

McLean Land Management Committee
Meeting Minutes
Trails Assessment Presentation by Pressley Associates
June 19, 2007

The meeting convened at 7:07 pm at the Chenery Community Room
Purpose of the meeting is for Pressley Associates to present their assessment of the trails per the RFQ work.

Members present: Ellen O'Brien Cushman, Carla Moynihan, Wes Ward, Martha Moore, Rich Pichette. Andy Healy, Frank Keefe, Michele Gougeon and Steve Kidder were not present.

Others present: Gary Claiborne (Pressley), Chief of Police Richard McLaughlin, Nancy Davis (ConComm) (Liz Allison (Belmont Neighborhood Association), Tom Grimble (NEMBA), Gene Record (JKR Fund), Ann Paulsen, Kit Dreier, Jeanne Mooney, Nanny Almquist, Helie Tomford, Harlan Carere and Mike Tabaczynski (NEMBA)

" Wes Ward requested that the Baseline information prepared by TTOR be presented at the next open meeting in September

" Brief introduction by Ellen, Gary has requested that info be presented without questions or comments until the end. All info will be put onto website within a few days.

" Gary provided a summary of the process including site visits on 5/29, 6/1 and 6/17; review of prior studies of the Subject Property; compilation of base plans and surveys (GIS and Mass GPS); and meeting with the Fire Department

" Referring to trails on plan as labeled by Pressley with Primary Trails in red and Secondary Trails in blue. Following are notes taken during presentation, not Pressley's written comments.

" Primary trails:

" Trail 1: old coal road, gated access, steep, lots of erosion, dangerous access near Shaws (sightlines), overflow of stream/groundwater seepage at Junction Brook, runoff from parking lot (building materials present), former parking lot partially located in open space, tree fall across trail, knotweed, another intermittent stream, is culvert pipe blocked, increased erosion in steeper section, and truck tire tracks are fresh

" Trail 2: to the buffer. Growing over, some growth over trail, significant poison ivy, not well used

" Trail 3: to used parking lot/buffer gravel of McLean 12 - 15 ft wide to Wyman House

" Trail 4: connecting the water tower to Oaks/Bowditch buffer of 12 - 15 ft, shows some tire tracks

" Trail 5: coal road approaching the cemetery crosses into Belmont Day School property for maybe 100 ft and then crosses back. Well used, in good shape, wide, limited erosion

" Trail 6: parallel to #5, it is 12 - 14 ft wide, shows old tire ruts, half in open space and half in cemetery land, has look of old carriage road.

" Trail 7: connection to #5 and #6 to gate through heart-shaped meadow. Perhaps too close to the new cemetery road to be useful or private enough. Could be relocated to the edge of the meadow.

" Trail 8: well used trail, connects east to west south of the red maple swamp, about 4 years ago water main installed, has a low bridge over a brook that collects significant debris and blocks the water flow, also has no edge protection, accessibility is an issue.

" Trail 9: small spur trail off of #8, to the corner of the residences and parking lots via diagonal access, possible trail head.

" Trail 10: water flow down the drive will cause erosion problems that need to be fixed to slow flow.

" Trail 11: through the Great Meadow in good condition. Low area behind. Edge of meadow shows seepage from vernal pool

" Trail 12: off #11 enters into the residential woodlands with gate. Down the fall line of the hillside shows erosion problems. Could be a main access point if not re-routed.

" Trail 13: connects #11 to Mill Street inside the Pine Allee. Not good sight lines, bad down the fall line of the hill, showing gullying, lots of roots and rock are exposed, has a grade of 12 -15%. Dangerous spill out onto Mill Street. Dense vegetation with overgrown oak trees, sumac and buckthorne, utility pole blocks view of road limiting safe crossing. Takes 2+ minutes to cross Mill. Potential trail re-route to connect directly across to Rock Meadow - could this get a pedestrian activated stoplight?

" Trail 14: stems off #13, dead end trail connects low meadow behind the residential Woodlands, potential candidate for closure and/or re-route with #13

" Trail 15: more gradual downhill showing pocket meadows. Soil allows growth of meadows, sandy. Steep areas have gravel grading. Gravel is not good for long time.

" Trail 16: Pine Allee trail 5 - 6 ft and 7 -8 ft with soft surface from duff of Pine needles/no compaction. Connections to the openings in meadow and to Concord Ave. in 2 to 3 places including 1 across from MA Audubon

" Trail 17: Driveway -blocked by grass clippings and trees across new roadway. Large cliff to the road, for all intents and purposes closed/disassociated with rest of trails.

" Secondary trails:

" Trail A: Coal road used by Mountain Bikes to the knoll. Shows significant erosion

" Trail B: Longer coal road alternate showing one area crossing a spring (year round?) that contributes to the erosion

" Trail C: top of coal road, steep in one area

" Trail D: Connects Snake Hill Road to Coal Road, wider/eroded. It dumps into the neighborhood

" Trail E: Trail deadends to Red Maple swamp a short, small trail

" Trail F: From a lower meadow to the low end at the Northwest corner (near Mill Street connection)

" LEC contribution/comments:

" Narrower trails are better for habitat

" When closing trails, suggest using woody and shrubby vegetation at the entrance and post signs

" Long-term sustainability - don't use open space money on property that may ultimately be turned into a cemetery if short term

" Recommend abandoning Trail 2 or keeping it as narrow as possible

" Next steps: Public Meeting and LMC comments

" Final assessment trails plan draft will be available in July. Could complete in August after public meetings. Dates subject to change depending upon schedules.

Committee conversation and public input:

" The LMC should consider shifting the public meeting/response portion of the trails activities to the fall after most people return from vacation. By unanimous consent by LMC and Gary Claiborne of Pressley, the LMC agreed to do so. Ellen will work with Pressley to do so, requiring four meetings in rapid succession to accomplish the task by end of September.

" Ellen read a letter received from the Belmont Day School indicating their continued desire to keep any connections to the open space as unlabeled and private.

" General comments: Belmont locals appear to be the most common pedestrian users; there is some commuter bicycle traffic, especially during a narrow timeframe in the morning, afternoon more spread out; general usage of all types increases after 5 pm

" Specific comments:

" Harlan Carere vigorously expressed concern that bikes cause extreme conflict with open space/conservation values, especially erosion and disturbance of the peaceful enjoyment of the property (inadequate sightlines for safety). He requested that the LMC not permit bikes on the property and said that he and his children have had several unpleasant, unsafe encounters with bicyclists recently.

" LMC member Richard Pichette reiterated his desire to have the property accessible to all Belmont residents, not just those immediate neighbors. He'd like to see a plan to offer parking and bicycle racks for those who ride there but want to walk. He also stated that if greater attention paid to connect this property to the Greenway, the use in general would increase.

" Jeanne Mooney noted that when people use a property they are more likely to donate money to its maintenance and upkeep.

" Liz Allison said that the LMC should pay attention to numbers and reinforced her position that bicycles should not be permitted on the property. Conflicts between bicyclists and pedestrians do occur. The concept of carrying capacity, even for open space usage, is real. The LMC should engage a survey to develop some serious factual data on use, numbers of users, who, from where, etc. In addition, the LMC needs to plan for changes, develop a budget for reasonable, achievable maintenance in the long term and sources of that funding so it's not a draw on public funds.

" Ann Paulsen emphasized personal safety on the property, stating that we don't need lots of money, the effective public/private partnership of Judith K. Record Memorial Conservation Fund is an excellent example. We need to coordinate volunteerism on the site to develop a feeling of general public ownership.

" Chief of Police Richard McLaughlin stated that for security and safety, a procedural response will be required when individuals phone Belmont Police/Fire and/or animal control officer. Question whether only response or actual patrols will be undertaken.

" The issue of allowing or prohibiting bicycles was again discussed. The open question, "Bicycling would be an acceptable use of the McLean open space if..." was posed. Two options addressed were limiting days of the week or designating certain trails for bike and pedestrian use and others for merely pedestrian use. Pressley is charged with helping to determine the best policy/trails plan to preserve the open space but make it usable by the most Belmont residents. Specific considerations: sight line issues, slope, and narrow width to keep speed down. In addition increased informational signage, warning system, rules and common courtesy.

" LMC Member Martha Moore mentioned that with respect to state land DCR developed a resource management plan that was broader than our plan and made the decision for shared use.

The meeting adjourned by unanimous vote at 9:40 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ellen O'Brien Cushman
Chairman, McLean Land Management Committee