

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

Present:

Joseph Meehan	Jim Roberts
Nancy Becker	Todd Fisher
Michon Blake	Dr. Costlow
David Sponseller	Peter Murphy
Laura Smith, Towamencin Supervisor, BOS Liaison to OSPAC	
Dave Hillmantel, Towamencin Township, Director of Public Works	

Absent:

None

Also attending were: Peter Simone, of Simone-Collins Landscape Architecture
Representatives from the Towamencin Youth Association (TYA), Jeff Hill, Dan Vaitis, Jeff Baer, Doug Kile
Chairman Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM and led the assemblage in Pledge of Allegiance.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan thanked Peter Simone, Dave Hillmantel, and the representatives from TYA for making time to attend this meeting. He said Peter will be providing Simone-Collins' (S-C) thoughts on seeking grants from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Department of Community and Economic Development each in the amount of \$250,000 for improvements to Grist Mill Park.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of February 8, 2021

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes to the February 8, 2020 meeting as drafted and distributed. There were none. Mr. Meehan noted that the minutes being approved contained some punctuation corrections not noted on the distributed minutes. Mr. Murphy made a motion to approve the minutes as written/corrected, Dr. Costlow seconded the motion. All committee members voted to approve the minutes. These approved minutes will now be posted on the Township website.

DCNR AND DCED GRANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRIST MILL PARK \$250,000 EACH

Mr. Meehan began the discussion on these grant opportunities by providing some background information emphasizing the OSPAC's desire to make Grist Mill Park one that offered opportunities to all age Township residents where it now focuses on sports fields for the organized youth play. He said in the OSPAC meeting in January, when the committee became aware of the grants, the committee started with a recommendation that the Township apply for grants to construct a pavilion at Grist Mill. After getting feedback from Mr. Simone that based on his past experience, DCNR likes to fund projects that result in meaningful recreational improvements and that just seeking a pavilion grant was way too low. This led to covering not only a pavilion, but other active facilities which would provide Grist Mill with recreation facilities useable by all age groups. At this point Mr. Meehan asked Mr. Simone to provide his thoughts on the applying for grants for Grist Mill park.

Mr. Simone accompanied his comments with a slide presentation. (A copy is attached to these minutes)

Mr. Simone began by providing an overview of the park and the options for improvements included in the S-C park evaluation report. He noted that option “one” eliminates a portion of the open ballfield area presently used by TYA.

Dr. Costlow said option “one” is costly and will be over the \$500,000 target. Mr. Simone said other factors play into what we want to apply for in the grant. He said one is to help ensure that money spent ends up being used on facilities by keeping engineering costs down. A driver of high engineering costs is permits. He said if the area of disturbance with the improvements exceeds one acre, an earth disturbance permit would be required, and the engineering involved with that complex permit usually costs about \$25,000. A target for developing a plan of improvements is to keep the disturbance under one acre. To accomplish this, much of the trail shown on option 1, would need to be eliminated and only portions necessary to provide ADA accessibility be included. The trails could be added later possibly by Township Public Works forces. He said considering this, the applications for the grants will be a variation of the option 1 shown in the Park Evaluation Report.

For a grant application to be successful it needs to hit all the marks outlined by DCNR including good handicap access, being “green”, being sustainable, being a practical, and being a useable facility for diverse age groups. Mr. Simone said S-C will develop a site plan meeting these criteria for the grant application. As an example, he talked about a plan roughed out by Mr. Meehan and given to him which constructs 2 basketball courts, 4 pickleball courts, a pavilion, and a playground on the site. Mr. Meehan’s cost for this is about \$500,000 including \$50,000 for engineering. He said he is not sure this will all fit in a 1 acre. He said for the applications S-C will refine the previous options and come up with a plan that meets the criteria.

Mr. Simone gave a short summary of the agencies that evaluate and award the grants. He said DCNR grants are very apolitical and award on merit. It is a good program. DCED is also a good program but is very political but not in a bad way. The DCED grant can be used as the match for the DCNR grant and vice versa. If the Township got both grants, the Township would not need to put in any money. He mentioned the applications should include letters of support from civic organizations or the like. He said contributions, even small amounts, demonstrate a commitment of the community to the improvements. Such contributions would not be needed immediately but more likely in early 2022. Construction would likely not happen until 2023.

Mr. Simone said because of the one-acre disturbance limitation, the trail shown on the Parks review plan cannot be included in this plan. Perhaps it could be constructed by Public Works as future project. He said however that ADA compliant handicapped access to all the new facilities needs to be included, along with handicapped parking spaces.

Dr. Costlow mentioned that there are products on the market that are ADA compliant that might make construction of access paths quick and less costly. He said he will provide more information on these products to the committee along with some cost estimates.

Mr. Meehan said that he wanted to get the Committee’s order of priority for the items included in the application so that if total costs are exceeded or the footprint of all the facilities exceeds one acre, the items with the lowest priority could be the first to be postponed to a future project. The Committee’s priorities were #1 a pavilion, #2 a playground, #3 Basketball courts, #4 pickleball courts, #5 bocce court/s, # 6 a trail and #7 a volleyball court. There was a discussion on the popularity of volleyball courts and the Committee agreed it should be the lowest priority. What fits in that space? PS. Will talk to CKs in case there is a need to go over an acre.

Mr. Meehan said one of the main concerns with any plan at Grist Mill was the elimination of an area TYA uses for its soccer program. He said the planned facilities would be located at the eastern end of the field paralleling Allentown Road and based on his estimates be about by 255 feet wide by 160 feet, just under an acre. This leaves an area at the west end of the field with dimensions of about 255 feet wide and 330 feet long for TYA’s use for soccer. Mr. Meehan asked Mr. Simone to take a look at these dimensions and see what could be made to fit,

Mr. Meehan asked the TYA representatives for their thoughts on the plan.

Mr. Hill said he is concerned with the amount of available parking. He said TYA activities would be taking place evenings and weekends at the same time as people were using the new facilities creating a shortage of parking. Mr. Simone said for this reason a flashing signal crosswalk across Allentown Road was included so that parking at the Walton Farm School could also be used. He recommended that independent of the grants being applied for, a flashing signal crosswalk should be installed at this location anyway.

Mr. Hill acknowledged that the existing parking area is not being used efficiently because the gravel lot has no lines and people leave too much room between vehicles. Mr. Simone suggested parking bumpers would help correct that and once the parking was “formalized” about 80 cars could park there. Dr. Costlow suggested the lack of parking is sometimes cause by the “transition” between games when you have both the teams leaving an event and teams coming to an event in the parking area at the same time. Mr. Vaitis said TYA could help the “transition” by managing the scheduling of events.

Mr. Vaitis said TYA wants to continue to be able to “rotate” their field’s usage, so the fields do not end up with long term damage. He said the soccer program already rents fields from Christopher Dock School, NPSD as well as fields in Hatfield Township. He added that having the use of Butch Clemens Park multi-use field has now become a necessity so they can “rotate” and rest fields.

TYA representatives said the proposed plan has the least impact to TYA’s use of the fields at Grist Mill. The area being taken is a practice and scrimmage field. This is the best place to put the new facilities.

Mr. Vaitis said he is a long time Township resident, and he feels a park like what is being proposed has long been needed in the Township. He said the kids of the community love basketball and courts have been lacking. Mr. Baer said in the past, the Township wanted TYA to concentrate its soccer program at Grist Mill Park and with the loss of a portion of the fields, TYA would need to adjust this thinking but this accommodation can be made. He also liked the plan. When asked about the percentage of soccer program participants who reside in Towamencin he said it is about seventy five percent across all sports.

Mr. Meehan said that based on what he was hearing from TYA, he understands they are not opposed to the proposed plan. The TYA representative said they are not opposed to the plan and gave it a thumbs-up.

With that, Mr. Meehan asked for a committee recommendation to go forward and have S-C advance to the next step of refining the plan and preparing the grant applications. Ms. Becker made a motion on this recommendation, seconded by Mr. Murphy. All committee members were in favor, none opposed. The motion was passed.

Mr. Meehan told Mr. Simone he would pass this recommendation to Mr. Ford for approval by the BOS at its next meeting so that S-C can get started on the application process.

ITEMS TO DISCUSS WITH PUBLIC WORKS

- **Bocce Courts**

Mr. Meehan noted the need for discussions with Mr. Hillmantel regarding the bocce courts at Fischer’s Park.

Dr. Costlow said there is a need to have some small tools to prepare the courts prior to playing on them. He said it is difficult to play without a good surface. On behalf of the bocce group, he is asking the Township to contribute the tools, the cost of which would be less than \$500.

Mr. Hillmantel said the Board of Supervisor’s needs to approve that and that a storage location needs to be established for the tools, so they are secure and do not create any hazard in the park as well as preventing them from being stolen. He said there are plans to replace the storage pavilion and he could add a door to the outside and create a separate area inside that could be used for storage. It would be isolated from the other areas of the storage building. This also would need approval from the BOS.

Mr. Meehan said the plan for a replacement structure is years away and we would like to have something that could be used starting this spring. Mr. Hillmantel said he could likely carve out a spot in the existing building' separate it with walls from the Township's storage area and provide a door from the outside. He estimated the cost to do this would be less than \$500. He said he wanted to check further to confirm that there was interior space for this. Ms. Smith said that because of the low amount involved, the money for this could likely be found in the budget. With this, Mr. Meehan said he will ask Mr. Ford to put this on the BOS meeting agenda for their consideration and approval.

- **Creekside Pavilion in Fischer's Park**

Mr. Meehan noted that the S_C Park Evaluation report shows the Creekside pavilion in Fischer's Park being demolished. He said with the pavilion being so close to the new bridge, it might be better to dress it up and have it used by park visitors entering the park by crossing the bridge. The pavilion is in relatively good shape and just needs to be spruced up with some paint. Mr. Hillmantel said he thought this was a great idea. He noted that he has only a limited crew to maintain all the work needed in the Township, so he cannot promise when any such work would be able to get done.

This led to a discussion of Mr. Marino's suggestion from the last OSOAC meeting that we establish a "Friends of Fischer's Park" group of volunteers who could help maintain the park. Mr. Hillmantel commented that such help would be great, and the Creekside Pavilion was an example of how this help could be used. He said he is in favor of this idea as long as it is led by someone who is qualified and is done safely. He also said it enhances the image of the park to its users when they see volunteers working to keep it looking nice. It creates a sense of community pride. Ms. Smith said this would need to go to the BOS for approval. He rejected the idea of using community service people. They had been an administrative burden in the past. Scouts are also an option for helping.

Mr. Meehan asked the committee if a committee member would like to lead this effort of establishing a volunteer group and coordinating its efforts with Mr. Hillmantel.

Dr. Costlow said he would volunteer for this. He even suggested this idea go beyond just Fischer's Park and be expanded to all the Township's Parks. He said he had been thinking about this and he suggested naming such groups Towamencin TAPIN an acronym for **Towamencin Adopt a Park Initiative**. Ms. Blake asked if there is a list of items that need to be done. Mr. Hillmantel said if we created a group, he would have no problem making a long list. Mr. Meehan said he will pass the Committee's thinking along to Mr. Ford and ask that establishment of such a volunteer group for Fischer's Park be placed on the next BOS meeting agenda for consideration and approval.

- **Install electrical service from the Arneth Pavilion to the area near the new bridge.**

Mr. Meehan asked Mr. Hillmantel about plans to install electric service from the Arneth Entertainment center to the new bridge. Mr. Hillmantel said he has this on his schedule to be completed before Christmas this year as long as no major unexpected diversions occur before then.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Revisit Setting up "Free" Little Library in Fischer's Park**

Ms. Smith proposed an alternative to setting up a Little Free Library in Fischer's Park. She said if the committee approves, the Bookmobile has agreed to come to Fischer's Park on Saturday mornings. The Committee liked this proposal and said this time is more convenient for kids.

- **Fischer Park Bridge Trail Repair**

Mr. Meehan noted that the BOS approved a change order that has been issued to Barwis Construction for repair of the washed-out section of the approach trail on the north side of the Fisher Park pedestrian bridge. The work should get underway shortly.

- **Possible realignment of Kriebel Road at Hanks House**

Now that the new pedestrian bridge is in place across Towamencin Creek, access to the portion of Fischer's park north of Kriebel Road is available. However, to use this access pedestrians need to cross Kriebel Road where there is a double s-curve with limited sight distance. At a previous meeting, the committee discussed the possibility of realigning Kriebel Rd improve crossing it to get to a proposed parking lot and portion of the Park on the other side. The Township asked the Township Engineer and Township Traffic Engineer for a cost proposal to investigate the realignment. They provided a cost proposal in the amount of \$34,000. The Committee felt this was much more than expected and if this were the cost for the investigation, the engineer's cost for a complete set of construction drawings would likely be prohibitively high and this would not include the cost of constructing the realignment. The high costs were of realignment were making other options more attractive.

Mr. Hillmantel said something needed to be done and he felt closing the road to through traffic would be best given that the Township owns the Road and the park property which it bisects. Ms. Smith said that the Board of Supervisors is not fully in favor of closing Kriebel Rd. She said in the past strong objections had come from the fire company which uses Kriebel Rd. as access to the to the "panhandle" properties of the Township. She said she would talk to the other supervisors and determine how they feel

Dr. Costlow suggested that there were all kinds of solutions for situations such as this and he suggested that they be investigated. Ms. Smith said full closure had come up in the past and encountered strong objection which weighed heavily on the supervisor's position. She said before going forward, there must be a consensus from all the parties involved, the police, the fire company, and the residents and commuters who use it on a regular basis.

Mr. Meehan suggested to Ms. Smith that the cost proposal from the engineers in the amount of \$34,000 which is presently on the agenda for the next BOS meeting, be tabled, or pushed to a future meeting, so we do not spend a large amount of money on engineering on an option which might not be the best option when all aspects including cost are considered. Ms. Smith agreed.

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 Friday's meeting with Mr. Ford.

- ***Kriebel Road Trail II (Montco 40 Grant) - PECO Powerlines to Fischer Park*** – The Township is waiting for the award announcements for DCED grants before moving forward with final design.
- ***Kriebel Road Trail I (TA Grant) Valley View Park to Trumbauer Road*** – The date of June 24, 2021 has been established on PennDOT's letting schedule for this trail project. This means the advertisement for bids would be released on May 20th. Construction work will extend into 2022.
- ***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 summarized the grant's status as being likely to change with all the upcoming award announcements.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Meehan noted Supervisor Marino attended the February 2021 OSPAC meeting and he brought up several items that he asked that the committee consider. The items were: a temporary ice-skating rink; establishing a "Friends of Fishers Park" volunteer group (see above, this was discussed previously in the Creekside pavilion item discussions at tonight's meeting).and the possibility of doing some landscape work at the Turnpike entrance at Sunneytown Pike.

Temporary Ice-skating rink

Mr. Meehan asked Mr. Hillmantel for his opinion on having a temporary ice-skating rink in the winter. He said he had never really thought about it. He said he had encountered such a rink as he was growing up and it was nice. He would need to think about it. The committee thought it was a nice idea also. DH said he would have to talk to the risk advisor to see what liability is involved.

Dr. Costlow said that he had researched the weather for this area to see if it would sustain the ice for a period of time and he said that from his research was he thought making it work would be a challenge. He said average low temperatures in January were below freezing but not by a whole lot and the average highs were in the high thirties. The committee will keep this idea on the table but a lot more research needs to be done.

Establish a Friends of Fischer's Park Volunteer Group

Establishing a friends of Fishers park was discussed previously in the meeting. See Creekside Pavilion discussions above.

Regarding the landscaping at the Turnpike entrance,

Mr. Hillmantel said that he did not think the Turnpike would be agreeable to that. They do not want anyone on their property. The committee will table this for now.

ITEMS OF INTEREST TO THE COMMITTEE

Mr. Meehan noted several items of interest to the committee regarding Open Space impact fees.

Wambold Road warehouse development. Substantial impact fee will come from this development, but it is moving through the process slowly.

Town Square Shopping Center. The Boston Market will be demolished and replaced by a Chipotle and a Mattress Warehouse Store. Some impact fees from this.

The storage facility on Franklin Street Development plans have been sold to another developer and the progress on this has also slowed.

The next OSPAC meeting is on April 12, 2021

With there being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM

Respectfully submitted,

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