

Bulkeley Hill Preserve

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Colchester Land Trust purchased the second portion of the Bulkeley Hill property in 2016. At that time, we outlined plans to develop the 130-acre forest for public access, including a parking lot for up to eight cars: the preserve to be known as “Bulkeley Hill Preserve.” We envisioned an educational aspect to the property that would benefit school children, farmers, homeowners, and the town in general. The process continued for four years, including the 200-Acre Campaign to retire the debt incurred to preserve Bulkeley Hill and the Tangletree Farm easement.

The effort to develop Bulkeley Hill Preserve took some time to get off the ground, then immediately encountered an obstacle: intermittent wetlands. This small vernal freshet was not shown on the maps that were made for the housing development that had been proposed for this piece of property, back in 2006. In March of 2018, CLT sought guidance from the Town Wetlands Officer, who provided an assessment of our proposed parking lot project. Discussions and planning with the Town took place over many months, and by December of that year a surveyor was retained to correct the topographical map of the area and propose appropriate placement of a parking lot and driveway.

By February, CLT was meeting with a contractor (who had been identified two years earlier). In April, plans were reviewed, and permits were applied for. Through the following months, we pursued other improvements to Bulkeley Hill Preserve, including installation of bog bridge #1 on August 24, 2019. Materials for a second bog bridge were purchased and the red trail was blazed. In November of 2019, our surveyor provided an updated parking lot design that would better meet engineering and environmental requirements. CLT sought estimates from three contractors for this parking lot project, and by February 2020: we had these estimates. The lowest bid was accepted, with clauses that would reduce the final cost if our members did some of the clearing of trees and brush (see photo).

On June 1, 2020, the parking lot permit was received, and we started to clear the space shortly thereafter. On July 28, 2020, actual site development began and by August 29, the specific site work was staked out. In September, the driveway and parking area were chosen. In the course of grading, two very large boulders were unearthed and moved. After site preparation, a substantial layer of gravel was installed, parking curbs were installed and a kiosk was built by our favorite Eagle Scout. We also added a sign on the street. Bulkeley Hill Preserve was opened to the public on CT Trails Day of 2021, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, curated hikes, and aerial photography marking the occasion!



Site of future Bulkeley Hill Preserve parking lot ... after volunteers cleared the underbrush and many large trees



One of the two massive boulders encountered as our contractor graded Bulkeley Hill Preserve parking lot



Parking lot entrance to Bulkeley Hill Preserve (before signage installed)



One of the bog bridges (#2) CLT constructed on at Bulkeley Hill Preserve



CLT Board member admiring the kiosk at Bulkeley Hill Preserve parking lot