TF map showing the new red-trail link to Sachem Way.

See 03.1 - Will's Hole Map (with Sachem Way details)

He pointed out where the sign, "No access to Nonset Path" had been located. In making the new trail, Jim took down the sign because it seems to send the wrong message, now that there is a good access to Sachem Way. He suggested that the LSC has three options:

- 1) Move the sign farther back on the now-abandoned trail that led to private property on Nonset Path.
- 2) Put the sign closer to the yellow-trail entrance to the Sachem Way trail for "early warning."
- 3) Remove the sign.

Discussion points:

- Now there is no access to Nonset Path. Also, we've dragged branches and sticks to block it off.
- The debris now offers about 40 ft of discouragement. It's pretty well impassable.
- There is not a lot of evidence of use.
- We could post a sign at the conservation-land boundary saying, "Trail closed by order of Acton Conservation Commission" but such signs don't last that long.
- The property owner(s) on Nonset Path could put up a sign.
- We could post the existing sign at the Sachem Way red-path entrance.

Proposal moved & seconded: We keep the sign in question down, keep the Sachem Way trail clear, and continue discouragement on the abandoned trail to Nonset Path.

Voted: Unanimous in favor.

Guggins Brook meadow: mowing, trail plans

There are two parts to this agenda item, possible trail development at Wright Hill (WH) and trail maintenance at Guggins Brook (GB). The two parts merged as discussion ensued.

New is a trail plan for adjacent WH parcels with trails that would link with GB trails. Jim showed a map of WH with possible trails marked.

See 04.1 - Sketch of possible trails in Wright Hill area

Background: The largest WH parcel belonged to Priscilla Mead, then Joe Rice, and now belongs to the Wright Hill Association (WHA), a set of people who would like to keep the land protected. This is the biggest undeveloped and unprotected parcel within easy walking distance to West Acton. The WHA would like to sell the existing house, sectioned off in its own parcel. It would then like to sell the remaining parcel to Acton for future protection, especially of the meadow at the top of the hill (WHA's primary goal), which affords some great views to the west. If the WHA can't get enough of its investment back from public sale of the existing house and of the land to Acton, the WHA would then consider housing development at the base of the hill on Central Street.

One of the features that makes the WH land valuable for the town is a corridor connecting it with GB. A trail, shown on the map in blue, could run from the hill through parcel 11-4, parcel 6, and the New View (NV) cohousing common land to the west of the NV buildings. Such a trail could connect to the informal NV green trail that has been cut by NV residents.

Gregory Lane (see map) Homeowners and the NV Homeowners Association (NVHA) are both enthusiastic about the concept. Gregory Lane Homeowners owns parcel 6. NVHA owns parcel 11-4. A trial easement would be acceptable to both groups.

Most of the blue trail is an old graded road.

Discussion points:

- Where would parking be? Public could park on Elm Street or they could walk in from West Acton. It could be possible to get parking closer.
- Regarding the meadow and mowing: A NV resident currently is maintaining the green trail. The present tractor operation will maintain both the green trail, and the red trail access to GB from Central Street.
- We don't have such a maintenance agreement (private mowing with private equipment) anywhere else and one person wondered if approval of this would have to come from the Conservation Commission, not us.
- Tom is on the Conservation Commission but at this time has no idea as to whether the Commission should even be involved with this.
- We should talk with Tom Tidman on maintenance of such trails.
- The LSC has the authority to approve and build new trails that we maintain without getting Conservation Commission approval. This green trail is a trail on town property that is a dead end. This is just like the spur at the Arboretum that leads to private property on Main Street.
- There now is an "Entering private property" sign on the spur at the Arboretum. It is true that Arboretum abutters are using their own power equipment on Conservation land.
- At Stoneymeade, private owners maintain our trail along with their own trail. Not too many people follow their trail onto the private land.
- So, this WH concept is similar to a couple other situations that we've treated quietly. Given then that others have proceeded without our approval, this is the same, so treat it the same.
- Remember that we are about to send letters to some private property owners telling them that they can't mow Conservation land.
- We can regard a WH arrangement as a "maintenance swap." Here NV is volunteering to cut the Central Street easement, but NV will need to maintain the green trail to get equipment to the

easement.

- Jim will confer with the NV homeowner doing the maintenance. Jim thinks that this homeowner will be happy to be considered an LSC volunteer acting under Jim's supervision, keeping the green trail clear to get access to clearing the official trail.

Bulette/Town Forest: clarification on Bulette Road parking, possible map change

Do we want to remove the "P" from the map at the end of Bulette road? Yes. Some people do park there, and it's legal to do so, but it's not a maintained parking area. The guidebook and website write-up provides a correctly-nuanced description of the parking situation. Keeping the "P" on the map sends the wrong impression.

Update on 8th Grade Work Day projects, Friday Sep 27

Jim is still waiting to hear from Ann Shubert as to a project at Grassy Pond. Not sure she will be available. There is a volunteer to oversee students at Pratt's Brook's blueberry barrens but Jim needs to hear yet from Charlie Carlson, former Pratt's Brook steward, on this to give the volunteer some information.

Event planning for September 28 committee celebration

The event is to be Saturday, September 28. Bruce asked and got the okay to use his place, so it will be at Bruce's house, 275 Pope Road (pumpkin house on the right when heading away from Acton), roughly 5–8 P.M. Bruce will cook. Jim is taking attendance plans for it. People will bring potluck dishes, and there will be something on the barbecue. Jim will try to balance what is brought.

Who else to invite? Suggestions: All of the Conservation Commission, volunteers Joe Holmes, Ed Russell, and Dave Wilson (who has agreed to maintain part of Grassy Pond), Scoutmaster Paul and family, Janet Adachi, Tom Tidman, past stewards.

Bruce will talk with his neighbor about parking.

Nagog Hill: garlic mustard update

Not discussed at this meeting due to time constraints.

Nagog Hill: painted footsteps at Quail Ridge

Not discussed at this meeting due to time constraints.

Parcel updates

- Heath Hen Meadow: Bruce says there is garlic mustard in the meadows. Jim says that we know about it. Joe says that the beaver dam is back, about 15 ft below the bridge. The water is about 1 ft higher above the dam. Bob says that it looks as if someone had mowed the grass in the HH meadows. Perhaps Shawn did it.
- Wetherbee: The meadow (apple orchard area) needs some mowing. We don't know whether the rock in front of the kiosk has been put back into place. Someone apparently moved it to allow vehicle access. Shawn is supposed to take care of the rock, and mowing of the access trail from Wetherbee Street. Bob will cut the meadow yet. Tom successfully downloaded the Wetherbee map using the QR code posted at Wetherbee. He thinks the QR sign is so small that some people could miss it and wonders whether we could incorporate it into a larger sign? Bettina says that people know right away what a QR code is.
- Canoe Launch: Bettina will hack down the flora on Friday morning.
- Grassy Pond (GP): Shawn has not done any mowing yet. Per Bob, Shawn could do one part of GP (the meadow) but not the other (Newtown Road access). Jim will get in touch with Bruce about cutting the Newtown Road access.

- Nashoba Brook: Laurie wondered about the Nashoba Brook sign. Bettina sent a second email to town staff who cut signs and hasn't had a response yet. She says that NARA likely is taking their time.
- Wills Hole/Town Forest: We want a "You are here" notice board at the Sachem Way trail entrance, but we need a parcel-naming sign there first. Bob notes that the informal crossover trail is slowly getting overgrown as are a lot of the other ad hoc trails. He recommends that we continue to throw brush into these other trails.
- Guggins Brook: GB is clear and useable.

Evaluating this meeting

Not discussed at this meeting due to time constraints.

The meeting adjourned at 5:26 P.M.

The next meeting will be at 4 P.M. on Wednesday, October 16.

Items that serve as background for today's meeting are here: <http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-5663>. They are titled as follows:

- 00 - agenda as filed
- 01 - Draft LSC minutes for 2013 Aug 28
- 02.1 - background for Robbins Mill loop and connector decision
- 02.2 - Map of Proposed and Possible Robbins Mill Trails
- 02.3 - feedback from Robbins Mill residents re: trail system
- 03.1 - Will's Hole Map (with Sachem Way details)
- 03.2 - Nonset path sign background
- 04.1 - Sketch of possible trails in Wright Hill area
- 05 - Excerpts from emails about parking at Bulette
- 08 - Emails re: large garlic mustard infestation at Nagog Hill
- 10 - parcel updates