

Acton
Land Stewardship Committee (LSC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, March 15, 2016, Town Hall, Room 9, 7 P.M.

Attendance

Regular (voting) members present: Bettina Abe (Chair), Bob Farra, Bob Guba, Bruce Rachman, Jim Snyder-Grant, Laurie Ullmann, Joe Will (Minutes)

Associate (nonvoting) members present: Paula Goodwin, Joe Holmes, Sherman Smith, John Watlington

Nonmembers:

Janet Adachi (LSC's Board of Selectmen (BoS) liaison), Susan Mitchell-Hardt (President, Acton Conservation Trust (ACT)), Jim Engell (Acton resident, Breezy Point Rd)

Bettina called the meeting to order at 7:05 P.M. Joe H brought cookies. Bettina distributed T-shirts with promise that hats are coming.

Review and approval of February minutes

Approval of the February minutes was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously.

Letter to BoS about proposed water treatment plant at Nagog Pond

Bettina shared a draft of a letter to the BoS from the LSC. Points made in the ensuing discussion:

- Do we really know anything about wildlife travel corridors at this site? There is considerable anecdotal data, so are we talking about conjecture and observation rather than scientific data? There is narrative and a map of wildlife corridors around Nagog Pond in the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Tom Tidman has done some work related to such corridors.
- Re the bulleted item: "No fencing around the pond to inhibit wildlife or neighbor/abutter access" that the letter says "The LSC . . . strongly recommends":
 - Reference to "neighbor/abutter" access is not needed, as such folks should not be on the land under consideration; also, it "dilutes" the message about wildlife.
 - Abutters are "natural stewards."
 - Abutters have no standards for stewarding.
 - This is a public water supply. There should be no human trespassing around its perimeter. Think 09/11.
 - Per the Concord OSRP, passive recreation on Concord land is actively encouraged. Officials are not on such lands on a daily basis, if at all, so who is it that understands the place and alerts responsible folks when needed? The abutters. To date, everybody in the Nagog Pond area has been pretty responsible for protecting the area.
 - The proposed fences to the water serve only to keep people from walking through the Concord Water land.

Motion: Strike "or neighbor/abutter" from the bulleted item in the letter. Motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

- Bettina and Susan shared information on the nearby 12-acre Buxton Conservation Restriction which helps "connect" the Nagog lands with the Town Forest/Wills Hole Conservation Land. Included was a history of failed attempts at development within the Buxton CR.

- Re the photovoltaic array, the power and related benefits it generates can be had from anywhere.

Cut wood on Conservation Land

Bettina provided background on this, including the regulations:

- The BoS must approve the giving away of any surplus material.
- Nothing can be cut in our stewarded lands.

Discussion points:

- The Town's "Cut-a-Cord" program (several years ago) was a failure.
- Sawyers should cut wood in lengths that are large enough so that no one will haul them out. Recently at Wetherbee, several tops of trees had fallen across the Hosmer Street access trail. Sawyers laid lots of the small debris along the trail and then laid logs cut in 5-6 ft lengths on top. Good for wildlife.
- When fallen wood is near a parking area, we have cut logs in stove lengths and notified others that the wood is there to haul away. We are comfortable with wood being taken when it's near parking.

Morrison farmhouse update

Joe W told of the unanimous vote by the Morrison Farm Committee (MFC) against selling the farmhouse to private interests (so that it could be fixed and made available for affordable housing). The MFC strongly opposed the excision of a house lot from Town land (plus rail trail) that runs from the Woodlawn Cemetery chapel to the East Acton Village Green. The MRC had subsequent discussion about the farmhouse, acknowledging that the Town had made reasonable and fair tries at fixing and/or finding a use for the house, but it was time to let it go. The MRC voted unanimously that the house could be demolished. The second vote (the house could be demolished), not the first (not selling such a strategic house lot to private interests) is what subsequently resonated with other Town groups.

Supposedly, the BoS will poll Town groups in the future about the house.

Bettina: The LSC will give no comment on this at this time.

The LSC website; editing of website pages update

Jim S-G: Most of the Conservation Parcel write-ups have been reviewed. There are still 5 or 6 parcels for which the write-ups need to be edited. An issue: Need map for the Canoe Launch.

John: Take the website live now; remaining write-ups that need editing can be placeholders and the editing can be done live.

Jim: There are some small additional content things that need to be dealt with. It could quite possibly be live by our next meeting.

The Assabet River Blue and Green Trails Project update

Nothing new.

Workdate calendar update

Joe H put three workdates in the calendar. There are none from anyone else. Shouldn't there be workdates from all the parcels? Stewards can get help from eighth graders and high school kids.

Heath Hen Meadow beaver dam—Do we need another deceiver?

A week ago the water was above the bridge stringers. Later someone had breached the dam a bit.

Bettina and Paula did some more work and the water level is down.

Do we need a new beaver deceiver under the bridge? Bob G: We could do it, but we should make it longer. Jim E described the 100-ft long deceiver near the Fairyland in the Hapgood Wright Forest in

Concord. Jim S-G will lend anyone interested a DVD on building these things. On the current deerer, the mud at the entrance cage compresses the cage. It should have vertical posts supporting the fence forming the cage. For additional dam work, Paula and Bettina will solicit a work crew “off line”.

Beavers at Nashoba Brook

Caught three beavers, removed the dam, removed one tree, and the story is over. Things seem to be working normal.

Proposed Wright Hill trail

Jim S-G: When Philip Keyes walked the “wiggly” trail, Phil suggested a couple of nice technical changes to be made before bringing the trail to the LSC. It should be ready to discuss at the April meeting. Jim will try to send a map out in advance of that meeting with all trails marked.

Canoe Launch trail

Nothing to report.

Hemlock Wooly Adelgid at Guggins Brook

Jim S-G is reading more about it, following it in Guggins, and taking a wait-and-see attitude. He has learned that if the number of trees is small enough, you can slow down the spread by scraping. He might do that.

Other parcel information

• Nashoba Brook

Laurie feels that a possibility for a workday would be to enlarge the Davis Road parking area. He would widen the lot towards the kiosk end, making more space for a turnaround. He estimates it would be an hour of work with a backhoe and truck. Bettina suggests that she and Shawn O’Malley could meet him there. They could also fix the potholes on the access to the parking area.

• Guggins Brook

Jim S-G is wondering what people thought about using the volunteer list for help in extending the narrow bog boardwalk (the “bog bridges” that sit on the side of the trail) from the Route 111 entrance. Perhaps a family could take it on if we provided some support. He’s thinking an extra 50-70 ft, but it could go even further. Jim may send it to the volunteer list to see if anyone would be interested in taking on this project. Bettina is willing to order the wood. Also, we could provide the other hardware. There would be no cutting of planks, but the volunteers would have some other cutting to do.

• Heath Hen Meadow

– Is it okay to put flyers at the Robbins Street kiosk asking for volunteers? Yes.

– There are 6-8 boardwalks that are in great condition on the now abandoned Overlook Trail (around the homes on Prescott Road). Is it worth the effort to move these over to the Prescott Road red trail? Paula could supervise High School seniors on their April 29 Community Service Day. However, it might be too late to schedule such a project with the seniors.

– The photovoltaic array proposed for 127 Stow Street near Heath Hen Meadow on the south comes before the Conservation Commission tomorrow night.

– The ACT is hosting a walk of the 176 Central Street parcel near and to the north of Heath Hen Meadow on Sunday April 3. The town is currently trying to purchase this parcel from a developer.

- Great Hill

- Responding to John's observation, Acton police checked out a car regularly parking in playground parking spaces. The driver was parking there to use the train, so police issued a citation.
- John would like to see a trash can at the entrance to the path to the Little Great Hill playing field.

- Caouette Farm

Someone is dumping refuse on this property. Bettina: We'll tell the authorities. (Note: Caouette Farm is town-owned Conservation Land with a Conservation Restriction held by the ACT. The Conservation Commission oversees the parcel. Nothing significant has been done with this parcel pending development of the Assabet River Rail Trail.)

- Wetherbee

Massachusetts Correctional Institute (MCI) at Concord and various conservation trusts have placed CRs on the state-owned MCI farmland that lies along Route 2, including the field that is adjacent to Wetherbee on its west side. The ACT website has a good description of this. We don't have permission to build a trail on this land yet, although we have an informal trail crossing it in order to access Wetherbee from Hosmer Street. Also, we don't know yet whether a parking lot is possible on this land. Per Jim S-G, a long-ago task was to check with the state on this. The Town should give this to Selby, Acton's new land-use czar (Land Use, Economic Development Director).

Brainstorming stories for the LSC website

Possible stories:

- History of Concord's association with Nagog Pond (Did Acton cede water rights to Concord?)
- Beaver dams and beaver deceivers
- The gauging station at Nashoba Brook.
- Ebenezer Wood's family (check the Jenks Library)

Email any other story ideas to Paula.

April agenda

- Wright Hill trails.
- Assabet River Trails Project. Bettina will try to schedule a walk.
- Draft maps for the “North Acton Woods” made up of Nashoba Brook, Spring Hill, Camp Acton, and Robbins Mill.
- How to manage unstewarded parcels. Joe H will present.
- Food for next meeting: Send email to Joe W for mention on the agenda.

Evaluate meeting

Bettina did a masterful job of managing the group edit of the letter to the BoS regarding the developments at Nagog Pond. The cookies brought (and made) by Joe H cookies were awesome.

The meeting adjourned at 8:39 P.M.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, April 19, at 7 P.M., in Room 9.