

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee
Meeting of February 8, 2021
Meeting Minutes**

Present:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Michon Blake
Todd Fisher

David Sponseller
Jim Roberts
Todd Fisher
Rich Costlow

Laura Smith, Towamencin Supervisor, BOS Liaison to OSPAC
Rich Marino, Towamencin Supervisor

Absent:

Peter Murphy

Chairman Meehan Called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM and led the assemblage in Pledge of Allegiance.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan thanked supervisor Marino for taking the time to attend this meeting so the Committee could discuss the concerns he raised at the January 27th BOS meeting regarding the Simone-Collins (S-C) Park and Trails Evaluation Report which was on the BOS agenda for adoption that evening.

Mr. Meehan noted a new member was appointed to the Committee by the Supervisors at their January 27th meeting. The new member is Richard Costlow who is present at the OSPAC meeting. Mr. Meehan introduced him to the Committee and asked each Committee member to introduce themselves by name to Mr. Costlow.

Mr. Meehan noted that he spoke with Mr. Rob Ford, the Township Manger, on Friday February 5, 2021. Mr. Ford updated him about recent developments regarding Park projects and other items of interest to the Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee (OSPAC). When items noted below are shown as Mr. Ford's input, they are items being passed to the committee by Mr. Meehan from this meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There being no members of the public in attendance, there were no public comments.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of January 11, 2021

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes to the January 11, 2020 as drafted and distributed. There were none. Mr. Costlow made a motion to approve the minutes as written, Mr. Roberts seconded the motion. All committee members voted to approve the minutes. These approved minutes will now be posted on the Township website.

TOWNSHIP PARKS PROJECTS UPDATES

- a. **Grant Updates.** Mr. Meehan provided the Committee with the following updates regarding Grants for Parks and Trails. The updates were provided to him at Fridays meeting with Mr. Ford.
- ***Kriebel Road Trail II (Montco 40 Grant) - PECO Powerlines to Fischer Park*** – Mr. Ford will ask Gilmore and Associates for a proposal for the preparation of design and bid documents based on the conceptual design submitted in the grant application for this trail. He expects this to be available for OSPAC review at its next meeting.
 - ***Kriebel Road Trail I (TA Grant) Valley View Park to Trumbauer Road*** – Mr. Ford said he was told by Gilmore that the schedule has slipped. The bid documents are not finalized yet. This will push back the bid date. Mr. Meehan expressed concern that this schedule slippage will push the construction into 2022,

possibly causing extra cost created brought on by a winter shutdown. He also noted Mr. Ford has taken the step of approving the Inspector in Charge representing the Township on this trail project. Mr. Ford said he struggled getting this entered into ECMS. Bi-weekly update meetings will continue to be held involving Gilmore, DVRPC and the Township to keep everyone abreast of progress. Mr. Costlow asked if the Committee has seen the bid documents. Mr. Meehan said not the latest documents, but he has a copy of the alignment documents. Mr. Meehan said he would forward a copy to Mr. Costlow.

- **Kriebel Road Trail II (DCED Grant) - PECO Powerlines to Fischer Park** – Mr. Ford contacted PA DCED and asked when the announcements of awards could be expected. They said they are doing the final review of applications and it tentatively looks like March for award announcements. There is no change on this grant.
- **Veteran's Park DCNR Master Plan Grant** – At their September 23, 2020 meeting the BOS put the Simone-Collins preparation of the Park Master Plan on hold until the Township hears whether or not the Township will be awarded other grants for which it has applied. Announcements are expected in the spring timeframe. No change on this since the last meeting.
- **Veteran's Park DCED Master Plan Grant** – DCED recently said it makes award announcements each year in the spring. This year's announcements will follow this pattern.
- **Veteran's Park PECO Green Region Grant - \$10,000** – Grant application was submitted seeking \$10,000 toward the development of a Veteran's Park Master Plan. Mr. Ford contacted representatives of the group helping PECO make the awards and they said they only recently completed scoring and ranking the applications and they are on track for making the awards in early spring.

Mr. Meehan noted each of these Grant's status will be changing with the new grant announcements slated for the next couple of months, hopefully in favor of Towamencin.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Comments from the BOS regarding the S-C Parks and Trails Evaluation Report (PTER) - Mr. Ford passed on some concerns made at the January 21st BOS meeting. The concerns were posed by Supervisor Marino. Before going into detailed commentary on each of Mr. Marino's concerns, Mr. Meehan gave Mr. Marino a heads-up on what he would like to see as the outcome of the Committee's discussion with him at tonight's meeting. He said he would like to see the plan approved as written. Changes would mean there would be additional costs for S-C to modify the report and changes would take time. Over the next month the Committee is hoping to reference the approved PTER in new grant applications which have deadlines in April and May of 2021. He also noted that this PTER was intended as a low-cost alternative to a much more detailed and costly new Township Parks Masterplan and the PTER is intended to be flexible and be just a starting point for improvements to the parks.

Mr. Marino's concerns as relayed by Mr. Ford were:

1. *Heebner Park is not appropriate for pickleball. There are no restroom facilities there. Maybe basketball at Heebner is a better choice.*

Mr. Meehan's presented the reasoning leading to why S-C and the Committee determined Heebner was a good location to start with pickleball. Heebner was chosen as a low-cost, easily implemented solution to resident's growing desire for pickleball. The infrastructure was already there. It could be converted to pickleball by simply painting addition lines on the tennis court and adjusting the net height. He provided some background details saying conversion costs of the existing tennis court at Heebner are low compared to starting from the ground up. It is estimated Heebner would be converted for about \$15,000 (includes court resurfacing) versus about \$75,000 for a new court. Additionally, Heebner could continue to be used as both tennis court and 1 pickleball court or even 2 pickleball courts by using "temporary" nets with new lines.

It has on street parking along the frontage of the Park (about 300 feet) for about a dozen cars. With regard to basketball here, Mr. Meehan said he felt the residents adjacent to the park are likely to be more accepting of "seniors" playing pickleball at this site than having high energy teenagers and young men playing basketball there.

In summary he said, using Heebner for pickleball was meant as a stop-gap location until courts at locations with restrooms are built elsewhere. The OSPAC long-term solution was to construct courts at Grist Mill Park as a “companion” to basketball courts. Although not shown in the park evaluation report, another long-term location was a similar grouping of basketball and pickleball at Firehouse Park. (That puts one location in the northern area of the township and one in the southern area).

Mr. Marino mentioned he would like to have the committee consider pickleball at Fischer’s Park in the area of the unused ballfield. Mr. Meehan agreed that this site can be considered but pickleball at Grist Mill Park aligns with the OSPAC objective to improve Grist Mill Park making it a Park with facilities available to all Township residents as opposed to its present status as athletic fields used only for organized youth sports. Mr. Meehan said the Committee is not ignoring pickleball and to the contrary is looking to make a court or courts available quickly and at a low cost and with that in mind, Heebner was a good choice.

2. *Another comment from the BOS meeting of the January 27th BOS meeting concerned the basketball courts shown in the plan.*

Mr. Meehan noted the PTER included 2 courts at Firehouse Park, 2 Courts at Bustard Road Park and 1 or 2 at Grist Mill Park. Mr. Marino acknowledged that courts were shown in the PTER at Firehouse Park, but he wanted the Committee to consider how basketball courts there would impact the closest neighbor who was very opposed to them. Mr. Meehan said the court location within the park was flexible and courts could be placed closer to the Turnpike sound wall and further from the nearest houses. Mr. Meehan agreed that as Mr. Marino suggested at the Jan.27th meeting, a court could also be added to the Butch Clemens complex at some time in the future. The PTER is flexible and changes can be made as time goes on and as thinking changes. It was not intended to mean that the improvements shown are the only possibilities.

Mr. Marino said he had made his comments at the BOS meeting so that his concerns were discussed and not “locked in” if the plan was approved as presented. After these conversations with the OSPAC, he understands the plan is flexible and does not have any problem with the plan. He noted that the Plan was well done, and he appreciated the work of all who contributed to it.

Mr. Meehan said he would like the Mr. Marino and the BOS to leave the plan as is, with Heebner Park being a short-term solution for pickleball and the basketball courts as were shown. He asked that the BOS accept the Park Evaluation Plan as presented.

b. New Grant Opportunities - These discussions regarding pickleball and basketball courts led into Mr. Meehan presenting information regarding new grant opportunities which could help fund addition of these facilities to Township Parks. He said applications are being accepted for two new grant opportunities in the next several months. One comes from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and the other from the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) each with a maximum grant of \$250,000. The DCNR Grant has an application deadline of April 15, 2021 and requires a 50% match and the Township pays for the associated engineering. The DCED Grant has an application deadline of May 31, 2021 and requires a match of 15% of the total project costs.

At last month’s OSPAC Meeting, when grants were discussed, the Committee agreed to suggest the Township apply for a grant/grants to construct a new pavilion at Grist Mill Park. For the last several years, an objective of the Committee is to improve the facilities at Grist Mill so this Park can provide recreational activities for all residents, beyond just ball fields used mainly by the Township youth. A pavilion would also make this park an alternative to Fisher’s Park for resident rentals. With the restroom facility built in 2019 and the addition of a pavilion, it would also be another step toward providing a multi-purpose park in the northern part of the Township.

Mr. Meehan said he passed this suggestion along to Mr. Ford who then passed it to Peter Simone of S-C. Mr. Simone responded by recommending the Township apply for both saying “DCNR likes projects that result in meaningful recreational improvements”.

With that in mind, pursuing these grants comes to the OSPAC. Mr. Meehan presented thoughts applying for the Grants for improvements to Grist Mill Park.

- OSPAC has the goal of adding to the Grist Mill Park facilities to provide recreational activities beyond just ball fields. Multi-use facilities there:
 - Would provide recreation facilities in the northern part of the township
 - It already has the critical and costly restroom facilities
 - Grist Mill Park is a highly visible location. Having active recreation there would be a great visual showcase of the Township's recreation opportunities. (Mr. Sponseller noted that he often thought of how great it would be to construct a significant park identification sign at its corner at the intersection of Allentown Road and Forty Foot Road.)
 - Would fulfill the recreational facility requests of seniors and teens
- For about \$500,000 at Grist mill a pavilion, a playground, basketball court, pickleball courts and a perimeter trail could be added. (Ms. Blake questioned whether all these items could be completed for \$500K? Mr. Meehan said the costs for some items would have to be pared down. The trail for instance would need be reduced in length and rather than be a paved asphalt trail, a stone dust trail could be constructed by Township Public Works which would contribute an "in kind" match to the Township's match requirement.)
- A more detailed plan needs to be developed for the grant application. The detailed plan would need to consider minimizing the impact to TYA soccer field space. Mr. Meehan acknowledged that TYA's soccer program space needed to be maintained and suggested the Township allow more TYA use of the Butch Clemens multi-purpose field to offset loss of space at Grist Mill. Others suggested more use of Nash school and Mr. Fisher mentioned the northern part of Fischer's Park as an option. Mr. Meehan also pointed out that the PTER indicated addition soccer fields on the Township property between Bustard Road Park and the PECO powerlines.

Mr. Costlow asked if the committee would get to see and comment on the proposed improvements in the plan S-C develops for the applications. He noted additional bocce courts could also be placed in the Grist Mill Plan. Mr. Meehan said S-C could be invited to present its plan to the committee for comment.

Mr. Meehan presented some Township matching monies commitment scenarios:

- If successful with the 2021 DCNR Grant, it would be awarded Jan/Feb 2022. From signing of an agreement, you have three years to spend the money...until Jan 2025. (Point being, the Township does not have to provide the match immediately, only commit to the match.)
- If you got both DCNR and DCED, the Township's match costs would be almost zero.
- If you got neither, the Townships costs would be the application preparation costs: 2 applications x about \$8000 each.
- If initially you got one and not the other, you have the opportunity to apply again in 2022.

Because the application deadlines are fast approaching, Mr. Meehan noted what needs to take place soon.

- A proposal from S-C to prepare a plan and estimate
- A resolution from the BOS to go forward with the preparation of a more detailed plan and estimate by S-C
- Buy-in from TYA since it reduces the field size
- Provide TYA alternative fields

These action items will be passed on to Mr. Ford.

- c. **Revisit setting up a Free Little Library in Fischer's Park** – After last month's OSPAC recommendation to not allow a Little Free Library (LFL) to be set up in Fischer's Park, Supervisor Smith who was unable to attend that meeting asked that the Committee revisit this and she present her thoughts, because she thinks it would be a good idea. Supervisor Smith said LFLs are being set up throughout the United States. and she sees them as a good thing. She said she has researched them and has a friend who has successfully set one up at her home in Hatfield for kids books and feels it would be a good thing to have in the park.

Mr. Meehan said the Committee discussed this at our last meeting. He said the Committee is not against the libraries but felt it was not appropriate for a Township park where there is no “librarian” and inappropriate materials might be left there. The Committee was concerned about the liability/responsibility and felt the Township might be caught in the middle of a controversy about free speech versus what might be considered appropriate or not. Examples discussed were pornographic materials and flat earth type materials. There were concerns about who would be the “librarian” responsible for the physical upkeep of the LFL and monitoring its content. Ultimately the Committee felt the park should be a “park” and not a library.

Ms. Smith said she knows of a LFL located in a park and rather than speculating on what bad things might happen, she will check to see what the actual experiences have been with that park’s LFL and come back to the committee with her findings. This will be discussed again at next month’s meeting.

d. Fischer’s Park Pedestrian Bridge. Based on his meeting with Mr. Ford, Mr. Meehan updated the Committee regarding the washout of the northern approach to the pedestrian bridge. He said CKS, the Township Engineer had developed a remedy which was presented to the Public Works committee. The committee made some suggestions that were then incorporated into the plan. Barwis Contractors was asked for a cost to implement the remedy by change order. Barwis provided a change order cost. The BOS will review the change order at its February 10th meeting and if approved the work will be initiated.

e. Pedestrian crossing where pedestrian bridge trail crosses Kriebel Road. Last month’s Committee thinking, spurred by Ms. Becker’s suggestion that the crossing of Kriebel Road be best addressed by eliminating the s-curve was presented to Mr. Ford. He said Mr. Hillmantel of PW was exploring the same idea. A field meeting is scheduled on Wednesday Feb 10 with the Township Engineer, The Township Traffic Engineer, the police, and Public Works to explore the feasibility of realigning Kriebel Road to eliminate the s-curve and improve crossing sight distance.

Mr. Costlow noted that the S-C PTER recommended closing Kriebel Rd altogether which would also eliminate the concerns or just reducing the speed limit. Ms. Smith said, although the closure is a recommendation in the report, the BOS does not agree with this. Mr. Meehan said exploring the realignment as well as reducing the speed limit are other options which might be able to be implemented quickly and for a relatively low cost.

NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Swimming pool repairs.** Mr. Meehan informed the Committee that new tiles have been purchased for the remaining perimeter of the Township Swimming pool. The tiles are expected to be installed in March and be completed before the pool opens for 2021 on Memorial Day. Standguard will be managing the pool again in 2021.
- b. **Towamencin Day 2021.** Mr. Meehan informed the Committee that because of Covid uncertainties, Towamencin Day will not be held in the spring. At their next meeting, the BOS will decide whether to hold it in the fall or cancel it altogether for 2021. Ms. Smith said the supervisors do not want to cancel this event and want to make it happen in the fall if possible.
- c. **Permeable Paving** – Mr. Costlow asked if the Township has considered permeable surfacing in its trails and parking areas. He said he has researched porous environmentally friendly pavement materials that are a good substitute for the conventional asphalt or other hard non-porous surfacing. He would like to see the materials incorporated into park plans. He said he would share the literature he has on these porous materials with the committee.
- d. **Thoughts from Supervisor Marino for Committee consideration.** Mr. Marino said he has some items that have been in his mind that he would like the OSPAC consider. They are:

- Establishing a temporary ice rink at a safe location that would allow residents to experience the fun of ice skating during the cold months. The rink should be of a raised curb type that could be put up, flooded, and then removed each year. Rather than having the police chase young people off the ice that forms in Towamencin Creek, a rink alternative would be a great addition for winter recreation.
- Establishing a “Friends of Fischer’s Park” group to help care for and improve the Park. He said he has seen such a group in action while working at Swarthmore College and they provide a great service in keeping the areas free of litter and trash as well as performing other minor maintenance tasks. He felt township residents are proud of Fischer’s park and having such a group would be a great way for them to participate in making it better. As an offshoot of this, it was suggested that maybe an “adopt a trail” program could be started there as well.
- Improving the exit at the Turnpike Exit at Sumneytown Pike to make it more appealing. Mr. Marino said the turnpike exit is a doorway to the Township and it does not look nice at all. He said the Turnpike has no interest in making any improvements there. He suggested the OSPAC look at creating a simple landscape plan for planting trees, bushes, and plants to dress up this area which see thousands of motorists pass by it every day. It was noted by the Committee that the Township is owed trees by developers and they could be planted here.

The Committee like these ideas. The Committee will discuss them further at future meetings.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Mr. Meehan passed on information on several items that would be of interest to the Committee.

- a. Rob Ford the Township manager has announced he will be retiring in the near future. The BOS have engaged a consulting firm to help them search for his replacement.
- b. “The Store” a Towamencin landmark located in the shopping center at Forty Foot Road and Allentown Road is closing after sixty-nine years.

NEXT MEETING

The next OSPAC meeting is on March 8, 2021

With there being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM

Respectfully submitted,

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