

**LAND STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 10, 2003, 4:00 P.M.
ACTON TOWN HALL**

Present: Dave Cochrane, Bob Guba, Maura Herlihy, Philip Keyes, Gigi Hopkins, Peggy Liversidge, Linda McElroy, Cyril Murphy, Rich Rhode, Ann Shubert, Jim Snyder-Grant (chair), Laurie Ullmann, Paul Wasserboehr

* Election of new committee chair: Philip has recommended via several e-mails that we use a formal nomination and election procedure to authorize the change in the committee chairmanship from Linda to a successor. Accordingly, Jim, acting as chair, asked whether there were any other nominations for the position besides himself (there were none); a motion was then made, and seconded, that Jim be nominated, and a voice vote was taken to accept the nomination (unanimous). This change will now need to be formally recognized by the Conservation Commission, and Jim will be sworn in as an associate commissioner of the ConsCom.

Jim stated that he wants to ensure that LSCom business is conducted in an open and deliberate way; he also said that he tends to do things at the last minute and sometimes needs to be reminded of things (in fact, he would welcome such reminders).

* Volunteer issues: Since he will be taking over as committee chair, Jim stated that he would like to step down as volunteer coordinator. He noted that he has drawn up a list of potential volunteer projects that he can pass along. Unfortunately, we have had a very poor response rate to e-mails about volunteer activities that have been sent out to the general volunteer list that has been compiled over the past few years. Similarly, although he compiled a long list of potential high school volunteers this summer for his invasives project, very few people actually followed through.

Philip suggested that we try to increase our volunteer outreach by creating a Yahoo! listserv that the public can subscribe to on the LSCom website. Individual stewards would post volunteer opportunities as they arise, and this might make it possible to do volunteer outreach without having a specific person act as volunteer coordinator. Philip will set up the list and work with Rich to publicize it on the website.

Several other suggestions were made. In general, it was recommended that stewards speaking to anyone who is interested take down at least their name, e-mail address, and phone number for inclusion on the ongoing list. Ann suggested that if individual projects are scheduled at specific properties, an additional way of soliciting volunteer help might be to post paper announcements on a few trees near the entrance several days before the event to alert regular walkers to the opportunity. Linda suggested that if someone appears to be particularly motivated, a job should be found for him or her as soon as possible. Bob suggested that we maintain our contact with the high school, and Ann agreed to act as the liaison with them, including acting as the coordinator for the annual May service day. Bob also suggested we might have a specific day each year—which might perhaps be called Acton Trails Day and coincide with one of the state or federal trail days—when a variety of volunteer projects could be undertaken.

* Guidebook: Gigi passed around a copy of a poster she has created to announce the availability of the new guidebook. She has posted them at Town Hall, the library, the post office, CVS, Donelan's, and Roche Bros. and she plans to put one up at Willow Books. It was also suggested that we distribute the posters to realtors and to the Acton-Boxborough Newcomers Club and that we post them on kiosks. Bob agreed to laminate some copies for this latter placement. Gigi also reported that around 50 copies of the guidebook have been sold thus far through the several retail outlets where it is available (Butter Brook Farm, Pedal Power, and West Acton Market), and she noted that she has heard several very complimentary comments about it.

Paul noted that his September Beacon article will be about the guidebook.

Peggy raised the question of whether Rich should substitute the new guidebook descriptions of the properties for the ones currently on the website. Bob and several others thought that the old descriptions were shorter and might serve the purpose as well as the new ones. Peggy thought some of the information might be out of date but was uncertain whether this was the case. It was agreed that each steward should check the new guidebook write-up for his or her property against what is now on the website, both to ascertain whether any information

needs updating and also to get a sense of both the style and the content of the two descriptions in order to decide which we prefer to have on the website.

* Publicity: Paul reported that the Beacon has a new editor and that, since July, his “These Lands Are Your Lands” column is back on track. The July column was about yard waste on conservation land, the August column about Wetherbee, this month’s will be about the new guidebook, and October’s will be about invasives, with a focus on what Jim is doing at the Arboretum. Paul received good feedback from stewards in response to his e-mail request, in July, for future topics, and he now has a good list. He also noted that he has written a “Conversation” column featuring Tom Tidman that will be appearing in the next issue of the Beacon.

Gigi added that she has heard good feedback about Paul’s articles from a number of people.

* Abutter encroachment problem: Bob reported that the problem of abutter encroachment on conservation lands has been placed on the ConsCom committee agenda for Wednesday, Sept. 17 (this issue is scheduled for 7-7:30 pm). He will raise the question of how to handle specific current violations (e.g., the dismantling of the stone wall at Wetherbee) as well as the general question of how to clarify boundaries (perhaps by putting in permanent boundary markers whenever a survey is done). A related issue that he also hopes to cover concerns “developer amenities”—specifically, access to conservation lands through newly developed properties, such as the Robbins Mill development.

* Parcel status: Bob has heard from almost all stewards about their parcels’ maintenance status and has found that stewards have taken care of most of the work that was needed. One specific request Bob made was that Rich (as Camp Acton steward) try to check out the campsites after they are used.

* Norway maple control project: Jim estimates that the project is around three-quarters completed. He is almost done tagging the maples—both Norway and other kinds of maples—in the project area and has pulled most of the small Norway maple seedlings (up to 1/2 in.). The next part of the plan is to cut down the larger saplings and trees and paint them with herbicide, which will require the cooperation of certified town staff. He would welcome help but warns that there is lots of poison ivy in the project area.

* Intertown projects: Linda summarized her ideas for pursuing intertown trail connections with Acton’s seven contiguous towns, which will be her major responsibility now that she has stepped down as committee chair. She plans to act as a facilitator of several small subcommittees, each of which will focus on Acton’s connections with one other town. The subcommittees will include one or two LSCom stewards and one or two representatives from the particular town, plus an ACT representative.

The ACT has important inventory material concerning the status of the remaining undeveloped parcels within Acton and has been in touch with some of these parcel owners. Other potential benefits of a closer connection with ACT are that CPA money might be forthcoming based on an ACT-LSCom collaboration and that there is a possibility of having occasional help from a pro bono lawyer who is working with ACT.

Linda would like to proceed by getting something started in one town at a time before initiating communication with another. Our only action thus far has been toward a possible connection with Stow, between Stow’s Capt. Sargent Land and our Heath Hen Meadow Land. She reported that some progress was made this summer, with Dave having established a formal contact with Don Reising of the Stow Conservation Trust. Dave, Linda, Tom, Susan Mitchell-Hardt of ACT, and Don have met and agreed on who of the abutters to the common boundary should be contacted. In Acton, Peter Whitcomb is the next person to be talked to; Tom will do this. Linda and Tom suggest that the next town to initiate outreach with is Carlisle, followed perhaps by Littleton, then Boxboro, then Maynard. We know that there are interested people in both Littleton and Boxboro.

We already have a trail connection with Concord through Stoneymeade so Linda doesn’t see a need to create a Concord subcommittee. Concerning a possible Westford connection, Philip stated that it should be possible to create a trail connection between NARA and the Mass. Audubon land in Westford. He agreed to look into who owns the intervening properties.

Stewards who have indicated interest in being on a subcommittee (at this meeting or at the April meeting) are Dave for Stow, Ann and Laurie for Carlisle, Gigi and/or Bob for Littleton, Jim and/or Peggy for Boxboro, and Paul for Maynard. Linda indicated that Morene Bodner would like to serve as ACT’s representative on the Littleton subcommittee and that Susan Mitchell-Hardt has met with the Stow subcommittee, which has already held two

meetings.

* SuAsCo Watershed Community Council: Linda's second focus will be her participation as a member of the SuAsCo Council, which deals with water-quality issues in the watershed of the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers. A meeting on Sept. 18 will mark the beginning of the second year of her three-year term. Although she was largely inactive last year, she hopes now to have the time to focus on the idea of creating a trail along the Assabet River, a project that she and Tom have discussed for some time. Bob commented that he thinks there is already a bit of a walk along one stretch in Maynard.

* Labeling of maps and map boxes: Bob reported that he has sent an e-mail to Rich suggesting that the steward's phone number and the committee's website URL and e-mail address be added to the master map for each property (on file at Town Hall for copying), but he has not yet received a reply. (Rich had left the meeting by the time this item was discussed.)

Gigi suggested that we should label map boxes to indicate what's inside; Bob and several others felt this was unnecessary. It was decided that the choice would be left up to each steward as to whether to add a label to his or her property's map box but that if they do so, there should be a consistent style. Gigi was asked whether she would create a template for this purpose, and she may decide to do so.

* Arboretum bog boardwalk, trails, and blazing: Bob has replaced missing planks in the boardwalk and may decide to jack up the sills; he also brushed out the trails and removed blowdowns throughout the Arboretum. Cyril plans to talk with Cathy Hatfield of the FAA about beginning blazing the Arboretum trails; nothing was done over the summer because of the hot, muggy weather.

* Status of other current or potential projects: (a) Laurie noted that the bridge over the sluiceway at the pencil factory kiosk site at Nashoba Brook needs to be repaired (plank replacement). There was some disagreement over whether railings should be added when this is done. No money is currently available in our budget, but Bob will ask Tom whether this can be funded through his budget; this work should be done when the funds are available. Linda said that she has some surplus lumber (not pressure-treated) at her place in Maine that might be used for this or other projects. Laurie added that the planks crossing the Robbins Mill Pond sluiceway are in adequate condition. (b) Dave reported that the two panels for the Wills Hole kiosk are being fabricated at this time, and he passed around a copy of the panels. He said that Tom has some ideas about the design of the frame that will hold the panels but that a final plan hasn't been drawn up. (c) Ann indicated that the current pile of wood chips at the Willis Holden Dr. entrance to Grassy Pond will not fully cover the stretch of trail she thinks needs them; after this pile is used up, she would like to have another load delivered. (d) Bob reported that ConsCom has told him that repairs at various parking lots are a low priority due to lack of funds. He plans to check with the town highway department to see if there are suitable materials on hand for minor repairs that won't cost money.

* Painted vs. plastic blazes: As we are reaching the point where our painted blazes need to be touched up, Cyril stated that he is in favor of using plastic blazes instead of paint: they show up better, are consistent and neat, and can be moved and reused. Philip and several others disagreed, primarily on aesthetic grounds. Philip also noted that driving nails into trees can increase the risk that some sort of infection will be introduced. Linda wondered if we could get volunteers to do the repainting.

* Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 1.