

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
August 14, 2023
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Dr. Richard Costlow
Robert DeHaven
Joe Rumsey
Michon Blake
Todd Fischer
Dave Sponseller
Dan Vaitis
Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to OSPAC Committee

Chairperson Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM

All present participated in the pledge of allegiance.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan noted that he records the audio of the meeting for his convenience in preparing the minutes.

Mr. Meehan also noted that he met with Dave Kraynik last week and he provided a verbal update on items the OSPAC has been following. Their update comments will be passed on to the Committee as shown in the minutes as "Mr. Kraynik or Mr. Carney reported" as the individual items are discussed in tonight's meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There was one resident, Katie Cleary, present. She said she had no public comments.

PRESENTATION

A Boy Scout, Noah Makarichev, was attending to ask for the Committee's endorsement of a project he is proposing for placement in Fischer's Park as an Eagle Scout project. He is with Troop 303 at Corpus Christi Parish.

He explained his proposed project which was to construct Wood-Duck boxes in Fishers along the creek. He presented some printed schematics to the Committee (a copy is attached to the minutes). He said he needed to put them in certain spots in the park and before he went there to see where the best locations for them might be, he wanted to get permission to do this exploratory work. He was making this presentation to make the Committee and the Township aware of his intent and to also ask permission to do this exploratory work.

The Committee asked him some questions about the boxes, including their purpose, what they were made of, how they would be mounted and how many he is proposing. He said he is thinking of installing about five to eight depending on what he determines as he studies the habitat in more detail. He explained how the wood-ducks would use the boxes as feeders and not as nesting sites and that the boxes are constructed so other animals could not get into them.

Noah said at this point he is asking for permission to go into the park and explore sites for the placement of wood-duck boxes. He didn't want to go ahead without having permission. Once he then determined potential locations for the boxes, he would come back and make another presentation including the locations and ask for final approval of the project.

The Committee in a verbal consensus endorsed Noah's request. Mr. Meehan said he would pass the Committee's endorsement on to the Township staff and ask for the Townships action on his requests and once he has heard back, he would notify Noah. The Committee wished him success with the project.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES – Meeting of July 17, 2023

The minutes of the July meeting had been distributed to the Committee by email prior to tonight's meeting. Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments on the minutes as written and distributed. There were none. Ms. Becker made a motion to accept the minutes. Mr. Sponseller seconded the motion. All Committee members voted in favor of the motion, none were opposed, the minutes were approved. Mr. Meehan said he will forward them to the Township staff to be posted on the Township website.

OLD BUSINESS – Updates

Overview of the funding process. Mr. Meehan said in his discussion last week, Mr. Kraynik provide an overview of the funding process. This discussion was prompted by the Committee's discussion at last month's meeting regarding how we can prepare a budget when we don't know how much money is available to be budgeted. Mr. Kraynik said for Capital projects funding the Committee should use zero as the amount available. The exceptions are money available from the Arneith Funds for Fischer's Park and items that might fall under operational items such as park maintenance.

The process in general terms should be that the Committee should identify items it recommends as Parks Capital project's needs, prioritize them, and request they be placed in the budget. This is then passed to the Finance Committee, which then looks at all the Townships Capital project needs, prioritizes them and decides what funding mechanism would work to finance them. This final process also considers the Township's options such as raising taxes, seeking loans or bonds for funding, when current revenues do not provide what is needed. Of course, another option is that the projects don't get done in the current budget cycle.

Some Committee members questioned this process, and it was discussed further. There is a portion of taxes dedicated to Parks, what about that? Mr. Meehan said he interpreted Mr. Kraynik's process summary to be that other those funds went toward operational costs and not capital project costs. The one source that in the past has been used for capital project costs was impact fees from development which have now dried up because of the downturn in any development. The Committee will continue looking at the process and possibly have Mr. Kraynik come to a future meeting for his direct input.

Review of OSPAC Requests for 2024 Parks Capital Projects Funding. Mr. Meehan said he went back and refined the cost estimates for the items the Committee is proposing for the 2024 budget.

The first being the request to match the \$250,000 DCNR Grant for Grist Mill Park. This includes \$140,000 being requested for a pavilion there. This is the highest priority item for 2024.

The second item is for pickleball courts at Fischer's Park. In his original estimate, Mr. Meehan said he used a number for courts he thought were constructed in Upper Gwynedd Township in 2017 which he then adjusted for escalation and inflation to make those costs current. He later learned these courts were in fact bid to be constructed in 2023 and the cost escalation factor of 28% did not apply. The costs without the escalation/inflation factor when recalculated became \$232,000, not \$325,000. Those were the estimated costs for six (6) courts. For four (4) courts the estimate is \$173,000. These costs were with the revision was made to the Budget Request as Option A for six (6) courts at \$232,000 and Option B for four (4) courts at \$173,000 and sent to the Township Finance Director.

Another item updated was for the installation/connection of utilities to a new restroom/pavilion facility at Butch Clemens Park. That cost estimate was revised to be \$242,000.

The fourth item was fencing improvements at Bustard Road Park ballfields. Mr. Meehan questioned his thinking on this item saying this is an item that he now feels should fully reside in TYA's hands. His thinking on this is that the repair/replacement of fencing falls more into the category of field maintenance and is not something we should be considering as a Capital Parks improvement project. The Committee discussed this. In the current (2023) budget, there is an item for fencing improvements budgeted at \$10,000 a year for 2023 and each of the next five (5) years. He continued saying TYA 's people who use these facilities are the best individuals for making such recommendations. Items like the new soccer field at Green Lane Park should remain in the purview of the OSPAC but fencing repairs is drilling down too far for OSPAC and should be with TYA. We certainly will endorse such recommendations by TYA on keeping the fields safe but let TYA make their case on this item at the Budget Workshop in their presentation. He said he will notify the Township Finance Director of this change in thinking and withdraw this fencing item from the 2024 OSPAC budget request.

The next item was to begin the engineering work transforming the Simone-Collins Master Plan into detailed engineering plans for bidding and construction. A budget request of \$100,000 was made for this engineering work but on reviewing the scope, the work will be more costly than that. Mr. Meehan said he will talk to the Township Finance Director about what might be the best approach to funding this, maybe in installments, over several years.

The last item was to set aside money in the budget to continue with the Tree Trail" planting along Kriebel Road Trails. The plan is to set aside about \$25,000 each year from the tree fund and each year plant as many trees of specific species as we can get for that amount.

Environmental Advisory Council Update - Mr. Costlow attended the EAC meeting and gave an update on what was discussed. He said there were some good comments about last year's OSPAC Budget Presentation. They also discussed EAC budget items for 2024.

Trails Updates

- TA trail – Complete just waiting on final cost report.
- KRII Trail – Substantially complete, PW will be installing a fence between the trail and the Creek at the Trail narrow point near Green Lane Road. The Township is pushing to get some of the tree debris removed along the trail at the edge of the woodlands.

Green Lane Park Soccer Field - Engineering work to prepare plans and bid documents for a soccer field at this site was approved by the BOS at its July 26th meeting. CKS, the low bidder, was chosen to perform the work. The Committee discussed the expectations for CKS's engineering work. Was it to design a soccer field anywhere on the site? Was it to optimize the site and allow for future uses? What are TYA's soccer field needs today and forecasted needs?

Mr. Kraynik indicated the Township has similar questions and for this reason a meeting is being set up to get the stakeholders input in one setting and plan the path to move forward. This meeting is an important step since CKS has indicated it will take time to get the documents prepared and bid and construction to start which means the Township will be lucky to get the construction completed in 2024. The field would then need to lay fallow for a year to allow the turf to toughen. With this timetable, the field would not be on-line until 2026. The committee continued to discuss the different scenarios for the site including additional parking. Mr. Vaitis noted that he visited the site earlier today, took some photos and tried to get some measurements. The Committee agreed that having a meeting is the next step and it needs to be held as soon as possible.

Bocce Courts at Fischer's Park - Mr. Meehan passed on to the Committee Mr. Kraynik's comments that PW revised their estimate to reflect the responsibility of each party for its scope of work. He also said Top-A-Court is also part of the equation and needs to perform the court surface replacement work. He said PW is expected to do their portion of the work this fall, with Top-A-Court doing theirs in the spring. Some Committee members were skeptical of PW living up to any commitments because something else inevitably comes along that it feels takes priority. Ms. Smith said she will do what she can to push to have PW make it happen as planned.

Drinnon Park Path – Mr. Meehan said he will arrange to be on an upcoming BOS meeting agenda to request approval of the Committee's plan for a path connecting Tennis Circle and Drinnon way to the playground in the center of Drinnon Park via a six (6) foot wide paved pathway, with a curvilinear alignment.

Tree Trail – Mr. Costlow said he just received the tree plan he had prepared. The plan now has the tree species shown in the digital document. Mr. Meehan said in his quick review the plan might need a little refinement since there is at least one section where trees are designated to be planted that already have dense trees. Mr. Costlow said he would check this. They agreed however that this minor refinement should not hold up moving forward with the plan.

Mr. Costlow noted that any new trees will need a maintenance plan if we expect them to survive. Mr. Meehan said he knows of two options to be sure maintenance is covered in the planting plan. The first is to plant the trees and have the PW department be responsible for watering and any other maintenance for the first two years. The second option is to plant trees that are guaranteed to survive the first two years. If they don't survive the trees are to be replaced at no cost by the contractor who purchased and planted them. This option comes at an additional cost per tree which could range from 1.2 to 1.5 times the cost of a tree without

a guarantee. The Committee discussed each of the options. Having PW care for these trees could be a burden on the time of the PW department for two years and in the end, the trees might not survive.

Mr. Costlow said chestnut trees are so hard to obtain that special care must be taken so they are properly cared for if you are able to acquire some. Mr. Costlow explained why chestnut trees are so hard to get. They are, in general terms, genetically modified to be blight resistant. If we are going to get these trees it is necessary to comply with the tree care plan from the Chestnut Foundation, which is part of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. He added that at one time the PW Director said he was going to have staff trained as Tree Tenders. This should be the minimum training needed to implement the chestnut tree care plan. The committee felt that by including chestnut trees in the immediate plan we are adding hurdles to the overall plan. Instead of doing this we should make it as easy as possible to get the trees planted. Mr. Costlow said right now the chestnut trees are not even available. The Committee consensus was that we leave the chestnut trees for a future year's planting and recommend the others for now based on the planned species shown on Mr. Costlow's plan.

Further, Ms. Becker made a motion, seconded by Mr. DeHaven that the trees purchased have a guarantee to survive at least two years. All Committee members voted in favor of this motion, and it was approved.

Additional parking at Fischer's Park – The Township has asked CKS to prepare a concept plan for providing additional parking, a pavilion and four (4) pickleball courts at Fishers Park on the ballfield area used for parking. This is to be a preliminary plan looking at feasibility. The Committee discussed this which prompted questions about the need for another pavilion, and where on the ballfield these facilities would be located. Mr. Meehan said it is his understanding that matters such as this are what CKS will be looking into.

Pool Update – Mr. Sponseller said in general things have been going well at the pool. Attendance appears to be up although he didn't have numbers to confirm that. He said there have been quite a few camps and other offerings that attracted good numbers as well as a lot of day pass swimmers. He reiterated what he said at a previous meeting that pool managers have been great and the same applies to the new food provider.

Farming on Township property – Mr. Kraynik said nothing has changed on this item. He has not been able to connect and sit to talk with the farmer. It seems the Township has contacted the farmer multiple times and he just doesn't want to talk about it, and just doesn't respond. Mr. Kraynik said he would continue trying to reach out to the farmer.

Butch Clemens Park Overflow parking at the North Peen Water Authority lot. The Committee discussed pursuing the idea of parking in the North Penn Water Authority lot adjacent to Butch Clemens field. There are still questions that need to be looked into so that future conversations with NPWA will be productive. This is something that we should continue to pursue as an option but at this point it is not a high priority.

Article for the Township Newsletter – The deadline for an article is on August 25th. The Committee discussed topics for an article and concluded that a lot of research had been done regarding tree species we are looking to plant. Sharing that information with residents would make a very informative article. Mr. Costlow said he would take on the task of preparing an article for the newsletter.

With there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Joseph F. Meehan
Chairperson, Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee

The next OSPAC meeting is on September 18, 2023