

**Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (Massland/MLTC)**

**Steering Committee (SC) Minutes**

**Friday, June 19, 2020 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM (Virtual Meeting/Not recorded)**

**Attendance:** On record at MLTC Office

**Hand Outs:**

* Minutes of March 6, 2020 Steering Committee Meeting sent by email

10:05 A Kathy Orlando, Steering Committee Chair called this virtual meeting to order and clarified the Zoom logistics for the meeting. Robb Johnson, Kathy Orlando, and Buzz Constable monitored comments and questions in Zoom Chat. Everyone introduced themselves noting their affiliation.

1. **March 6, 2020 Steering Committee Minutes.** Andrew “Andy” Magee moved and Henry Woolsey seconded to accept the Minutes as submitted. Hearing no further discussion, Kathy Orlando called the vote. **VOTE:** Unanimous (available to members at <http://massland.org/steering-committee>)
2. **Remaining SC 2020 Meeting Dates.** Wednesday Sept 23rd (Virtual) and Friday Dec 11th are scheduled at this time with December meeting venue to be determined pending pandemic status.
3. **Board Member Election.** William “Buzz” Constable acknowledged Andrew “Andy” Magee’s willingness to stay on the board and continue as treasurer. He also thanked Mark Robinson who volunteered to be treasurer if Andy did not wish to stay on. Buzzed moved and Rita Gibes Grossman seconded to vote Andy to a one year term. Andy clarified his willingness to serve a three year term and Buzz amended his motion to three years and Henry Woolsey seconded the amended motion. Hearing no further discussion, Buzz called the vote. **VOTE:** Unanimous.
4. **Executive Director (ED) Evaluation.** Robb Johnson was hired and started as MLTC’s ED October 8, 2019. Buzz requested any comments or feedback concerning Robb’s performance be provided to Buzz at his email: buzz@massland.org in preparation for Robb’s evaluation. Buzz the board has concurred that Robb is doing an excellent job and he thanked everyone who has provided feedback to date.
5. **Staff Report Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition.** Robb Johnson provided the following update.
	1. 2020 Mass Land Conservation Conference (MLCC) report :
		1. MLCC had to be cancelled as a live meeting two weeks prior to event
		2. 9 online webinars were organized with 600 live participants; 400 received recordings
		3. Positive and constructive feedback for virtual method
		4. Thanks to generous sponsor support and donated registration fees financial losses were avoided.
	2. 2021 MLCC. At the recent meeting of the MLCC Planning Committee decision was made to do a virtual conference. Virtual conference software is being researched. Next week Robb will attend the LTA regional meeting of state land trust associations and hopes to acquire more information on options for remote conferences. Based on this past MLCC, virtual has allowed for some participant to attend who would not have attended the live conference. May offer live regional gatherings in conjunction with the virtual conference, if public health guidance allows.
	3. If you are interested in serving on the MLCC Planning Committee. Candidates are sought across all spectrums including, age (younger), ethnicity, race, location, organization et al.). Current Planning Committee members are: Rob Warren, Henry Woolsey, Buzz Constable, Andy Magee, Nick Rossi, Kelly Boling, Cynthia Henshaw, Loring Schwarz, Rich Hubbard, Bob Wilber, Ed Hood, and Janet Milkman who is stepping down. Please contact Robb if interested at: robb@massland.org
	4. FY21 Budget outlook looks sound due to the 2019 staffing gap and reduced expenses with MLCC. Approach to FY 21 budget will be conservative.
	5. Membership renewals across all categories are being sent out this week. Recognizing current hardships, an appeal was made for renewals and includes an online renewal option.
6. **Subcommittee and Working Group Updates**
	1. *Conservation Restriction (CR) Working Group.* Rob Warren thanked all for useful feedback on the current CR model and the revision is moving forward and a draft for everyone’s review is anticipated by mid-summer.
	2. *Valuing Nature’s Services Working Group.* Christa Collins said the group anticipates completing their work by the end of this year. The original goal of generating a dollar value for every acre saved is not a realistic expectation for this group. Following Resilient Land Initiative and the Cost of Community Services work (UMass); their intention is to develop an evaluation tool that can be customized for specific land types and constituencies. Assuring that the regional planning agencies are aware this information and the available for assessing resiliency and climate change impact is a priority. Loring Schwarz noted the goal on having the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) programs include resiliency in their work. Kathy Orlando said that that based on her regional experience, MVP coordinators are looking for this information, and Christa concurred.
	3. *Amicus Committee.* Buzz Constable thanked Christa for her work on the Nature Services group. The Amicus Committee voted to participate in two lawsuits: Wildlands v. Cedar Hill Retreat Center, which has been argued; and the Wellesley Conservation Council v. Robert W. Pereira which has not been argued yet. Any questions about either case should be sent to Robb at robb@massland.org.
	4. *Agricultural Subcommittee.* Kathy Orlando said the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program applications are due at the end of the month and clarified that if there are no state or federal funds being requested, the due date is on a rolling schedule. The Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program was just announced by the Baker-Polito administration created in response to the COVID pandemic to accelerate locally produced food and equitable access.
	5. *Policy Committee.*  Robb Johnson noted that Kristen Sykes, the Policy Committee Chair could not join this SC meeting. He summarized their work has included lobbying on the federal Great American Outdoors Act, SMART (Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target) program and on an Article 97 withdrawal petition before the State Senate. MLTC work as one of the Green Budget Coalition members continues and we also submitted comments along with partners from the Commonwealth Conservation Council on the State Capital Budget. . The committee plans to re-assess the legislative process in the context of the pandemic and how to best leverage regional and local land trust (LT) voices to amplify statewide land conservation advocacy efforts.
	6. *Young Land Professionals (YLP).* Nick Rossi noted YLP is currently in a holding pattern due to COVID. At their next meeting to be held late summer/early fall, they will discuss new initiatives and how to proceed within the pandemic context for networking.
7. **Land Trust Alliance (LTA) Update.** Daron Blake, the LTA’s Northeast Program Coordinator gave an update and indicated that the Great American Outdoors Act passed the Senate, and acknowledged Sen. Elizabeth Warren for voting yes. Everyone needs to contact their U.S. representative to support the passage of the Act as it has been submitted this week. The LTA Rally will be held on October 6 – 8, 2020 as a virtual event using the Pathable brand software with a keynote address; sixty workshops; tiered pricing and will include more participants with more savings for all.
8. **Advocacy and Policy Updates.** Emily Myron, The Nature Conservancy’s Government Relations Specialist, provided a comprehensive summary as described in Attachment A.She noted
	1. The FY21 operating budget will be challenged by a projected revenue shortfall between four to six billion dollars due to the COVID induced lost tax revenue and delayed tax deadline. A short term budget may be passed, but, not yet certain, and there will be significant cuts across the board. The Green Budget Coalition is working hard to assure adequate funding for environment and conservation. In regards to the capital budget, the good news is there are no cuts for conservation and the Commonwealth Conservation Council’s (of which MLTC is a part) priority programs will at least receive level funding. Emily summarized a few programs that received increases in funding, including a big increase for the Greening the Gateway Cities, an increase for Climate Change/Hazard Mitigation, and a new dedicated line for Cranberry Bog site restoration programs.
	2. In regards to S.2757, An Act to mitigate arbovirus in the Commonwealth and mosquito spraying as a prevention measure for EEE, Emily recommended contacting Heidi Ricci at MA Audubon with questions or on how to respond at hricci@massaudubon.org. S.2757 will be voted on this Wednesday.
	3. In regards to solar regulations which are being reviewed now with the goal to reduce inappropriate siting. Emily also mentioned there may be some COVID stimulus funding that will include job creation and public benefit around conservation.
	4. During the question and answer component the following issues were discussed:
		1. Mosquito bill and EEE. Buzz noted that the Lincoln Conservation Trust did a presentation to their Board of Selectmen on S.2757, An Act to mitigate arbovirus in the Commonwealth; he said they were unaware of the bill. He suggested using this as a way to connect with boards of health on using less toxic alternatives. Rita Grossman suggested everyone contact their legislators on this issue. Emily thanked Rita for bringing this up as the impact of COVID should not deter our feedback, especially if your work is dependent on ear marks. Dot (Dorothy) McGlincy answered a question about whether local (residential) pesticide applicators are included in this Act and they are not. As originally drafted, pending legislation would give unprecedented power to the State Reclamation and Mosquito Control Board and the state to do whatever they feel is necessary to address EEE threat. Opponents are urging a scientific analysis on the proposed strategies and less toxic, effective alternatives. Buzz noted that municipalities can opt out if their plan for a less toxic approach is submitted to the public health commission. Buzz also requested that at some point the 1950’s “mosquito ditches” be reviewed for effectiveness. Dorothy noted that there has been some discussion on this by the State Reclamation and Mosquito Control Board. She also noted that S.2757 would create a Commission to oversee, but, she believes that over rides may not work if EEE emerges as an issue and noted that the proposed approach will have a devastating impact on organic farms and beekeepers. Kathy O urged each one to connect with local mosquito control boards for policy and practice impacts by new bill.
		2. Justine Kent-Uritam asked about water resource issues, noting that we may be entering a drought and some areas already have water bans. She made a plea for water conservation and for DEP to be required to address over pumping issues, which they don’t currently address. . Even though 10% of the Commonwealth is on private wells, the numbers of individual households impacted are significant. Emily suggested that the MA Rivers Alliance is best contact and also noted that DEP has been understaffed. Justine also noted that e. coli has been found in some Dover wells and that water boiling is required.
9. **State Agency Update.**  Bob O’Connor summarized:
	1. The Great American Outdoors Bill, if adopted, could benefit the state and that the LWCF funding flowing to the state would be significant at $15-$17M per year.
	2. The state’s capital budget is level funded for conservation staffing and programs. Greening the Gateway Cities has increased and is fully funded. Getting ready to implement both the Foresters for the Birds and the Cost of Community Services program and both are level funded. Surprisingly good news all considered.
	3. The Resilient Lands Initiative in the final phase with a plan to have something ready for public review after a July meeting. This has been a ten month project and Bob is grateful to all the ideas that have been generated.
	4. Grant contracts with June 30th deadlines which have been impacted by COVID 19 can be extended.
	5. Regarding CRs, John Gioia meets with EEA Secretary Kathleen Theoharides every month to get signatures so projects can move forward.
	6. The Mohawk Trails and MVP grants’ deadline was yesterday and there were many applications.
	7. Melissa Cryan, the grant’s administrator announced that the latest Land and Water applications have been submitted to Federal administration and noted the extensive bureaucratic process has an impact on increased funding for spending. The LAND and PARC grants are due July 15th and both are electronic submissions. Applicants can ask questions on their applications until June 24th. Conservation Partnership Grant (CPG) electronic submissions are due July 20th and also noted the Westport Land Trust for being the already having their application in. . Can ask questions on CPG up until submission deadline. She also expressed appreciation for everyone’s patience as EEA continues to work virtually.
	8. In response to a question on the Conservation Land Tax Credit program, Bob said calendar year 2022 has been filled and the two year waiting list is being sustained unfortunately. Emily noted there has been no movement on increasing the cap to reduce this backlog, even though everyone in the legislature seems supportive and an improvement is needed. The pandemic unfortunately clouds the likelihood of a fix this year.
	9. The Healthy Soil Action Plan which is going forward and will be complimentary to Resilient Land Initiative focuses on below surface issues. Bob believes the next six months could be a very critical time in the Commonwealth for conservation and resiliency work action and improvement.
	10. Bernie McHugh noted the powerful impact of Bob O’Connor’s arrival 20 years ago and his key role in dramatically improving the state agency and LT community relationship.

(5 minute break)

1. **Survey of Massachusetts Land Trusts**. Buzz Constable introduced the survey project by explaining how it happened, and indicated that everyone can review the results which are posted on: <https://massland.org/resources/survey>. There are 147 LTs and 114 participated and he thanked Paul Catanzaro and his team at UMASS for all of their work and expertise. Paul thanked Buzz and recognized the team effort which made this possible. Paul summarized the results and noted the 77% percent participation rate. Results were by organization characteristics, including the many town boundary defined local land trusts; respondent priorities; respondent holdings in fee and CRs; (Paul thanked John Gioia for his help in confirming CR holders); land conservation partners; 86% of respondents with active land projects; challenges being faced excluding funding and sustainability of the organization being the top challenge; LTA membership 70%; 91% MLTC membership; MLTC satisfaction (70% satisfied); policy priorities; and MLTC program support options. Please contact Paul with questions or if you desire a hard copy at: paulcat@umass.edu. Marla noted that the question regarding new programs or services MLTC could offer was an open-ended question, with response sorted into categories based on qualitative analysis. A collection of responses categorized as “Technical Assistance” was the top response. Buzz noted the raw data that went into this qualitative analysis well captured and available for further review, as is the raw data for the question on top challenges facing land trusts.
2. **Sharing Responses to Challenges from the Pandemic**. Kathy Orlando posted a poll to gather information on what participant LTs are confronting due to the pandemic. Top results: engaging the community and members; getting funding; lost revenues; and working remotely.
	1. Robb then invited participants to share what’s working/ successful strategies for public engagement, since that was the top identified need. Several examples were offered: AVIS (Andover Village Improvement Society) post themed hikes for children but had to manage overwhelming response and then had to re-orient to maintain COVID social distancing.
	2. Lisa Vernegaard at Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) noted challenges including the extended financial downturn and need to share best practices. SVT virtual presentations and programming have been well received and engaging more individuals. Given the response they indeed to maintain this kind of programming ongoing.
	3. Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust had to finish their spring appeal in the midst of COVID and is doing socially distant walks on with land owners on their properties. Participation has dramatically increased including from beyond their region for virtual offerings, especially for content offerings.
	4. Colin Novick (Greater Worcester Land Trust) provided on update on their virtual activities.
	5. Kate Bowditch (Essex County Green Belt). ECGB had a virtual annual meeting and vote was done by proxy in paper mail and she noted higher participation on both counts compared to their regular live meeting. The meeting was recorded, allowing them to include additional learning resources as part of the recording.
	6. Anna Wilkins (North County LT). A video tour of properties from a nine year old child’s point of view was well received. Board meetings have been on zoom and have found that board members are now exploring other “outside the box” thinking.
3. **Setting MLTC priorities for FY21**. Robb Johnson summarized proposed MLTC program for the coming year, which have been informed by the survey responses around needs, challenges and helpful new programs, as well information gathered in other forums during the year:
	1. MLTC is exploring two new offerings, both of which would take place remotely for the time being: A training series comprised of more in depth virtual workshops on best practices such as: CR enforcement; insurance and liability; models for LT collaboration (regional and local); succession planning and board recruitment; land owner outreach. Goal is to launch by early fall with new funding yet to be determined. The other offering would be regional or themed-based networking gatherings that would be less structured and enable relationship-building and potential informal mentoring around common interests.
	2. Continue successful programs including the MLCC. At its recent meeting, the planning committee decided to plan this is an online events, with an interactive conference platform – and if possible, regional networking gatherings or hikes offered to complement the online conference.
	3. The annual Land Trust/State Agency Retreat scheduled for Nov. 12th – 13th at Harvard Forest – but the planning committee will be meeting to discuss contingency plans if we are unable to gather in person for that. Ongoing advocacy and policy work.
	4. The Record Keeping Initiative is planning to begin a second round of direct technical assistance on land records to interested small and all volunteer LTs (AVLTs). Application information will be announced soon.
	5. Working groups (like the CR working group) will be ongoing, eNews and listserv will be ongoing.
	6. Plans to leverage and complement programming already being offered by others, such as regional gatherings on the Cape and Berkshires.
	7. A live poll was offered to solicit top priorities for the new training series. Popular results included :
		1. Equity and inclusion in land trust work
		2. Models for LT Collaboration
		3. Board member recruitment and succession planning
		4. Integrating Climate Change resilience into our work
		5. Working on urban issues
		6. landowner and community outreach

Next there was open discussion about additional needs and ideas, such as marketing training, increasing internal capacity to handle more for both AVLTs and staffed LTs, need for a mentorship program linking experienced to less experienced LT professionals and volunteers, stewardship for wildlife, protocols and best practices for virtual meetings, especially annual meetings and need to address bylaws and legal issues. Kate Bowditch (ECGB) offered to participate and assist based on ECGB’s experience. Lisa noted the need for this in early July given the number of annual meetings upcoming that will need to become virtual and the need to train the next generation of LT professionals and volunteers.

Kathy asked everyone to share thoughts and ideas either on the chat or to Robb at MLTC.

Kathy Orlando thanked everyone and recognized participant Bernie McHugh for his foundational work for MLTC and the benefit of this meeting format for polling as follows:

12:35 Rita moved and Henry Woolsey second to adjourn the meeting. Hearing no further discussion, Kathy called the vote. **VOTE:** Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Rita Gibes Grossman, clerk