



TOWN OF GROTON

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Groton Trails Committee

**** Special Meeting Minutes ****
Conservation Commission – Trails Committee
8 March 2011

Trails Committee Attendees:

Chairman Joachim Preiss
Vice Chair Paul Funch
Stephen Legge
Bruce Easom
Wendy Good
Ed Bretschneider
Alan Taylor
David Minott
John Lynch

Conservation Commission Attendees:

Craig Auman
Nadia Madden
Marshall Giguere
Bruce Easom
Peter Morrison
William Neacy
David Pitkin

Barbara Ganem

At 7.15 pm Chairman Preiss called the meeting to order with the above quorum of Trails Committee members plus listed visitors present.

Topics

(1) Projects

a. Jenkins Road

Members discussed the ongoing Jenkins Road issue, which the Trails Committee considers an important connection that was still in use until it was closed by abutter Alan Friedrich in the mid-1990s. The trail continues to Fitch's Bridge. One of the difficulties in pursuing the matter is that legal fees are likely to run \$30,000 - \$40,000. Preiss pointed out there are other difficulties on trails with encroachment issues and residents mowing land they don't actually own. He worried it would set a dangerous precedent, but members advised that residents cannot take over public property through adverse possession. Members expressed an interest in reaching a final resolution on the Jenkins Rd. matter, but understood there needs to be money to proceed to get it through the Land Court. Town Meeting voted to discontinue the road in the 1800's, but there is no record that it was in fact discontinued. There seems to be no negotiating room with Mr. Friedrich who actually used Jenkins Rd. as frontage when he built his home. Upon a motion by Neacy, seconded by Morrison, it was VOTED: to authorize Ganem to send a letter to the Board of Selectmen summarizing the Commission's discussion on Jenkins Rd.

b. Gibbet & Angus Hills

Member Pitkin is working to put together a management plan for the trails on Gibbet & Angus Hills. The plan would then be reviewed by the two owners, the Commission, and the Trails Committee. One of the difficulties is the wetland crossing that is inadequate for equestrians. Easom designed a 40 ft. bridge crossing estimated to cost \$20,000. There may be an opportunity to apply for a grant. Morrison suggested taking a look at some of the new trail bridges on the Wharton Plantation. Rocks have been added over time to the Gibbet Hill wetland to provide dry footing, but these are hazardous for horse-back riders. Funch questioned whether it might be tidier to install a culvert with sidewalls, and Commissioners pointed out this would be disturbing a large area of wetlands which would then need to be replicated. Funch acknowledged this would require an engineering design and analysis to present to the Commission.

Members commented this is a typical wet seep on the side of a drumlin hill. It is likely to weep unpredictably. Madden said the Commission would have to consider changes in flow and how it affects the wetland there. Preiss mentioned people are altering the trail by throwing logs in and someone dug a

trench across the wetland itself. Trail Committee member Minott questioned the quality of the wetland itself, and Morrison said this depends on the functions associated with the particular wetland which can include such interests as biodiversity, water filtration, and stormwater control. He emphasized that diverting water affects other parts of the wetland, and there are various attributes of each wetland that make it unique.

Giguere noted it is the Commission's intention to minimize and mitigate impacts to wetlands, but there is usually a need to preserve flow. Parking for users was proposed near the pillars on Rt. 40, and this has proved to be a very wet area. Preiss said it is hoped the trail can be moved 50 ft. closer to Rt. 40 where the elevation is about 1 ft. higher than the wet area. The owner, Steve Webber, has no objection to re-routing the trail in this area. The fencing is within the conservation-restricted area and would be left as is. It is understood Mr. Webber would incur no liability as no fee is charged to use the trails. The trail may be partially located in the Rt. 40 right-of-way. Pitkin will be talking with the owners about how this is to be resolved as part of the Trail Stewardship Plan.

c. **Surrenden Farm:**

Giguere explained the Surrenden Farm Resource Management Plan was sent out last August, and members of the ad hoc committee were given four weeks in which to respond with any changes or comments. The landscape context map will need some corrections, but otherwise the document has been finalized and will be posted on the Commission's home page. Trail Committee members asked if there is a management plan for the Town Forest, and it was noted nothing has been prepared other than their forestry plan.

Preiss noted Shirley Rd. was graded last year and, although it has not been plowed during the winter, there is a graded section suitable for parking. The Trails Committee has not done any trail maintenance yet. There are seasonally wet areas and a brook crossing on the Nashua River, and the Commission has previously walked the site with members of the Trails Committee. Several options were discussed, such as stepping stones, boardwalks, and bridges; Commissioners recommended a Request for Determination of Applicability be filed for work near a wetland.

Funch asked if a wooden bridge would be appropriate or is there a better way to make the crossing. He also questioned whether it must be adequate for equestrian traffic. The Trails Committee generally prefers to identify which trails are suitable for particular uses. It was noted that the Conservation Commission minutes of May 12, 2009 recommended the filing of a Request for Determination of Applicability and plans. One suggestion was to re-route the trail into dryer, upland areas rather than cross wetlands. Preiss felt the surrounding area drains through the trail, and it would help to dig out the adjacent ditch and direct water off the trail. Commissioners pointed out the whole area is wetlands. The deep ditch that separates Zone I and Zone II has been the site where hikers are adding logs and 2' x 6' lumber to temporarily bridge the area. There are no marked trails within Zone I where the ditch is located, and Funch pointed out this is the type of behavior the Trails Committee worries about when there are no designated trails. He indicated this is a natural consequence of what Pat Huckery has required.

Madden asked if they couldn't use signage indicating the trail is closed. People are allowed to walk in Zone I, but there are to be no marked trails. Members suggested photographs be taken if this continues to be a problem, but technically the 'improvements' should be removed.

d. **Sampas property**

The Commission has previously rejected a 3-bridge trail design for a loop on the Sampas property. Funch asked whether a single trail from the Housing Authority land on Nashua Rd. to the Sampas parcel could be considered. Giguere pointed out there are several concerns to be addressed, including the presence of rare species, vernal pools, and wetland crossings, and these may preclude the presence of trails. Preiss questioned whether the donor had specific intentions for the property. Funch stressed there is some significance to access this area by foot from Nashua Rd. to Longley Rd. and the Rail Trail. There is not likely to be a large number of walkers. Madden questioned whether bikers would be attracted with the access to the Rail Trail.

Member Giguere reiterated his concern about the stream and amount of wetlands on the site. Signage could be added specifying no bikes or horses, but the fact the trail would be located within Estimated Habitat requires more scrutiny. Preiss worried that activities on unprotected land are also difficult to police. This parcel does not have an easy access. Funch said he is a strong advocate of trails, but is not in favor of putting trails through sensitive areas. If we have designated trails, it keeps people from straying into sensitive areas however. Preiss said it all depends on one's philosophy of trails, but this site would definitely require a bridge and re-routing to discourage people from going off trail. Madden expressed a preference for seeing the site before making a decision, especially if it is particularly rich in species. Ganem mentioned the Housing Authority continues to work through the process to develop their Nashua Rd. property, and a through connection may be possible once the plans are completed.

e. **Bridge St.**

Trails Committee members also noted there are problems with the Bridge St. crossing of Cow Pond Brook. This appears to be a discontinued Town road which was dammed by beavers, and steel supports were subsequently washed downstream during a storm. The Groton Conservation Trust and New England Forestry Foundation own property on either side of the crossing, and the question is who owns the crossing and who can help with the repair. Tom Delaney of the Highway Department has tried to clean up the area, but the level of repair is significant this time.

f. **Motorized vehicles on conservation land:**

Another issue that concerns the Trails Committee is the use of motorized vehicles on conservation lands. The signs which were ordered do not show snowmobiles, but they are considered motorized vehicles. Snowmobiles are allowed on the Cronin property, and motorized vehicles are permitted on Fox Run, Integrity Way, and Lawrence Park. The use of snowmobiles seems to require written permission from the owner. Ganem mentioned the Conservation Commission home page on the Town's website lists the rules for each of the conservation areas. Morrison pointed out snowmobiles do not touch the land so the disturbance level is less than for ATVs.

Preiss mentioned snowmobilers on Brooks Orchard cut trees and left beer cans, and other trail users do not bring litter with them. Madden said she has noticed the use of off-road recreational vehicles is a problem on Old County Rd. and the turtle nesting areas behind Academy Hill. Auman read from an excerpt from the state regulations for use of recreational vehicles which prohibits operation within 150 ft. of an occupied residence without the owner's permission. In addition, no person shall operate a recreational vehicle on the property of another without permission of the owner of such property which is the case with the Town Forest. The vehicle also needs to be registered in Massachusetts. Technically, there should be no need to have a sign forbidding the use of recreational vehicles. Preiss pointed out the use of snowmobiles can contribute odors and obscure cross country ski tracks. Commissioners suggested submitting a joint press release to the newspaper at the beginning of the snow season next year.

g. **Town Master Plan:**

The Trails Committee has developed a list of strategic trail corridors for recreation for the transportation section of the Master Plan. Preiss indicated this would be an opportunity to approach landowners and ask them to consider granting trail easements. A draft map with the recommendations of the Trails Committee was prepared by the Master Plan consultants, a copy of which was given to the Trails Committee for comments and feedback.

h. **Wrap-up:**

Conservation Commissioners thanked the members of the Trails Committee for coming in to present their concerns and for all the work they do on conservation land. It was suggested that quarterly meetings might be helpful to coordinate efforts between the Commission and Trails Committee.

Motion to adjourn by Bretschneider, seconded by Funch.

YEA: Bretschneider, Funch, Minott, Preiss, Taylor; NAY: none; Abstain: none. Joint meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Approved as amended on 7/29/11. Respectfully submitted by Joachim Preiss.