

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee
April 12, 2021 Meeting
Meeting Minutes**

Present:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Michon Blake
David Sponseller

Todd Fisher
Dr. Richard Costlow
Peter Murphy

Absent:

Jim Roberts
Laura Smith, Towamencin Supervisor, BOS Liaison to OSPAC

Also attending were: Mary Stover, PE (CKS Engineers, Township Engineers) and Chad Dixon, PE (McMahon Associates, Township Traffic Engineers)
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Chairman Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM and led the assemblage in Pledge of Allegiance.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan thanked Ms. Stover and Mr. Dixon for attending.

Mr. Meehan noted that he met with Mr. Ford, the Township Manager on Friday April 9th to receive an update on items of interest to the Committee.

Mr. Murphy mention that he was made aware that on April 10th, the Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy had volunteers cleaning along the tributary of the Towamencin Creek in Firehouse Park.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of March 8, 2021

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes to the March 8, 2021 meeting as drafted and distributed. There were none. Mr. Murphy made a motion to approve the minutes as written/corrected, Ms. Becker seconded the motion. All committee members voted to approve the minutes. These approved minutes will now be posted on the Township website.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Trail Crossing Kriebel Road near the location of the old Hank's House.

Mr. Meehan presented a summary of the facts regarding a trail crossing near the location of the Hank's house which has been demolished.

- The Township's long-range plan is to develop the portion of Fischer's park north of Kriebel Road
- The Township has been awarded a Montco40 Grant in the amount of \$192,000 to build a trail extending from the PECO powerlines westward along Kriebel Rd. to Fischer's Park near the former Hank's house location. The grant will be matched with another \$192,000 from another grant or the Township.
- The concept for the proposed trail from west of Bustard Road showed it along the north side of Kriebel Road partially along the shoulder and then in park property when it reached the property line.
- Included with the construction of a pedestrian bridge crossing Towamencin Creek in 2020, was a trail constructed from the north end of the bridge to Kriebel Road.
- A trail crossing of Kriebel Road is needed to connect the south park to the north park and the Kriebel Road trail.

The committee was looking for input from the Township Engineers (CKS) and the Township Traffic Engineer (Mc Mahon Associates) regarding a safe trail crossing of Kriebel Road. Mr. Meehan said he wanted to get input for a long-term solution and a short-term solution. He asked Ms. Stover and Mr. Dixon to provide their suggestions and recommendation.

Mr. Dixon summarized the scope of work given to CKS and McMahon by the Board of Supervisors. He said they were asked to provide a concept plan and an "opinion of costs" for realigning Kriebel road in the area of the Arneth and former Hanks House location. He said the existing, approximately 650-foot-long portion of Kriebel Road being reviewed has sharp horizontal curves combined with an over-vertical curve in the middle. This horizontal and vertical geometry does not lend itself to safe pedestrian crossings.

He said McMahon put together a rough concept plan based only on aerial photos and some preliminary field measurements to see what Kriebel Road at a crossing might look like when horizontal and vertical geometry were straightened out. He said they also looked at placement of a parking area of no particular size for illustrative purposes. (The concept plan was printed and made available to the Committee as well as sent electronically).

He said their review begins at a point just east of a crossing of a tributary of the creek. He said this creek crossing is small and they had not inspected it. He was hopeful they could avoid including the creek crossing because it might become complicated because of permits etc. Mr. Costlow mentioned that he walks past the crossing frequently and it is not in good shape. Ms. Stover said CKS has not looked at the crossing in terms of capacity. Mr. Meehan reminded McMahon and CKS that the examination of this crossing was not included in the scope of work for providing a concept review of the realignment of Kriebel Rd. Mr. Dixon said that once preliminary engineering is completed, the realignment might involve extending beyond the creek crossing and thus involve it.

There was a discussion of some details of what the results of a realignment might be, including a grade difference, increased speeds on a straightened road, a need for additional measures such as flashing crossing lights. Mr. Dixon said normal traffic calming measures would not necessarily be the answer since the issue is related to sight distance. Mr. Dixon said these are details that will be addressed as the preliminary engineering plans are developed. He said that these issues would be addressed by improving the crossing sight distance for both pedestrians and motorists. Additional measures such as keeping the road width and shoulder widths to safe minimums would also help keep the speed down.

Mr. Costlow asked about the possible need for a retaining wall because of the grade difference from one side to the other and the need for flashing lights. Ms. Blake noted that we were still in the conceptual stages and we needed to know more about the realigned vertical and horizontal geometry before working on the details we were discussing at this early stage. Mr. Dixon agreed, and we should see what the new horizontal and vertical geometry that would come with realignment looked like before getting into those details for which the costs were low when compared to the overall cost the realignment.

Mr. Dixon cautioned that the alignment plan presented and discussed here was preliminary and is based on aerial photography and existing topography mapping. He said engineering as proposed in CKS/McMahon proposal submitted previously would be needed to better determine the vertical and horizontal geometry to address sight distance improvements. The cost of this engineering work was estimated at \$34,000.

Mr. Meehan noted the concept plan provided is helpful in visualizing a long-term solution to a crossing.

Mr. Meehan noted that the long-term solution would take time to implement and there is a need to address right now, the trail which now stops at the south edge of the Kriebel Road pavement. He mentioned reducing the speed limit as a possibility.

Ms. Blake said there is a crossing on Yoder Rd. in an adjacent Township which has only a crosswalk signage and vehicles seem to be traveling faster than along Kriebel Road. Would this be acceptable at Kriebel Road? Mr. Dixon and Ms. Stover both said Yoder Road has sufficient sight distance because it is straight which makes

it different from Kriebel Road. Mr. Dixon said sight distance is the problem along Kriebel Road. He further added that even with flashers but without better sight distance, it would not be an acceptable crossing. He said flashing beacons are there to alert people and are not meant as a solution to insufficient sight distance.

Mr. Costlow asked about using traffic calming measures. Mr. Dixon replied that calming measures will not improve sight distance in this instance.

Mr. Murphy suggested moving the crossing further west to at least improve sight distance in one direction. Mr. Dixon said McMahon can look at alternative crossing locations but acceptable sight lines in both directions are needed.

In the short-term Mr. Dixon suggested not giving trail users a destination on the north side of Kriebel Road. This was discussed and a question was posed whether the Township should prohibit crossings with a fence or other similar barrier. This however might force pedestrians to walk in the roadway. Mr. Dixon said do not do anything to suggest people walk where they should not be walking. He recommended not putting up any signing which might make such suggestions. He said however, that ultimately if someone wants to walk there, it would be hard to prevent them from doing so.

Mr. Dixon said in instances such as this where a trail ends and the future phases are not yet constructed, he has seen planners place a temporary cul-de-sac at the end of the first phase as a turn-around point or end point for the first phase. Benches could be placed around the cul-de-sac to make the space usable and reinforce the trail ending. This lets trail users know, that at the present time, the trail does not continue past this point. Mr. Meehan said this is a good thought. He added that some picnic tables might be placed in this area for users who had come this far along the trail.

Until a long term solution is implemented, parking needs to be discouraged on the north side of Kriebel Road. Just putting up no parking signs is likely not a winning strategy. The exception to parking there would be when events like Towamencin Day are held in Fischer's Park. For many years, for those events, closing Kriebel Road and using its paved surface for parking has been considered. With the pedestrian bridge in place, this is an even more attractive idea. Mr. Meehan said when he talked to Mr. Ford prior to tonight's OSPAC, this was discussed and remains a possibility.

Mr. Dixon said that an "opinion of costs" was included in the scope of their work to develop a concept plan for realigning the road, but the cost element was not completed in time for the OSPAC meeting. When it is completed, it will be sent to the Township and can be used for decision making going forward.

Mr. Meehan thanked Ms. Stover and Mr. Dixon for their input.

b. Complaints regarding enforcing dog waste pickup in parks.

Mr. Ford forwarded a complaint regarding walkers with dogs who disregard the regulation to pick up and properly dispose of dog waste. The email complaint was made available to the Committee members prior to the meeting. The complaint said the number of people not following the regulation has increased creating a health problem for other park users. Mr. Meehan asked the committee if others observed the problem and said he will also check with Mr. Hillmantel, the Public Works director. Mr. Costlow said he sees a fair amount of uncollected waste in his visits to the Park. Others said they had not observed the conditions noted in the complaint but that could have been the result of Public Works devoting more time to waste cleanup and trash clean-up due to the complaint.

The Committee discussed options including posting different signs to increase awareness of the regulation, perhaps using humorous signs seen on the internet to get more attention. There was also a suggestion to put an article in the Towamencin E-News that goes out each week and on the Township face-book page, reminding people that it is their responsibility to clean up after their dogs. The Committee knows that there are numerous signs in the parks, and dog waste plastic bags are being provided around the park. The complaint said some dogwalkers use the bags but then just toss them into the woods along the trails. The Committee felt there is little

else that they can suggest be done other than educating and maybe embarrassing the dog owners who do not comply.

c. Turning on Water Fountains in the Parks

The Committee agrees with the Township's decision not to turn back on the park's water fountains until it is determined to be acceptable under guidelines issued by the PA Department of Health during the Covid pandemic.

d. Pool and Swim Team

Mr. Sponseller wanted to bring to the attention of the OSPAC additional costs that the Towamencin Swim Team (TST) is incurring in 2021 due to changes being made by Standguard. These additional costs are putting a burden on the TST and they are looking for help in covering these charges.

Mr. Sponseller elaborated. The TST is being told by Standguard they will be responsible to pay for lifeguards at the pool during swim meets in 2021. This was not the case in the past. This is in addition to the practice time lifeguard costs the TST normally pays. On behalf of the TST, Mr. Sponseller says this new request is contrary to the Township's agreement with Standguard.

He provided some background financial information

2018: TST paid \$5247.71

2019: TST Paid \$5444.00 (also with ~\$700 loss of snack revenues)

2020: \$0 (season cancelled)

2021: TST being requested to pay \$7000.

Standguard wants TST to pay for lifeguards that are working during the swim meets and not just for practice.

- In 2021, this will result in approx. \$1,500 in additional expenses for TST.
- This is not consistent with the terms in Attachment A of the initial agreement between Standguard and the Township, which the TST understands has not been amended.
- Initially, Standguard waived lifeguard fees during these events because they would be making money during meets from the snackbar.
- In 2019, TST lost out on opportunity for approximately \$700 in snack proceeds due to Standguard restricting what it could sell.

Mr. Sponseller continued. In addition, there was a Bux-Mont league meeting last month to plan for this summer season and the TST coach learned that Towamencin is the only team that pays for pool time. (The cost for the Lifeguards during meets)

- Pre-Standguard, the team paid for coaches, general expenses, and training materials.
- During that rough year between the Y exiting and Standguard taking over, some on the Towamencin Board of Supervisors emphasized that TST needed to 'have some skin in the game' and should be prepared to ramp up fundraising and other revenue streams. TST was happy to still have the pool, accepted this premise, and cut costs via fewer coaches, expenses and pursued additional funding streams.
- For the last full season ('19), TST paid \$5,444 in fees to Standguard. Any additional fees in 2021 will be a struggle for the team, especially since it may be restricted by COVID rules on how many kids are permitted per lane and, thus, may need to limit team memberships.

With the savings the Township is realizing by not actively managing the pool, the TST asks for consideration that the Township cover all pool usage costs for the team; while the team continues, as in the past, to cover coaches, general team expenses and training materials.

On behalf of the TST, Mr. Sponseller asked for consideration that the Township to help subsidize the team for these added fees or help in the pushback against Standguard. The cost is estimated to be about \$2500.

The OSPAC discussed the concerns and the burden it places on TST. The OSPAC feels the pool is a great asset for summer activities and the TST is an important part of maintaining interest and growth of the pool. The OSPAC wants to get input from the Township staff and the BOS on TST's concerns and will forward their message requesting consideration to them.

e. EAC Invasive Species removal in Fischer's Park

Mr. Meehan noted that the Township Environmental Advisory Council will be holding an invasive species removal event in Fischer's park on Saturday April 24th. If anyone is available, they are welcome to help. It will also be an opportunity to learn more about the invasive species that need to be managed in the parks and on properties throughout the township.

f. Birdwatching in Fischer's Park

Mr. Meehan said Mr. Ford had forwarded an email, a copy of which was distributed to OSPAC members electronically, from a Township resident who is an amateur birdwatcher and has been "birding" in Fisher's Park since 2015. With his son, he has identified 128 unique species in the park so far. He mentioned the park on the north side of Kriebel Road being a wonderful bird habitat and was concerned about this area's future use which might reduce the attractiveness of this area to birds. He asked the OSPAC to consider his input regarding birdwatching in Fischer's. Mr. Meehan said he will contact the resident and invite him to the OSPAC Meeting in June.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Update on DCNR and DCED Grants for Grist Mill Park

Mr. Meehan requested the Committee members sign a letter of support to DCNR regarding the grant application for Grist Mill Park. The letter was passed around for signatures. A similar letter of support has been provided by TYA.

Mr. Meehan said over the past week he had communications with Mr. Simone of Simone-Collins (S-C) regarding what was being included in the grant application and what was not. Mr. Meehan said the S-C draft application was showing only 1 basketball court, only 2 pickleball courts, a pavilion, a playground, and a bocce court. This was different from what had been shown in the early discussions for the grant application. He had back and forth communications with Mr. Simone regarding the needs as understood by the OSPAC, especially for another basketball court and the lesser need for a bocce court.

Mr. Meehan said he initially pushed for another basketball court, but Mr. Simone said it just would not fit after the calculations were made to account for handicapped access, stormwater management, construction entrances, excavation storage and other miscellaneous items all of which all have to be accounted for as earth disturbance. The goal is to keep the earth disturbance below one acre to avoid the high costs for an earth disturbance permit.

Mr. Simone said the configuration he is recommending provides flexibility and can be adjusted if the grant is awarded to Towamencin. Ultimately, Mr. Meehan said he deferred to Mr. Simone's expertise and his knowledge of what DCNR looks for in an application. Mr. Meehan said he wants to do whatever works best in the application, so the Township is successful with being awarded the grant.

b. Bocce Courts update

Mr. Costlow noted improvements made to the bocce courts by public works crews. He said they replaced the wooden "bumpers" around the inner perimeter of the courts with a PVC material. He also noted that a new 'pad' had been constructed off the parking lot near the courts and this will be the base for a new enclosure to house a recycling dumpster and also the storage building for tools used by the court users to dress up the courts prior to play. This location was proposed by Mr. Hillmantel as an alternative to storing the tools in the building

which is part of the Stable Pavilion. Mr. Costlow and Mr. Meehan reviewed the alternative location and felt this was a good alternative. With the new location, the request to the BOS for approval of the Stable Pavilion storage area was withdrawn.

Mr. Costlow also said he had discussions with Mr. Hillmantel about replacing the playing surfaces of the courts, but this has not yet been agreed upon and scheduled. Mr. Costlow said the courts are presently topped with an oyster shell surfacing, but this is not the preferred playing surface material. A clay material surfacing provides better playing conditions. He said the cost difference between oyster shell and the clay is not much. He said Mr. Hillmantel said he will get to addressing the playing surface when his schedule allows.

c. Development of Friends of Township Parks idea

Mr. Meehan said following up on the BOS approval given at its March meeting, to explore establishing a volunteer group to be known as Friends of Fischer's Park, Mr. Costlow, who volunteered to be the coordinator for exploring and developing such a group, has looked into similar groups and prepared a summary of his findings. It was distributed to the Committee electronically with this meeting's agenda and is also attached to these minutes.

Mr. Costlow presented his findings to the Committee. He proposed expanding the concept to all Towamencin parks and naming the initiative TAP-IN. (Towamencin Adopt-a-Park INitiative) He researched other similar organizations and reviewed his findings with the committee.

- In other communities what similar organizations are already established
- What kind of assistance they provide
- How they are organized and funded
- Most are non-profit organizations incorporated as IRS 501(c)(3) organizations (for liability protection and fundraising of non-taxable contributions)

He expanded his findings further referring to his distributed summary.

Mr. Meehan said Mr. Costlow's research is especially useful and much appreciated but it seems to be developing a "friends" organization that goes beyond what Mr. Meehan thought was intended when the idea was proposed by Mr. Marino. Mr. Meehan thought the "friends" would operate much like the Veteran's Committee volunteers who have worked to clean up and maintain the cemetery behind the Holiday Inn. That group operates without a very formal organization and gets the volunteer work done simply and quickly.

Mr. Costlow said that is no different from what is already being done, things like the stream cleanups so why have duplicate effort. Mr. Meehan said the "friends" group would go beyond tasks like the stream cleanup and also help with other tasks such as painting pavilions or refurbishing signs as well as helping to maintain planting beds etc. Once the "friends" demonstrate their success in Fischer's Park the program can be expanded to all the parks and a more formal organization established if needed. He said it should start simple and show results. He proposed talking to Mr. Ford, Mr. Hillmantel and Mr. Marino to get their thoughts on what was intended and what they thought was the best way to proceed.

Mr. Costlow felt it should not be done piecemeal and should be organized formally from the beginning.

Mr. Murphy said he had experience with a similar Friends of a Library group, and they operate by asking the library what needs to be done and then start out by accomplishing the small things first and then move into more challenging tasks which required fundraising, for example. He said the "friends" concept with a formal organization works when you get into fundraising since you then are following the requirements of a 501(c)(3) non-profit.

Mr. Fischer asked if Mr. Costlow, as coordinator, could initially gather say 20 volunteers. He said from his experience with TYA, volunteers are difficult to recruit. He said people want to see the results of volunteers'

efforts, but they do not want to get their hands dirty doing the work. He said before going too deeply into establishing such a group, let us find out what the level of interest is.

Development of the “Friends of the Park” concept will continue.

d. Pedestrian Bridge in Fischer’s Park Update

Mr. Meehan noted the repairs to the trail on the north side of the bridge have been completed and the bridge has been reopened.

TOWNSHIP PARKS GRANT UPDATES

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. **No Change**
- ***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. **Still Proceeding on this schedule.**
- ***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 looks like for award announcements will be made in the near future. **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. **Still on this schedule.**
- ***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. **The Township was notified on March 12, 2021 that it was not awarded PECO Grant for the 2020 cycle.**

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Becker is also a member of the Township Planning Commission. She said a development, known as Belfair Square, located on Welsh Road, was presented to the planning commission for review. The development plans show a piece of the property as open space and the developer offered that piece to the Township as Township Open Space. The Planning Commission wanted to get the OSPAC’s thoughts on the offer.

The Committee looked at the plans and could see that although the piece was adjacent to existing open space, it had no public access from Welsh Road. Also, approximately one half of the piece was reserved for a stormwater management basin.

The OSPAC recommends declining the developer’s offer and let the homeowner’s association use and maintain the space. Mr. Meehan said he will convey this recommendation to Mr. Ford. Ms. Becker will do the same to the Planning Commission.

Ms. Becker also said a development proposal was presented to replace the Boston Market structure in the Towamencin Square Shopping Center with a Chipotle restaurant and a Mattress Warehouse store. She said that during the discussions on this matter with the developer, PSDC, she took the opportunity to remind the developer of his verbal commitment to provide access to Veteran's Park which is adjacent to the shopping center.

The next OSPAC meeting is on May 10, 2021

With there being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 PM

Respectfully submitted,

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