

Groton Invasive Species Committee Meeting Minutes

13 Mar 2017

Legion Hall

Committee Members Present:

Brian Bettencourt

Adam Burnett

Greta Marks-Strouble

Olin Lathrop

Visitor Present:

Linda Loren

Agenda:

- 1) Visitor: Linda Loren, to discuss Asian Bittersweet removal at Skyfields/119
- 2) Review of minutes from last meeting
- 3) Groton Conservation Summit wrap-up
- 4) Pesticide Applicator License(s) update
- 5) Status of new red mulberry tree-planting at Prescott
- 6) The Next Brochure - which plant to focus on
- 7) Any Other Business

Called to order, 7:02 PM

The 1st order of business was: Potential project - bittersweet removal at Skyfields Dr. / 119

- Linda Loren showed the committee the spot on the map, live on screen
 - Used to be live trees there, all toppled over
 - Both sides of road, including the trail head
- Brian Bettencourt described having looked at the site --- the telephone pole is completely wrapped up in bittersweet.
- Linda Loren said the situation feels overwhelming
 - Seems like it's tough to get rid of
- Linda Loren introduced herself further as a member of Friends of the Trees.
 - Would like to have a nice tree there, a "statement tree"
- Olin Lathrop asked - who owns the property?
- Linda Loren said it's for sale. She talked to the listing agent.
 - The agent had talked to Tom Delany; she thought the town would do it.
 - Agent is very interested in help.
 - Owner is Kevin Tavares --- seems like the house is not inhabited right now.
- Brian Bettencourt asked whether the Committee would need express permission from the property owner...?
 - Olin Lathrop replied yes.
- Linda Loren said the situation may be split up, since some might be on right-of-way for the road, some is private.
 - Olin Lathrop said that means the land would have to be surveyed.

- Linda Loren showed the committee a picture of the current view of the affected area in winter.
- Olin Lathrop said it looks like the trees are away from road, several feet back, and thus probably not on right-of-way.
- Linda Loren described the usual way of doing things: Friends of the Trees asks homeowners if they'd like a tree
 - Homeowners agree
 - Friends buy it
 - Town plants it
 - Friends keep it alive by watering etc.
- Friends does NOT do the clearing (typically)
 - They have not gone to Tom Delany re/ help on cleanup in this situation.
- Linda Loren had more questions concerning what happens to the leftover debris?
 - It can't go to the town dump.
 - She is also in Garden Club ... when they do cleanup, Tom Delany gives bags to fill.
 - Brian Bettencourt said: but this is a LOT of material.
- Adam Burnett said: the landowner has to deal with the material
- Linda Loren agreed and thought it was not an ideal situation.
- Adam Burnett felt that the committee's charge is not to help private landowners, but instead to help the town, on public land.
 - Olin Lathrop felt that some work on private land is legit.
- Adam Burnett asked: what about over on the trailhead? That's town land right?
 - Linda Loren responded yes, that's conservation land
 - Adam Burnett felt the committee could/should start there, then contact the landowner about the private land.
 - Brian Bettencourt asked: Could we do herbicide?
 - Adam Burnett indicated the committee could talk to the landowners and explain the problem
- Olin Lathrop felt the committee can help organize volunteers, that's the way to go, and:
 - It all has to start with the landowner. The committee has no right to do anything until they want to do it.
- Linda Loren said according to the agent, they'd love for it to be cleaned
- Brian Bettencourt indicated that the spot has some inertia at least, interested groups. Great visibility, good publicity.
- Linda Loren agreed and said the Friends of the Trees and Garden Club want to help
 - Olin Lathrop asked: are those two groups private or public organization?
 - Linda Loren replied that she was just with Friends of the Trees, talking with Suzanne the head. Suzanne said "we work for Tom Delany" ...
- Olin Lathrop said the difference is between private and public organizations and what they can and cannot do.
 - Brian Bettencourt gave the Friends of Wachusett example, explaining what a private nonprofit can do when allied with a public entity.
 - Olin Lathrop gave an example of if a town organization used town money to fix a bittersweet problem on someone's property, the next property owner can say "hey what about my bittersweet" ... a sticky situation arises.

- Linda Loren said the Friends does their own fundraising and purchases the trees; seems private.
- Brian Bettencourt said the Committee can get involved as volunteers.
 - Olin Lathrop said the Committee could publicize and say here's a great volunteer opportunity co-run with Friends.
 - Adam Burnett felt it's not the Committee's role to work on private property.
- Linda Loren said what can happen is the Friends of the Trees knocking on your door saying hey we'd like to plant a tree on your property...
- Brian Bettencourt said it's okay to present this strictly as a volunteer opportunity.
- Linda Loren asked: there are a lot of half-dead trees there... would town clean it up?
 - Adam Burnett said No.
 - Olin Lathrop said the Tree Warden does have some authority for trees that are a hazard.
 - Adam Burnett responded: the town requires the landowner to do it ... the town marks the tree(s) and then the owner is responsible ...
- Linda Loren said to remember, the Friends of the Trees doesn't do clean up.
- Olin Lathrop said: The Friends of the Trees can organize a group of volunteers.
- Linda Loren asked: what about the Boy Scouts, they're private- could they help?
- Adam Burnett said the Committee has resources and information, we can point out the problem and how to fix it. Maybe after that the landowner would jump on the opportunity to remove the bittersweet.
- Linda Loren said the bittersweet has already taken over.
- Brian Bettencourt directed the Committee to look at that trail head --- would that motivate volunteers at the other site?
 - Linda Loren showed a picture of the trail head.
 - Looks like multiflora rose in front
 - Linda Loren said there is bittersweet in back
 - Olin Lathrop indicated the area is town land (Conservation Commission)
 - Would need to see if anyone has a conservation restriction on the land
- Linda Loren said: maybe we could put a tree at the trailhead?
 - Brian Bettencourt replied – it's not as visible as Skyfields/119
 - Olin Lathrop said it's still pretty good!
 - Greta Marks-Strouble said: you could get one nice sugar maple there.
- Olin Lathrop asked whether there was any wetland in the area?
 - Linda Loren replied yes, there is some across the street. There's a ditch there too where the original planned site was (Skyfields/119).
- Olin Lathrop directed the Committee to look at a map live on screen indicating wetlands; the site looked to be free of marked wetlands.
- Olin Lathrop took an Action Item: to find out if there is any Conservation Restriction on that Hurd property.
- Brian Bettencourt mentioned the Committee's brochure on bittersweet.
 - Linda Loren had a suggestion regarding the brochures: focus on what to do with debris.
- Linda Loren asked: So it's a NO on the original idea?
 - Olin Lathrop said he thought it might be very useful to work with Friends of the Trees, as a model of how to work with private lands.
 - Linda Loren said remember, Friends of the Trees doesn't do the work (just plants trees).

- Brian Bettencourt replied: but you can call for volunteers, help organize.
- Linda Loren mentioned Phragmites:
 - Tom Delany has some he wants to get rid of his on his property
 - This led to discussion about Broadmeadow, and the patchwork of private property.
- Brian Bettencourt suggested that Linda Loren report back to Friends of the Trees that the Committee's hands are tied except for a site walk, education, etc. BUT, since Friends of the Trees are a private group (Linda Loren to double check that), they can organize volunteers and the Committee would love to help (as volunteers).
- Brian Bettencourt said, regarding the Hurd trailhead land: Olin Lathrop has his action item. If he finds out in clear, we can put this on the list of places of public lands to clean up!
- Olin Lathrop mentioned the Phragmites example on private lands ... the Committee is trying to get that message out, inform landowners.
- Adam Burnett mentioned that it's not illegal to have invasives on your property.
- Brian Bettencourt asked questions about burning bush as a common example.
- Brian Bettencourt summarized the discussion:
 - Volunteer opportunity only for original Skyfields/119site
 - Potentially put Hurd land on list of sites to work on
- Adam Burnett said the Committee should have prioritization criteria for ranking sites.

The 2nd order of business was Review of minutes from last meeting.

- The draft minutes were displayed live on screen.
- Brian Bettencourt asked whether there were any more comments on the minutes.
- Olin Lathrop moved to accept.
 - Adam Burnett seconded.
- The motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.

The 3rd order of business was a Conservation Summit wrapup.

- Brian Bettencourt said he thought it went really well, and asked whether there were any followup items?
- Adam Burnett said he loved David Black's presentation – conservation is a moving target each time.
- Olin Lathrop indicated that some of the groups are going to get together. In particular, through the Conservation Trust.
 - NEFF, Trust, Fish and Wildlife are going to get together
- Adam Burnett indicated that the Trust and Greenways have a good relationship now too.
- Brian Bettencourt asked: Are they getting together to share data, work on projects ... what?
 - Olin Lathrop replied: Mark Gerath is heading that up.
- Brian Bettencourt asked: So there is no immediate need for the Committee to jump in right now?
 - Olin Lathrop replied – no there is not.
- Adam Burnett brought up the idea (at the Summit) of having the Committee help the other organizations inventory their lands for invasives.

- Olin Lathrop said yes, everyone liked that idea. It's going to happen slowly, but it'll happen.
 - He was pleased with level of discussion.

The 4th order of business was pesticide applicator licenses.

- Olin Lathrop said that once you passed the test, you get a letter in the mail:
 - He passed with a 93%.
 - Got a form in mail, then send back with payment and proof of insurance.
- Olin Lathrop said he'd been talking with other official organizations (MDAR), and finding that no one's ever really done what the Committee is doing (getting applicator licenses as volunteers for the town)
- Olin Lathrop indicated that he'd received a letter from Mark Haddad saying "Olin Lathrop is doing this for town, he's covered by our insurance"
 - He sent that letter in (today).
 - Now he just has to wait for the license to come in the mail.
- Olin Lathrop said that the Committee has to apply pesticides on public land, as agent(s) of the town.
- Adam Burnett reported that he hadn't done anything yet for his own license.
 - Adam Burnett took an Action Item: to order his study material and take the test. He will report back to the Committee at next meeting.
- Olin Lathrop said the next steps are as follows:
 - Once license is in hand: Buy some materials.
 - Tom Delany indicated he has no one on staff licensed. He's interested in how we make out.
 - He has no materials (sprayer, gloves, etc.)
 - Olin Lathrop will buy materials. Haddad said town will pay back.
- Adam Burnett said - if we buy it ourselves, it's ours.
 - Our own private insurance is an option but very expensive
- Olin Lathrop said No, the Committee should buy materials as a town resource.
 - At least one backpack sprayer
 - Rubber gloves
- Olin Lathrop said the license gives him the ability to apply pesticides on someone else's property (with their permission).
- Brian Bettencourt said he felt the town would love it if other town agencies can use the materials.
 - Olin Lathrop agreed and said: let's start with one set, gain experience, first and foremost before recommending particulars to town etc.
- Adam Burnett asked: What about a special place to hold chemicals?
 - Olin Lathrop said he's volunteering to store them in his own shed - Fine for now.

The 5th order of business was the Red Mulberry project.

- Brian Bettencourt explained the background to Linda Loren.
- Olin Lathrop said he'd talked to Suzanne Goehringer at Friends of the Trees:
 - They talked about taking out the white mulberry at Prescott.

- He asked her whether they were interested in publicity-
- She said they've planted ~3 red mulberries around Groton previously.
 - They'd be fine with doing a red mulberry planting as a joint effort.
 - Olin Lathrop said to pick a good spot and we'd get involved for the publicity.
- Brian Bettencourt asked: so we're talking about another site, a replacement? (Not Prescott)
 - We got rid of an invasive, add a new tree back to town.
- Greta Marks-Strouble explained to Linda Loren the old tree was a white mulberry.
- Olin Lathrop said he left it with Suzanne G. It was a casual conversation.
- Brian Bettencourt took an Action item to contact Suzanne Goehringer at Friends of the Trees, and say the Committee would like to officially get involved in planting a red mulberry together.
 - Will mention her talk with Olin Lathrop
 - Will mention that Linda Loren was at Committee meeting as an emissary
- Greta Marks-Strouble asked: How can we find out where the red mulberries are?
 - Linda Loren replied: email Suzanne!
- Adam Burnett said he'd researched where to locally procure a red mulberry.
 - Very difficult
 - Bigelow's has thousands of native species ... and they didn't have red mulberry!
 - Otherwise, have to turn to online nurseries elsewhere.
- Greta Marks-Strouble said: We can do cuttings from red mulberry trees in Groton.
 - Brian Bettencourt said that would be great --- use rooting hormone on the cuttings, plant our own.
 - Brian Bettencourt took an Action Item to add mention of Greta Marks-Strouble (cc her) to email to Suzanne, and mention interest in finding those red mulberries planted in town.
- Linda Loren said she'd found cheap red mulberries online.
- Brian Bettencourt said: A cutting would take time ... likely plant in fall.
- Greta Marks-Strouble gave a report on her progress with mulberry seeds and stratifying them:
 - Some concern with local seeds and hybrids.
- Linda Loren said: pick a wet, understory spot for planting.
- Brian Bettencourt said the Committee could just buy a tree out of pocket if need be.
 - Adam Burnett agreed but said there'd need to be verification that they're just the plain old native red variety, not a hybrid or cultivar.

The 6th order of business was The Next Brochure.

- The Committee reviewed the three brochures previously done, then all present nominated their picks for the next brochure:
 - Greta Marks-Strouble - multiflora rose.
 - Olin Lathrop – burning bush.
 - Linda Loren – garlic mustard.
 - Brian Bettencourt – black swallowwort and/or honeysuckle.
 - Adam Burnett – Phragmites
 - Although he felt it's tough for average landowners/citizens to deal with.
 - Perhaps Phragmites was better suited for a talk, or educational program

- After some discussion, Brian Bettencourt pressed the Committee to pick one species to feature next.
- Olin Lathrop liked burning bush, because laypeople can see, recognize, and deal with.
- Brian Bettencourt indicated he liked garlic mustard because it's so easy to pull, but he also liked Olin Lathrop's points about burning bush
 - Plus, burning bush is more charismatic.
- Olin Lathrop moved to select burning bush as the next brochure
 - Greta Marks-Strouble seconded.
 - The motion passed unanimously.
- Olin Lathrop took an Action item to gather material on burning bush and send to Brian Bettencourt for the brochure production.
 - Olin Lathrop indicated he already has some pictures.

The 7th order of business was Any Other Business.

- The Committee had a discussion regarding an invasive earthworm species in Connecticut.
- Olin Lathrop described the Pacer Way Conservation Commission parcel – a large U-shaped piece around a development.
 - Part is licensed for hay
 - Part up front is getting overgrown with Autumn Olive
 - Olin Lathrop showed some pictures live on screen.
 - Autumn Olive: a big infestation, some older and some young.
 - Interspersed with some Friends of the Trees tree plantings!
 - The Conservation Commission talked about this.
 - Suggestion is to mow the area once every couple years.
 - Won't kill Autumn Olive, but keep it down.
 - Adam Burnett said: It will kill after a decade or so.
 - Brian Bettencourt asked: Will a brush hog take care of it?
 - Olin Lathrop said yes, the Conservation Commission can do: Will happen in fall.
 - Brian Bettencourt asked: how can the Committee help?
 - Olin Lathrop replied: not much, BUT ...
- Olin Lathrop said: While there on site walk, he noticed another section of ditch, a wet area, with a nice manageable patch of Phragmites.
 - It's a good test case: isolated, limited to one ditch.
 - Brian Bettencourt asked: Is there any cattail left?
 - Olin Lathrop showed the Committee some pictures of the ditch – there is cattail in front.
 - Olin Lathrop also mentioned that another part of the ditch is all cattail.
 - This ditch area is totally owned by town, with no encumbrances.
 - The Committee would have to file an RDA, but he would help with that. (An RDA is a wetland approval from the Conservation Commission).
 - Olin Lathrop said: So once the Committee has an applicator license(s), the Phragmites removal could be tackled in the fall.
 - Plan now
 - Adam Burnett said: Early fall is best.
 - Olin Lathrop said: let's get it on radar now, attack in September.

- Perhaps host an educational walk, for abutters.
 - Adam Burnett said: let's make that Phragmites brochure.
 - Olin Lathrop agreed, and said: also educate about Autumn Olive.
 - Olin Lathrop said: The Committee has to let abutters know about chemical applications too.
 - Olin Lathrop said this is an opportunity, to get neighbors involved as volunteers.
 - Brian Bettencourt asked: What's the size of the Phragmites patch?
 - Olin Lathrop indicated 1000-2000 sq ft.
 - Olin Lathrop moved that the Committee pursue addressing this stand of Phragmites by this fall.
 - Greta Marks-Strouble seconded.
 - The motion passed unanimously.
 - Adam Burnett added that he would like to make Phragmites the subject of the "next next" brochure.
 - Adam Burnett took an Action Item to gather Phragmites material for the brochure and send to Brian Bettencourt for production.
 - Brian Bettencourt said: Olin Lathrop has to spearhead this effort for now, coordinating with the Conservation Commission, getting permissions, etc.
 - Olin Lathrop took an Action Item to write the RDA ASAP, to spur the process into motion.
 - The Committee discussed the bundle, cut, and spray method of Phragmites control.
 - Adam Burnett said he liked the broadcast method.
 - The Committee discussed the suitability of the site as a test case and volunteer effort.
- Olin Lathrop moved to adjourn.
 - Adam Burnett seconded.
 - The motion to adjourn passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:31 PM.