

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
January 16, 2023
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Michon Blake
Dan Vaitis
Todd Fisher
Dr. Richard Costlow
Joseph Rumsey
Robert DeHaven

Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to OSPAC Committee

Absent:

Dave Sponseller

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM

All present participated in the pledge of allegiance.

Supervisor Smith led the Committee through its reorganization for 2023. Ms. Smith opened up the floor for nominations of a chairperson for 2023. Ms. Becker nominated Mr. Meehan for Chairperson. There were no other nominations. The motion was seconded by Mr. Vaitis. All Committee members voted in favor of the nomination.

Ms. Smith opened up the floor for nominations for Vice Chairperson. Mr. Meehan nominated Ms. Becker. There were no other nominations. Ms. Blake seconded the motion. All committee members voted in favor of the nomination.

Ms. Smith then turned the meeting over to Chairperson Meehan.

Meeting dates for 2023

Mr. Meehan said he is setting the meeting dates for 2023 as the second Monday each month, the same as previous years, with the exception of January and September where the first Monday is a holiday and, on those months, the Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee (OSPAC) will meet on the third Monday of those months. He said he will follow up and send the actual dates for the meetings to the Committee by email.

New Committee Members

Mr. Meehan said several new members have been appointed to the Committee and he wanted to welcome them and introduce them to the other committee members. Mr. Rumsey and Mr. DeHaven were introduced to the committee and the other Committee members also introduced themselves and welcomed the new members.

There were also residents in attendance and each introduced themselves to those present.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan noted that for his convenience in preparing minutes for the OSPAC meetings, he voice records the meetings.

Mr. Meehan noted that he met with David Kraynik and Dennis Carney on January 11th. They provided him with an update on ongoing project topics being discussed by Committee. He said he will pass on

their update information as the items are discussed this evening.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan opened the floor to Public Comments.

Mr. Kofi Osei said he had applied to become a member of the OSPAC but given that six members of this committee did something to facilitate the sewer sale he is no longer interested. He talked about his seeing mention of a turf field in previous minutes and on tonight's agenda. He said he played soccer and artificial turf surfaces are his least favorite. However, he sees the benefits of turf fields such as no need to recycle fields; they are weather resistant; and with lights would permit more play time. He said he has a problem with funding such fields through an investor with the Township then paying rental fees to the investor. He sees no value added with such an arrangement. He would rather see a bond issue through a referendum and in that way take it to the community for their endorsement. He cautioned to be wary of such privatization arrangements with investors.

Ms. Tina Gallagher said she wanted to thank all who volunteer for this Committee and other Committees. She said what is important to her is to see that the needs of all age groups in the township are addressed. She said she acknowledges that meeting the needs of everyone is a difficult task. She presented percentages of the township population by age from the 2020 census. She said she is here for the 65 plus population which is about 25%. This group has different needs than other age groups and she doesn't feel this group's voices are always being heard as much as perhaps the under 18 group. She said we should look at our "needs" and not our "wants". If you want to do the "best" for the population, you need to know who the best is for. Improvements need to be balanced.

A discussion between Ms. Gallagher and the committee began. Mr. Meehan asked her what she would like to see for the 65 and over group. She responded she likes to walk and stay fit, so the trails are important to her. She said she is not interested in bocce or pickleball, so they are not a priority for her. Mr. Costlow asked her where she felt she was being underserved. She said it is not so much being underserved as concern for priorities for the future. Spending money for athletic fields does not excite her. She prefers trails for walking and biking rather than athletic fields. She said she knows fields are important to families but she will not be setting a foot on them, so she does not support spending money on them.

Committee members noted in response that the Township and OSPAC are not spending the entire budget on under 18 facilities. There are 11 parks that offer a variety of uses. The committee tries to spread the dollars and do it within the fiscal restraints it has. Somebody has to pay for the improvements. The committee said she did not mention raising taxes to fund improvements. Ms. Gallagher said she is willing to pay for things that support her preferences but not things like a turf field. She feels a turf field is not beneficial to the retired population.

Mr. Vaitis asked if she is aware that Towamencin Youth Association pays to use the Township athletic fields. He noted Township residents are paying the Township about \$20,000 annually to use the fields. He stated that she should understand that, and not think that use of the fields is free to the youth programs using them when she says funds should not be spent on them.

Regarding the turf fields Mr. Vaitis said he would like to hear more about funding them through a bond issue. As with many items brought to the committee for consideration, they come as an "aspiration" to be looked into and studied before the committee make a recommendation. A turf field is only in the early stages of being looked into.

Committee member Ms. Blake noted that in 2022 funds were spent for a parking area at Kibler Meadows Park providing a safe access to this passive park which provides walking paths in a natural setting. The Committee tries to balance the needs of the different demographics in its plans each year and improvements at Kibler Meadows, and new trails reflect that. Ms. Gallagher suggested a comprehensive plan to help guide park improvements. Ms. Blake noted that the Township commissioned a Township "Park and Trails Evaluation Report" in 2020 and this is used in selecting improvements. This report is available through the Township website.

Resident Gisela Koch said she is opposed to privatizing the parks to do “wish list” items such as pickleball courts which she feels are just a fad. The Township needs to be fiscally responsible when spending on things like pickleball courts. She asked if the Township surveyed to find out how many Towamencin residents would like to have and use pickleball courts. She asked do any of you play. Several Committee members responded affirmatively.

The Committee got into a conversation with her about pickleball courts beginning with Mr. Costlow who has researched their popularity saying the demand for them is growing at about 20% a year with data showing about 60% who play are between the ages of 18 and 55. When looking at those who play more than three times a week the usage shifts to the older demographic. The Committee is trying to provide a service which statistically meets the enjoyment possibilities of communities like Towamencin which is no different than the general population from which the data has come. Also seeing this trend, surrounding municipalities recognize the desire to have these facilities and have either converted existing tennis courts to pickleball courts or built new pickleball courts. The Committee knows Towamencin residents are using other Township’s courts and there is a demand.

The Committee again noted that items like turf fields are brought to the OSPAC committee as “aspirations” or “possibilities.” The Committee then looks into them, studies them looking at the pros and the cons before making a recommendation to support or dismiss an item. In the case of the turf field, considerations like it being revenue neutral are considered. Mr. Osei pointed out that being revenue neutral does not matter to him. If an improvement needs money, he is not opposed to raising taxes for it. The Committee noted that talk of a turf field was a just a suggestion that the Committee was looking into and should not be talked about as something that is “on the drawing board” since it is only in the initial stages of consideration.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of December 12, 2022

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes of the December 12, 2022, OSPAC meeting as drafted and distributed. There were none. Ms. Becker made a motion to approve the minutes as drafted. Mr. Costlow 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 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 said based on progress on it so far and walks that he has taken along the trail, this will be a very nice trail through a tranquil woodland when it is finished. He noted that he encounters other walkers along the trail also. He relayed that the Township said construction is near completion but indicated final work has been halted because of weather which restricts asphalt paving. Paving will not likely resume until the asphalt plants reopen in March and then take only a couple of days to complete. In addition to the paving other cleanup and minor work also remains to be done. Mr. Costlow noted he also has walked the trail and observed what could be a potential washout problem in the gutters of the steeper portions if not addressed and it would be better to address it before the work is completed. Mr. Meehan said he will report this to the Township and have them look into it.

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

Bid documents for this trail 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 and are almost ready to go to bid. He said the Township expects to receive bids in late February or early march with construction in late spring or early summer.

2023 Budget Recommendations

Mr. Meehan presented the status of items approved by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) in the 2023budget.

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

Using survey information taken at the Nash field site, CKS has determined the size soccer field that would fit the site. The Township has reviewed the size and has found that a soccer field there would be smaller than first thought. Instead of the Nash location, the Township directed CKS to explore the option of establishing the field at the vacant area in Green Lane Park between the Park entrance and the sewer treatment plant. CKS was asked to take an initial high-level look at this location using available topographic mapping as an initial feasibility review. CKS is now reviewing the Green Lane Park site.

- **Drinnon Park Path from Tennis Circle to the mid-park Tot Playground - \$20,000**

Mr. Meehan said the Township has sent this back to the OSPAC for a recommendation of an alignment of a path. CKS has prepared and provided an aerial plan of the site and the Township is asking the committee to propose an alignment of the trail. The plan was shared with the committee. (A copy is attached)

Mr. Meehan said as a start he marked the plan with a yellow line showing a potential path. He said he would like to add this path alignment to the March OSPAC agenda for discussion in more depth, after the committee members have had a chance to visit the site and have a better understanding of the site conditions. He said the constraints are the close property lines along the corridor from Tennis Circle, a drainage structure, and a stormwater basin.

Mr. Meehan said in the meantime, he would meet with Mr. Hillmantel and get PW's input on the trail alignment. He said the Township also needs to meet with the neighbors and inform them of the path proposal and get their input.

Mr. De Haven mentioned he had visited Drinnon Park a few days ago and noticed a debris pile of logs and trash in the park. He asked if it had a purpose and why was it there. Mr. Meehan said he would check this and bring it to the attention of the Township staff.

- **Butch Clemens Field Restrooms and Pavilion - \$28,000**

Mr. Meehan noted this approved budget item is for the engineering only for a restroom/pavilion and its utility connection to a facility at Butch Clemens Park. Authorization to proceed with the engineering has not yet been given. The Township is asking that the OSPAC provide a recommendation on a site in the park for the facility. He said the OSPAC wants to have TYA's input on locating the facility, so we are asking for their preference first. He asked Mr. Fisher and Mr. Vaitis to inform TYA of this request. The Committee will revisit this at its March meeting looking at TYA input and make a recommendation to the BOS to go forward with the engineering.

- **Bocce Courts at Fischer's Park - \$35,500**

Mr. Meehan passed on the information that the Township wants to bid the reconstruction work at the Fischer's Park bocce courts this January. As of early January, the plans are substantially complete and need to be pulled together for bidding. Bids will be sought for the construction of a wall, sidewalk and drainage at the corner of the bocce courts where surrounding lawn surface water flows on to the courts. During that construction exploratory excavation will be done in the courts themselves to determine the specifics of what materials are in the court surfacing. (i.e. total depth, depths of layers, is there a coarse aggregate drainage layer etc.) Once that information is obtained, a meeting will be arranged including all who have interest in the courts to determine what should be done to the court surfacing material.

Mr. Costlow pointed out that this information was already obtained when cores were taken several years ago along with the plans from about ten years ago which showed the details for the original court construction. Mr. Meehan said the Township exploratory work was to confirm what is present. Mr. Costlow then asked if that means no refurbishment of the surface material will take place. Mr. Meehan said the scope of the refurbishment work will depend on the information from the exploratory work and will take place after the meeting which decides what should be done. He said the material surfacing work is not part of the initial bid project but will follow it.

Mr. Costlow asked about shade for the courts. Mr. Meehan responded that shade structures at the ends of the courts had been requested as 2023 budget items but were not approved as budgeted items for this year. No shade structures are included at this time.

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

This issue regarding whether the reels would fit in the storage building is now resolved. Dave Hillmantel confirmed they will fit. This item is now closed.

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

Mr. Meehan noted that the budgeted funds for tree planting in 2023 included winning a PECO grant in the amount of \$10,000. Grant awards will likely not be made before the tree planting season in the spring so the actual amount currently available in the 2023 budget is \$10,000. In order to plant a meaningful number of trees along the TA trail and along the Kriebel Road trail corridor a request needs to go to the BOS for approval. Additional funds are available from the Core 5 Development tree fund but need to be transferred. For that transfer, the Township requested specifics on the number of trees, species and approximate locations. In the past, Mr. Costlow has had contact with the Urban Forester at PSU and the Chestnut Foundation asking for this information. He will ask again so the information can be used in the transfer of funds request.

T.Y.A. has requested trees be planted along the first baseline of the ballfield number 2 at Green Lane Park. Five trees could be planted there with the funds budgeted for 2023 in the spring before the baseball season starts. Mr. Meehan asked Mr. Fischer and Mr. Vaitis to talk to their contacts at T.Y.A. and have them designate where they would prefer to have the trees planted. They said they will make this request from T.Y.A.

Turf Field for Soccer

Mr. Vaitis said he has had no further conversations regarding a turf field. There is nothing to update.

Pickleball Courts

Mr. Meehan said there was brief discussion regarding installation of pickleball courts in the Township at the December OSPAC meeting. He would like the Committee to continue the discussions and consider potential locations for them. He brought aerial views of potential locations he thought would be good sites which he projected onto the meeting room screen. (The projections are also attached to these minutes). He proposed that the Committee become familiar with the locations from these aerial views and then the Committee members individually visit each site on their own and be prepared to discuss them in detail at the March 2023 OSPAC meeting. Each of the aerial photos show a red circle indicating a radius of about 400 feet from an approximate center of the pickleball courts. This distance is shown to indicate what might be impacted by noise at this distance.

Referencing the aerial photos being displayed, the potential locations presented were:

- Butch Clemens Park – In an open area of the park directly behind the Wawa and a detention basin
- Green Lane Park – Between the restroom building and the property line of the sewer treatment plant
- Bustard Park – Near the back northeast corner of the park, adjacent to the powerlines
- Fischer's Park – Near the right field foul pole of the baseball field which is used for overflow parking
- Fischer's Park – North of Kriebel Road near the Arneth house

There was a brief discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of each. Mr. Meehan said he wanted the Committee members to evaluate the possibility for each location by using a "scoring" sheet (also attached) and bring those results to the March meeting so we can advance toward a recommendation of one site. He said he will send an email reminder of this evaluation prior to the March meeting.

Mr. Meehan said he will also ask T.Y.A. for their input regarding each location because they also use these parks for their activities.

Alternatives to Parking on the overflow parking area for major Township events

Following up to last month's OSPAC discussion, Mr. Meehan asked the Committees thoughts on a parking solution for major events when the overflow parking field is soggy. Mr. Costlow offered that shuttle busses from nearby parking areas might be the best alternative. He said there is ample parking near to Fischer's Park at the Firehouse and at Bustard Road Park. To make this work an announcement of "No Parking at Fischer's Park" needs to be made ahead of the event. Kriebel Road should also be closed from Bustard Road to Springer Road. Arrangements for this plan need to be set up ahead of the event and actively managed on the day of the event. Ms. Smith said for the BOS to consider this alternative, a framework of how it would unfold needs to be prepared and presented to them. There will be extra costs for shuttles and the Committee should check to get an idea of what they might be. It was suggested that North Penn School District might have a transportation coordinator who might offer some advice and also be able to provide shuttle buses. As a start in exploring this idea, Ms. Becker volunteered to make some phone calls to the school district administration and report back to the Committee.

Articles for the Spring 2023 Township Newsletter must be submitted to the Township on or before February 10th

The Committee discussed an article for the Township spring newsletter. In the past the articles have focused on OSPAC accomplishments and upcoming projects, but this same news is often also included in other articles prepared by the Township. He suggested the committee write an article about something different this time. After some discussion Ms. Smith said she would prepare an article focusing on our young residents' contributions to improvements in Fischer's Park, notably the kiosk and the insect hotel projects. The Committee agreed this is a great idea and Ms. Smith agreed to prepare the article.

Insect Hotel to be installed in Fischer's Park

Mr. Meehan shared that following a request made to the Committee in early December and approved by the BOS at their December 28th meeting, Ms. Grace McGeehan will be constructing and installing an "insect hotel" in Fischer's Park. This is a project for her engineering studies at NPHS. He reported that installation has been discussed and given the blessing of the Public Works Director who helped select an appropriate site and will assist with the installation. It will be installed adjacent to the trail located between the rain garden and the Stable Pavilion. This location will make it accessible for observation and the education of walkers along this trail.

Arneith House

Mr. Meehan said the Arneith house in Fischer Park has been vacant for a few years and it is in a state of disrepair. At the present time the prevalent thinking is to not try to repair it but rather tear it down. To the Committee's knowledge it has no particular historical significance and there is little or no interest in preserving it. He asked if the Committee had any thoughts about alternatives. Mr. Costlow asked if the Committee could see the inside. Mr. Meehan said he would check with the Township.

Memorials in Fischer's Park

Over the Christmas holidays some families have added "decorations" to their memorial trees and benches in Fischer's Park. In some instances, the decorations have been there for some time and are not necessarily holiday themed. He showed the committee some photo examples of the memorials.

He is asking the Committee if it thinks it should be monitoring the "decorations" added to memorial trees and benches and have a policy regarding them. Committee members said they feel they should be monitored and maybe a policy establish but we should explore and respect cultural intentions before deciding. The Committee understands the beautiful intentions but also wants to consider the overall impact these memorials have on the park environment. Mr. Meehan asked that Committee

members individually visit Fischer's Park, focusing on the memorials and bring their thoughts to our next meeting.

Trail and Path connectivity

Mr. William Jackson a cycling advocate was present at the meeting to offer some comments about trails, paths and the ongoing Connectivity Study being undertaken by the Township. He said his intent is to represent a local group of like-minded individuals advocating for improvements that allow for safer cycling throughout the community. They are encouraging travel other than automobile to stores, schools and different neighborhoods and this is contingent on connectivity. He cited several examples of conditions along Valley Forge Road that are not bicycle friendly and could be considered hazardous.

He said he is excited by the Townships Connectivity Study and his group fully endorses it and will be attending the future public meetings. He said the questionnaire which is part of the study is excellent and demonstrates the consultant's innovative approach by using Strava data in its study. He said his group is very interested in what is being studied and fully supports the Township's efforts.

Mr. Meehan thanked Mr. Jackson for attending the meeting and for advocating on behalf of connectivity and reminded him to pass on the message to the members of his group to complete the survey on connectivity which is on the Township website.

With there being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM.

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

**The next OSPAC meeting is on February 13, 2023
Mr. Kraynik, the new Township Manager is planning to attend.**