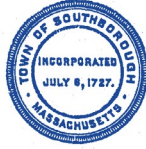


TOWN OF SOUTHBOROUGH



CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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July 6, 2026

Select Board
17 Common Street
Southborough, MA 01772

Subject: Stewardship Committee Charge, Appointments, & Committee Differences

Select Board,

The Conservation Commission would like to provide comments and input regarding the ongoing discussion involving Stewardship Committee, Open Space Preservation Commission, and specifically the appointment of Freddie Gillespie.

1. Stewardship Committee Charge & Appointments

The Stewardship Committee was formed by the Conservation Commission on January 31, 2005, and charged with the stewardship of the 88-acres at Breakneck Hill Conservation Land (BHCL). The Committee was formed while the Cow Fund held a License Agreement on a portion on a property and the committee was enabled to fulfill tasks outlined in a Master Plan to eradicate invasive species, re-establish grasslands, and management of woodland areas for a healthy, native landscape and ecosystem (Annual Report, 2005). Freddie Gillespie was a founding member, being originally appointed as the Open Space Preservation Commission seat.

With over 21 ‘official’ years of experience managing BHCL, Ms. Gillespie is an invaluable wealth of knowledge, skill, and volunteer power. In her tenure, Ms. Gillespie has overseen and spearheaded projects at Breakneck Hill such as managing a ginormous bittersweet infestation, many other invasive species removal projects, creation of Pollinator Meadows and Research Gardens to work with Dr. Gegear to promote biodiversity and native pollinator health and habitat, creating and managing grasslands, upkeep of fields, managing trails, updating signage, woodland management, public education and activities, and many more.

If the Select Board would like to discuss making changes to the designated seats, then the Commission recommends and approves changing the Open Space Preservation Commission designated seat to an at-large member, but to fill that seat by appointing Freddie Gillespie. Ms.

Gillespie's decades of experience managing the property is integral to continuing the management and protection of BHCL. Loss of this volunteer and powerhouse would deeply hinder the Committee's current and upcoming projects and ability to network to find contractors and qualified professionals.

The Select Board's Appointment Policy posted on the website and approved on October 17, 2017, states that incumbent members, especially those "which involve a significant amount of time in service to become a knowledgeable and useful member, present members will be given every consideration if they desire to be appointed." The policy further outlines the general requirements of those serving the town in that they should:

1. *Be people of competence, good will and sound, objective judgment;*
2. *Be drawn from new and long-time residents alike;*
3. *Be truly interested in the welfare of Southborough and all its residents;*
4. *Be sensitive to the long-term as well as the immediate impact of their decisions and recommendations;*
5. *Be willing and able to devote the time and energy necessary to fulfill their responsibilities.*

The policy states that the Select Board encourages volunteers to come forward to let their interests be known, which conflicts with some of the statements listed within the last Select Board meeting on why Ms. Gillespie was not to be reappointed. The Commission urges the Select Board to reappoint Ms. Gillespie to the Stewardship Committee, either as the Open Space Preservation Commission designated seat or by changing the committee layout by changing it to an at-large member so that we may not lose such a dedicated and committed volunteer and knowledge base at Breakneck Hill.

2. Committee Differences: Stewardship Committee and Open Space Preservation Commission

Stewardship Committee was created for a purpose and with the understanding that the charge of the already existing Open Space Preservation Commission would not be able to fulfill the responsibilities required for the upkeep of Breakneck Hill Conservation Land.

The Open Space Preservation Commission has a general purpose of serving as "facilitators for protecting and preserving open space in the Town." While this may appear to be similar to the goals and purpose of Stewardship Committee, there are many fundamental differences.

Stewardship Committee has the sole responsibility for both the daily and annual maintenance activities that are required to keep BHCL open for passive recreation and actively managed to promote habitat and a healthy ecosystem. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Conducting and planning parking lot repair work
- Trimming back weeds or overgrowth on paths
- Establishing a pollinator roadside meadow
- Installation and maintenance of pollinator research gardens

- Planning and overview of trail mowing and maintenance
- Annual rotating field mows
- Pruning and protecting the remaining apple trees
- Leading guided tours or events
- Posting educational and information material
- Working with Scouts on local projects
- Invasive species management
- Working with the Community Garden Coordinator
- Cleaning of bird boxes
- Project planning and overview

The Stewardship Committee is very unique as it has a very specific role within Town by ensuring that our premier open space area is maintained, safe for passage, and promotes a healthy ecosystem. While it combines the skills often utilized in other committees such as Open Space Preservation Commission, Trails Committee, or Recreation Commission, its dedicated scope does not allow adequate time for members to work on generalized open space initiatives throughout Town and does not align with the needs and time required to manage BHCL.

Open Space Preservation Commission, in its own right, is extremely important to open space and preservation throughout Town as it is not limited to Breakneck Hill. While general themes of both committees may overlap, the tasks and charges have very distinct differences. Ms. Gillespie has served on both committees, but while on Open Space Preservation Commission has been a part of many successful open space projects such as land protection, invasive removal, access agreements, open space design, review and comment on site plan applications. Ms. Gillespie is known for her work on the Halloran Property, Southborough Golf Course, Chestnut Hill Farm CR, and proactive discussions with landowners of priority open space parcels. Open Space Preservation Commission is also a ‘hands-on’ committee in that they hold events, install pollinator gardens, review open space design plans, assist in updating the Open Space & Recreation Plan, and many other import facets of open space.

As such, the Commission highly supports keeping the charges of the two bodies unchanged and separate as they each provide different, specific services to the Town.

3. Conclusion

The Conservation Commission has unanimously voted to support the Stewardship Committee by offering the following solutions:

1. Change Stewardship’s designated membership by removing the Open Space Preservation Commission Seat and replacing it with an At-Large Seat that Freddie Gillespie is then appointed to, or;
2. Maintain Stewardship’s current mission without change and reappoint Freddie Gillespie

The Conservation Commission would like to make it very clear that the Commission created the Stewardship Committee for a purpose and need that remains in strong effect today. Breakneck Hill is a large property that requires a full committee to help oversee as limited staff time is

designated to this property and Ms. Gillespie is a core part of why residents and those from neighboring towns choose Breakneck Hill Conservation Land as their destination or who attend events that she promotes and is a part of.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Conservation Agent, Melisa Danza at mdanza@southboroughma.gov.

Sincerely,

Southborough Conservation Commission

Mark Possemato, Chair

Benjamin Smith, Vice-Chair

Elizabeth Zulick

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