

RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE

MISSION

The Rights of Way Committee (RoW) originally formed in 1967 as a subcommittee of the Conservation Commission, and was established as a permanent town committee in 1989. The purpose, confirmed by Town Meeting in 1993, is “to identify, mark and maintain access to public property and public rights of way over private property, subject to review by the Board of Selectmen”.

RoW is charged to carry out its purpose by

- researching title information concerning locations of rights of way,
- identifying and recording all such rights of way,
- overseeing and recommending actions for their upkeep and preservation, and
- authorizing appropriate expenditures to carry out its purpose.

For an inspiring look back at the work of RoW, we invite you to view the 1990s video on “Preserving Rockport’s Coastal Pathways” that is posted on the RoW web page rockportma.gov/rights-way-committee.

ADMINISTRATION

Membership: RoW has nine seats, making it one of the larger town committees. Due to the large size, it had been a challenge to fill all seats and have a quorum at meetings. In 2018 two of our members became alternate (nonvoting) members, and two new members joined. We now have eight voting members, with one seat open. Two prospective members have been attending our meetings. A larger group makes RoW more productive.

Meetings: Meetings are held regularly on the fourth Monday each month, at 7:00 PM. We move meetings that fall on holidays or in some holiday weeks.

Web page and town calendar: We update our web page on a regular basis with minutes, news of events, and links to important resources, including the historic video mentioned above.

Records storage project: In its 30 years of existence, RoW has amassed two cabinets full of paper records and research, plus volumes of electronic records. It is a wealth of information, but not easily accessed. We have started a project to systematically organize both paper and electronic files, and to move electronic files to a town-sponsored Google Drive where they will be more secure and more readily accessible to RoW members and town officials.

MAJOR PROJECT

Atlantic Path / Sea Rocks project: At the end of 2017 we received a \$50,000 Community Preservation grant to establish a well-marked footpath across the town-owned Sea Rocks that will make it easier for people to traverse the area between Hoop Pole Cove and Halibut Point. This project will restore an important link in the historic Atlantic Path from Pigeon Cove Harbor to Halibut Point State Park. It builds upon limited improvements that were implemented by RoW in 2016. We have reached out to key abutters, drafted a bid package, and are preparing a Notice of Intent for Conservation Commission approval. We expect to put the project out to bid early in 2019 for the work to be completed before the end of summer, taking no more than 4 weeks.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Smaller trail projects: We obtained Conservation Commission permission, then bought lumber and fasteners to rebuild boardwalk across a wet area of town land on the Atlantic Path between Cove Avenue and Cedar Avenue. We removed storm-damaged lobster traps at Cogswell Farm.

Research on history and status of rights of way: Research into the origins and current status of public rights of way – over both public and private property – is an ongoing activity, as new questions and challenges to public rights of access arise on a regular basis. In 2018 we researched all of the paths that provide access to the Atlantic Path; footpaths to the waterfront in the Dock Square area and to the shore in the South End; and more – all in an effort to ensure preservation of public access to the sea.

Site visits & inspections: This past summer we visited all rights of way in three areas to check the conditions: Pigeon Cove Avenues neighborhood and Atlantic Path; Downtown and Harbors; and Old Garden Beach and South End. These inspections resulted in a work list of maintenance and signage needs – some of which we will handle, and some of which will need the help of DPW.

Trails Inventory and Oversight: Our mandate extends to all rights of way in the Town, both along the shore and inland, which means our role may overlap with other committees. To promote collaboration and avoid duplication of effort, we are compiling a detailed inventory of rights of way in the Town and will reach out to DPW, the Conservation Commission, Open Space and Recreation, and other committees as appropriate to clarify who takes responsibility for managing and maintaining the respective pathways.

Earth Day Clean Up: In 2018 we participated in Earth Day by clearing Reed's Lane and part of the Atlantic Path – with the help of more than a dozen volunteers.

Contract path clearing: With several miles of coastal pathways to oversee, it has become a challenge for us to keep the paths clear of overgrowth with volunteers alone, so we now contract with a landscaping service for clearing the Atlantic Path at regular intervals. This takes most of our annual budget allocation.

Fishing gear disposal protocol: During Earth Day, we encountered significant amounts of fishing gear washed ashore by storms and were uncertain what to do. After discussion with Harbormasters, fishermen and DPW, we drafted a protocol to follow for notification of owners, and/or proper disposal. The protocol will be shared with Conservation Commission and other relevant committees.

OUTREACH TO OTHER TOWN BODIES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Sunday morning hikes: Several members of RoW participate in the weekly hikes that have been ongoing for decades (led for many years by Ted Tarr), and we post the hikes on the town calendar. The hikes provide written documentation that public rights of way throughout the town continue to be used on a regular basis.

Open Space and Recreation Committee: Our Chair serves as liaison to the Open Space and Recreation Committee and keeps the lines of communication open so that both groups are aware of activities and initiatives in which there may be common interest.

Planning, Conservation, and DPW: Members of RoW routinely attend meetings of Planning Board, Conservation Commission and DPW Commission to stay abreast of development proposals that may affect public rights of way – such as recent proposals for development and sewer extensions in formerly unbuildable areas of the woods, or to use rights of way as driveways. We also collaborate with both Commissions on trail maintenance.

Traffic and Parking: Members of RoW attend meetings of the Traffic and Parking Committee to monitor parking proposals that may affect public access to the woods or shore. In response to repeated parking issues in areas adjacent to the Atlantic Path, we compiled an extensive report on all of the pathways that provide access to the Atlantic Path. The report details the history of public or private ownership as well as public access. We also provided parking recommendations for these areas.

Old Garden Beach and South End Associations: In a continued effort to clarify “who takes care of what,” we invited the leaders of both associations to attend our September meeting to describe what they do and identify the specific areas they cover. As a result, the three groups agreed to do more in the future to collaborate on activities of mutual interest.

City of Gloucester’s Dogtown Advisory Committee (DAC): DAC’s mission is to develop and undertake a comprehensive restoration, management, and stewardship plan for Dogtown. Members of RoW serve as Rockport’s representatives and attend monthly DAC meetings to stay apprised of activities and issues relating to the trails through the woods in both Gloucester and Rockport.

Dogtown in National Register of Historic Places: Members of RoW served as trail guides to the archeologists who compiled a report on the historical resources in Dogtown for a National Register application. We have also participated in public meetings on the project, wrote a letter of support for the National Register nomination and obtained letters of support from relevant boards, commissions, and committees in Rockport.

POSSIBLE FUTURE PROJECTS

Knotweed removal at Reed's Lane: We investigated the removal of a large stand of knotweed at the head of Reed's Lane. The cost is substantial and would require additional funding. Action was deferred to 2019.

Update to the "Guide to Public Paths & Town Landings", a.k.a. The Blue Book: The current edition of the guide was produced in 1995 and needs updating. We determined that an updated print version would be very expensive. We would like to replace it with an updated electronic version when time permits.

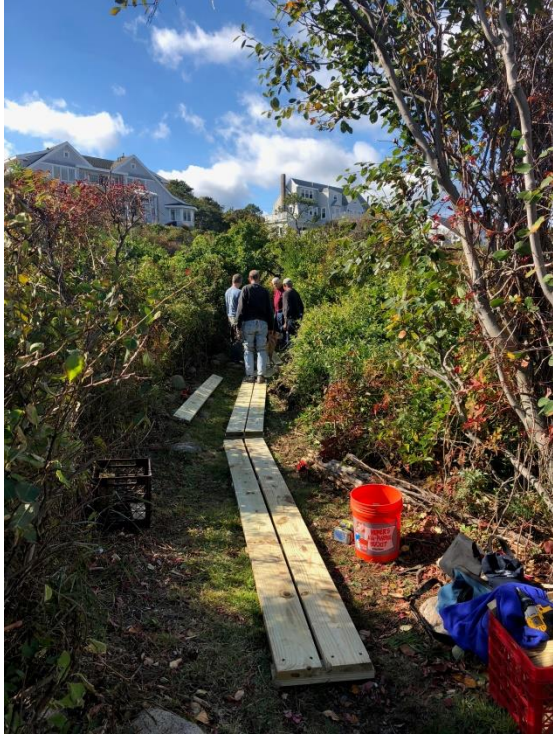
Bike path from Beech Grove Cemetery and possible walking path/trail along Nugent Stretch: We would like to improve access to Gloucester and along Nugent Stretch for bikers and walkers, and will offer support to feasible proposals, as appropriate.

Graffiti removal: Two members of RoW effectively constitute Rockport's Anti-Graffiti Task Force, taking responsibility for the complex task of arranging removal of graffiti at numerous locations around town. Looking to the future, it may be beneficial to formally place the Task Force functions within another standing body, whether RoW or other open space group.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO A PRODUCTIVE 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Mikus, Chair
Monica Lawton, Vice Chair
Candace Waldron, Secretary
Mary Devaney
Lori Morrow
Ann Cahill
Mary Jane Sawyer
John Cunningham
Tom Kerans, Alternate Member
Phil Morrow, Alternate Member



Rebuilding Boardwalk on the Atlantic Path