

Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
December 12, 2022
Meeting Minutes

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Michon Blake
Dan Vaitis
Todd Fisher
Dave Sponseller
Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to the OSPAC

Absent

Dr. Richard Costlow

Chairman Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan noted there were residents attending tonight's meeting. He introduced Ms. Gallagher and Mr. Cohen as the residents. The Committee then introduced themselves to Ms. Gallagher and Mr. Cohen and they introduced themselves to the committee.

Mr. Meehan welcomed them and noted he was glad they were here to learn about the issues, the background of each issue and learn the basis of the Committee's advice to the Township Board of Supervisors regarding Park and Open Space issues.

Mr. Meehan noted he met with Mr. David Kraynik, the new Township Manager, and Mr. Dennis Carney, the interim Township Manager, on Thursday December 8, 2022, to get updates on items that would be of interest to the OSPAC. The information they provided will be included in the items as they are discussed this evening.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan asked Ms. Gallagher and Mr. Cohen if they had any comments they wanted to make to the committee.

Ms. Gallagher said they are members of the Township's Study Commission and wanted to inform the OSPAC they are welcome to attend the Commission's meetings to be held the first and third Wednesday of each month. Ms. Gallagher also said she wanted to thank everyone here that volunteers on behalf of the Township. She said she understands how much time and effort volunteers like the OSPAC members put in and the commitment involved. She said she also likes to volunteer and realizes that once she does, she has an obligation to that commitment. So, she appreciates all the time the members contribute to this committee.

Mr. Cohen also spoke. He also said he wanted the OSPAC to know the purpose of the Study Commission. He continued, saying the purpose is to explore ways how the Home Rule could change the outcome of the sewer sale, how Home Rule could increase citizen participation through referenda, how Home Rule could add transparency to Towamencin's operations. Mr. Cohen said a website is being setup and this purpose will be included on it.

Mr. Vaitis asked Ms. Gallagher and Mr. Cohen how long they have been Township residents? Ms. Gallagher responded about thirty years and Mr. Cohen said six years. Mr. Vaitis also asked who is paying for the commission's website. They responded the website cost would be included in a budget request for expense costs to be covered by the Township. They also noted that the commission's meetings will be held here in the Township meeting hall.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of November 21, 2022

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes of the November 21, 2022, OSPAC meeting as drafted and distributed. There were none. Ms. Becker made a motion to accept the minutes. Mr. Vaitis seconded the motion. All Committee members voted to approve the minutes. These approved minutes will now be posted on the Township website.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Meehan passed the following information passed on by Mr. Kraynik, about the status of ongoing projects that are of interest to the Committee.

Kriebel Road Trail – Valley View Road to Trumbauer Road (TA Trail Grant)

Mr. Meehan noted that this trail is being constructed with a Transportation Alternative (TA) Grant (in the amount of \$846,000 from PennDOT through the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission). The trail connects the cul-de-sac at the end of Valley View Way with an existing trail along Kriebel Road at Trumbauer Road. This trail is nearing completion with about one third of it already paved. Paving and other minor work remain to be done but Mr. Meehan noted that with the weather quickly turning colder and rain in the forecast, being able to pave the remainder this year might not be feasible.

Mr. Meehan said he recently walked the trail even though it is not completed and noted it will provide a variety of exercise opportunities including some slight grades as well as level walking surfaces as it traverses the woodlands in its route. He said he encountered some people walking on the stone base of the trail even though it is not complete and officially open. Ms. Becker said this trail will be a connection for the neighborhoods along Morris Road and Kriebel Rd to Fischer's Park by way of an off road walking trail.

Kriebel Road Trail II PECO Power lines westward along Kriebel Road toward Fischer's Park.

Bid documents for this trail extension from the end of the current Kriebel Road Trail near the PECO power line crossing, westward to a terminus at Green Lane Road, have been prepared by Gilmore & Associates. It has been authorized by the BOS to bid. It is expected bids will be received in January 2023. Bids will be obtained over the winter with construction expected to begin in spring of next year. The Township is budgeting \$82,500 in the 2023 budget for this project in order to take advantage of an equal amount obtained in a grant from Montgomery County. Ultimately this trail will continue along Kriebel Road past Green Lane Road to Bustard Road, and then to the Fischer's Park entrance on Kriebel Road.

2023 Budget Recommendations

Following is a summary of the status of items the OSPAC proposed for the 2023 budget.:

- **Nash School Soccer Field - \$150,000.**

Mr. Kraynik / Mr. Carney said CKS is working on this field layout and preliminary engineering work. He said a site survey has taken place and after preliminary review of the site, they are looking at a plan for a 160 ft. by 120 ft. flat area for soccer use. The slopes along the perimeter limit the size of the useable area and they said this area is smaller than what was expected to be available for a soccer field. The Township is conferring with TYA about its adequacy for their growing program and at this point are not committed to the Nash location and will also look at other larger sites which might be preferred. Mr. Meehan asked Mr. Fisher and Mr. Vaitis to take the action and reach out to TYA and get its input on whether or not this size soccer field meets the needs of TYA.

In addition for the Nash site, a formal agreement with the NPSD was never executed in the previous discussions years ago about the Township improving the site and using it for TYA activities. An agreement would have to be drawn up and executed. If the site is acceptable to TYA and the Township. This needs to be done as a first step.

In view of this, Mr. Meehan offered to the OSPAC which was in favor of the Nash site, that perhaps this soccer field could be established at a larger site. One site might be an area in Bustard Park close to the PECO powerlines. This is Township owned property and not under the powerlines. He said the size of that area might be large enough for a field and also accommodate the parking for which it is now used. He showed the committee a rough sketch and dimensions of that site. (Sketch is attached) The Committee discussed the size of this site, the limits of the Township owned property, and whether a soccer field there would work there. No conclusions were reached.

- **Drinnon Park Path from Tennis Circle to the mid-park Tot Playground - \$20,000**
The Township (CKS) is looking at options to align the path to avoid the drainage structure and slopes at the Tennis Circle entrance. They are also locating property boundaries as part of looking at the path alignment options. Once an alignment is determined, the Township will construct the path with its forces. Having Public works perform the work reduced the cost requested by the OSPAC from \$65,000 to \$20,000. Mr. Meehan reported that Mr. Carney said work to construct the path is on PW's schedule for 2023.

- **Butch Clemens Field Restrooms and Pavilion - \$28,000**
This item requested engineering work be started to determine the best location for a restroom/pavilion structure at this park and how to connect the needed utilities (sewer, water and electric) from "the street" to the structure. This engineering work has not gotten underway yet.

Mr. Meehan noted that providing restroom facilities at this park is a goal of the OSPAC so that the many youths who use the park for athletic activities do not have to use a porta-potty or run across the parking lots to the nearby commercial properties (WaWa, Chick Fil-A, Freddy's Burgers) to use restroom facilities. He noted that such a new structure will be expensive, citing the recently built restroom only structures at Grist Mill Park and Green Lane Park constructed in 2019 which cost about \$400,000 each.

- **Bocce Courts at Fischer's Park - \$35,500**
In the draft 2023 Township budget the Township is setting \$35,000 for improvements at the bocce courts. At the December 9th meeting with Mr. Kraynik and Mr. Carney provided the plans. Mr. Meehan shared the plan with the committee. He said he intended to present these plans to Mr. Costlow who had asked if the Committee could get a copy so we can comment on the plan. Mr. Meehan said since Mr. Costlow was not able to attend this evening, he would get the plans to him.

The committee looked at the plans and discussed the details CKS is proposing to remedy the surface water flowing onto the court. No significant comments came up.

Mr. Meehan noted that Mr. Carney said the Township will be authorizing advertising for bids to install drainage with piping and three inlets and a wall with a four-foot paver sidewalk between it and the courts. In addition, the Township will be replacing the court surfacing material to provide better drainage. This work will be done by PW. In response to him, Mr. Meehan told him Mr. Costlow as bocce player and advocate, is concerned that the court material is the problem. Mr. Carney said that if the surfacing material needs to be replaced, the Township will replace it. He asked what material the bocce group wants to see as the court material. He asked that this information be sent to the Township. He said once the Township is informed of the court material desired, they will meet with all parties involved, CKS, staff, PW and OSPAC and confirm that

everyone is on the same page before going forward. Mr. Meehan said he will pass this request along to Mr. Costlow.

Mr. Carney said CKS is putting the finishing touches on the bid documents, and they should be ready to go to bid in early January with construction to then follow.

- **Lane Line Reel - \$4000.**

Mr. Carney said the lane lines reel is budgeted and will be provided to the Township pool for 2023. However, he said a glitch has come up regarding the width of a large reel needed to hold five lane lines. A question was raised whether such a large reel will fit through the doorway of the pool storage building. Although a logical question, this has never come up before when talking about the new reels.

Mr. Sponseller immediately checked the dimensions of the lane reel recommended by the swim team and found it to be 5' 9 1/4" X 4' 1 7/8". He will check with the swim team to see what the width of the storage building door opening is

- **Native Tree Trail - \$20,000**

For 2023 \$20,000 is budgeted for tree planting. Five new trees are intended to be planted at Green Lane Park at TYA's request to help provide shade for spectators and players. They are planned to be planted along the first base lines behind the between the grandstands and the batting cage. The Township asked that the tree locations be staked out. Mr. Fisher will contact TYA (Mr. Kylie) to get its input on locations. Mr. Meehan said he will also contact Mr. Kylie since he was the individual from TYA who requested the trees be planted. He will then arrange to meet with a TYA representative and PW (Mr. Hillmantel) to visit the site and put some stakes at the preferred locations. Mr. Carney recommends planting fast growing river birch trees which provide quick shade, and are durable and easy to trim, as starters. The locations will be coordinated with TYA.

In 2023 trees will also be planted along the new TA Trail and along the exiting Kriebel Road trail where over the last year unhealthy trees have been removed. Mr. Costlow has established a connection with PSU Extension to get their help in making recommendations for where to plant and what species to plant. The species of trees and locations for planting will be coordinated with PW and through contacts with Penn State Extension service. Both Mr. Carney and Penn State recommend looking into hybrid chestnut trees for use here.

- **Request for a Little Free Library in Fischer's Park.**

Mr. Meehan said an email was forwarded to him to review a request by a NPHS Student to construct and install a Little Free Library (LFL) in Fischer's Park. The student would be doing this a part of a school project.

The committee rehashed the reasons why in the past it rejected proposals for Little Free Libraries in Township parks. This request is no different and the Committee agreed the request should be denied. As an alternative, it was suggested that something such as an "Insect Hotel" would be more appropriate in the park setting. Mr. asked for the Committee's concurrence that a response be sent to the student denying the LFL request but suggesting an insect hotel as an alternative. The committee concurred saying the response should touch on the reasons the request was being denied. Mr. Meehan said he will respond accordingly.

- **Potential Turf Soccer Field at Grist Mill Park**

Mr. Vaitis reported he has no real news to report on the idea of investors installing a turf field at Grist Mill Park. He said he had conversations with the investors and also Supervisor Marino who has experience in constructing such facilities. His conversations with them brought up questions which need to be investigated and thought through before this idea can be considered viable. He said the investors were saying the site might be too small for the size turf field they had in mind, lighting might not be permitted because of the site's proximity to Allentown and Forty Foot Roads and residences, there were also concerns about collecting and discharging water from the site.

Mr. Vaitis also said contacted Horsham Soccer to get information about their success obtaining a significant grant (\$800) to construct a turf field there. They are forwarding grant application information to him. He also noted the lit turf fields at other Township's facilities where he attended games and said that playing at such facilities made for a great sports experience.

Even with all the questions about a turf field, Mr. Vaitis said the option to pursue it is still on the table. The committee discussed possible other Towamencin Park sites, security at such a field, recent improvements in field lighting that control and reduce light pollution and improvements to lack of sufficient parking at both at Grist Mill and at Butch Clemens Parks. Mr. Vaitis will continue looking into investor's interest in constructing a turf field at Grist Mill Park and report again at the next meeting.

- **Pickleball Courts**

Mr. Meehan said he added this item to the agenda since the OSPAC is being asked "what about pickleball courts"? Everyone wants pickleball courts but not near their houses because of the noise that comes "constant plunking noise" from balls contacting the rackets.

He said he did some preliminary research on pickleball websites about the noise problems to look find out more about the level of noise estimated to be noise coming from pickleball activities. He presented some of his findings to the committee. The source document from the internet is attached to these minutes.

Below is a summary:

- Noise levels in quiet residential neighborhoods without pickleball are estimated to be about 40 dBa
- Pickleball play results in noise levels about 70 dBa
- Distance and barriers at the source are a method of reducing noise levels
- Doubling the distance to homes drops sound levels by 6dba in open areas and more when there are obstructions
- If all homes are 200 ft. or more from courts the expected sound level is 64 dBa.
- At 400 ft. the expected sound level will be 58 dBa, which is quieter than normal conversation

Mr. Meehan said he is proposing some sites the committee might consider that might be suitable for pickleball courts, and asked members to suggest others. He used the following criteria in his selection of the sites he is suggesting.

- The site be on Township owned property
- The site be a distance of about 400 ft. from any residences
- The site is of a size that could accommodate four pickleball courts (60 ft x 144 ft)
- The site would accommodate or be close to parking

He suggested four locations

- Butch Clemens Park in an area directly behind the WaWa.
- Green Lane Park in the area between the restroom building and sewer treatment plant
- In Bustard Park at the far northern eastern corner of the park, adjacent to the powerlines
- In Fischer's Park on a portion of the open ballfield area used for overflow parking

He also suggested the field behind the Township building but the Committee dismissed this one because it is the site of the Township's geothermal heat source field and contains the geothermal underground system. He said he would send the Committee members aerial images of the four sites. He asked that the committee, if possible, physically look at these sites and be prepared to discuss them or any others that they think should be considered, at the next OSPAC meeting.

Park Needs – for advance planning

Mr. Meehan said the Committee needs to have a five- or ten-year plan for capital projects and improvements in the Township Parks. Mr. Meehan said we would table this item for a future meeting so we could discuss another item which came up as a result of the cancellation of the Holiday Lights event planned for December 3rd. He said he would send a copy of the plan we prepared years ago for a starting point.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Meehan noted the Township's Holiday Light Event at Fischer's Park was cancelled because the field used for parking was considered too wet from the rain the night before. This was the second Township 'premier' event cancelled in 2022 due to wet conditions. Even though Towamencin Day was rescheduled from May to October 2022, it required a tremendous amount of additional planning and coaxing vendors to reschedule. The Holiday Lights Event could not be rescheduled.

The Township suggested the OSPAC explore alternate parking arrangements that might be implemented should these wet conditions be encountered for future events. Mr. Meehan asked the Committee to think about alternatives that might be considered and bring those thoughts to future OSPAC meetings.

Dave Sponseller reported that at the Towamencin Swim Team Board's last meeting, the Board said that the 2022 swim season at the pool was the best in recent memory. They attributed this to the outstanding efforts of StandGuard's pool managers Ken Hall and Matt Potts. (Ken is a Township resident and has a vested interest in seeing the swim season be not only successful but also, always improving.)

The message from the Board was that Ken and Matt were ever present, engaged, and "knew how to operate a public pool". The Board said the pool operations were organized; well managed; chemicals in the pool were always at the correct levels; there were no instances of swimmer's ear as in previous years; and they liaised easily with the food vendors to head off conflicts that had occurred in the past years. In short, Ken and Matt did an outstanding job, and the pool ran smoothly despite the problems with the temporary closing of the "H" pool. Knowing this, the OSPAC feels strongly that the Township should let StandGuard know that the Township wants them to return for 2023 and that StandGuard should do everything possible to have Ken and Matt return as pool managers in 2023. Mr. Meehan said he will pass this recommendation along to Mr. Kraynik.

With there being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM.

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

The next OSPAC meeting is on February 13, 2023