

TOWN OF CONCORD
Estabrook Woods Access
Study Committee
Committee Charge

A. Background

Estabrook Woods is Concord's largest and perhaps most cherished intact natural area. Located in the northern part of town and extending into Carlisle, it contains more than 1,200 acres of undeveloped land with woodland, hills, ledge and swamp, and abundant wildlife. The Estabrook Woods are bordered by Lowell Road to the west (with access through Chamberlin Woods), Monument Street to the east, and Bedford Road (Rt. 225) to the north. The core of the area is Harvard University's 672-acre property, supplemented by another 180 acres near Lowell Road owned by Middlesex School which includes Bateman's Pond. Estabrook Woods also encompasses Town-owned Punkatasset Conservation Land, several parcels of Concord Land Conservation Trust property, and many smaller privately-owned parcels. The largely wooded area is one of seven priority open spaces in the town's open space and long range plans. Over 900 acres in Estabrook Woods is considered permanently protected from development by deed restrictions, including the Harvard land.

Throughout its history, Concord has valued its undeveloped, natural areas. From Henry David Thoreau to the authors of the numerous planning documents that have guided the town for the last five decades, emphasis has been placed on preserving the treasured open spaces that are unique to Concord. Open space remains one of Concord's highest priorities because it provides such a range of conspicuous benefits to the Town and its citizens. Although it is largely privately owned, much of Estabrook Woods is accessible to the public, who have enjoyed long-existing trails there for decades if not centuries.

The number of visitors seeking access to the largely privately-owned Estabrook Woods has increased in recent years. Communication via internet and other means has highlighted the beauty and appeal of Estabrook Woods, an area close to Boston. For many years, public use of the land was limited to hiking, cross-country skiing, and some horseback riding. In the past few years, new outdoor sports have become popular including geo-caching and mountain biking, and the area has become popular for group guided outings. Unfortunately, increased popularity has also led to an increase use by dog-walkers, creating added pressure at trail-head parking locations. Frequent complaints have been filed with the Concord Police Department for obstructions to public roads, unruly people and/or animals, bagged dog waste litter, conflicts between dogs and homeowners, and vehicles blocking driveways.

B. Purpose

The purpose of the Estabrook Woods Access Study Committee is to consider how to address the increased pressure for adequate and safe parking at trail heads, to review other impacts from increased visitor use, and to make recommendations to the Select Board for immediate and longer term natural area recreation management plans. The committee should evaluate whether existing facilities are being utilized effectively and how best to address the growing demand for access to the woods. The committee shall prepare a draft report of its findings and shall present the draft report at a public hearing to solicit feedback from the community. Following the public hearing, a final report will be prepared and submitted to the Select Board.

C. Membership

The Committee shall be comprised of nine members appointed by the Select Board with representation as follows:

- One representative from the Natural Resources Commission;
- Two members owning property abutting or neighboring Estabrook Woods, Chamberlin Woods, or Punkatasset;
- One member of the Trails Committee;
- One member of Conservation Restriction Stewardship Committee
- One member of Concord Land Conservation Trust
- Three citizens at-large representing a diversity of interests, backgrounds and expertise;
- Ex Officio staff members:
 - Police Chief or his designee
 - CPW Director or his designee
 - Planning Director or her Designee

D. Term of Office

The members of the committee shall serve from March 30, 2015 until September 30, 2016, unless the term shall be extended by vote of the Select Board.

E. Duties and Responsibilities

1. To become familiar with the points of public access to Estabrook Woods, including locations where the public may park to access the Woods, and how currently they are being utilized;
2. To review the issues identified by interested parties concerning access to the Woods, including concerns expressed by neighbors, town staff and committees, and the public;
3. To solicit public input on the subject through a variety of methods, including holding at least one public hearing early in the fact-finding process;
4. Solicit input from owners of parcels which comprise the Estabrook Woods, making certain to coordinate such contact in advance with the Committee's Select Board liaison.
5. To consider whether there are steps that may be taken immediately to address access issues identified, including, but not limited to, better informing the public of access options, improved signage at trail heads and on trails, increasing awareness of environmental and social problems, and addressing any public safety issues identified; and to convey any immediate suggestions to the Select Board as soon as practicable;
6. To consider whether there are measures which might be taken to improve on the issues identified that would require additional planning and/or more time to implement;
7. To develop criteria for evaluation of possible measures, taking into account the interests of the public, abutters and neighbors, and the environment;
8. To submit a final report to the Select Board on or about December 1, 2016;
9. To perform such other duties as the Select Board may request, including such tasks as the committee may propose to the Board as modifications to this committee charge.

F. Other Considerations

The Estabrook Woods Access Study Committee is responsible for conducting its activities in a manner which is in compliance with all relevant State and local laws and regulations, including but not limited to, the Open Meeting Law, Public Records Law and Conflict of Interest Law. The Committee shall consult with the Town Manager concerning the allocation of town staff or financial resources toward this effort.

Attachments

- A. Map of Estabrook Woods