

Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
May 10, 2021
Meeting Minutes

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Michon Blake

Jim Roberts
Dr. Richard Costlow
Peter Murphy

Laura Smith, Towamencin Supervisor, BOS Liaison to OSPAC
Cortney Marengo, Chairperson, Township Special Events Committee

Absent:

Dave Sponseller
Todd Fisher

Also attending Francis Bellitti, a local artist.

Chairman Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM and led the assemblage in Pledge of Allegiance.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan noted that he met with Mr. Ford, the Township Manager on Friday May 7th to receive an update on items of interest to the Committee.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of April 12, 2021

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes to the April 12, 2021, meeting as drafted and distributed. There were none. Mr. Murphy made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Ms. Becker seconded the motion. All committee members voted to approve the minutes. These approved minutes will now be posted on the Township website.

SPECIAL EVENTS FOR 2021

Ms. Marengo summarized the events planned for 2021 and discussed them with the OSPAC.

- BeerFest at Mainland Golf Course on June 12th
- Towamencin Day - is set to be on September 11th in Fischer's Park.
- Concerts in the Park – Every Thursday evening in July and Thursday September 9th.
- Movies in the Park – Friday August 27th and Friday October 1st
- Turkey trot on Saturday November 13th
- Holiday Lights Festival December 4th
- Other – Multicultural Event in Fischer's Park on September 25, 2021

ART IN THE PARK

Mr. Meehan noted that Mr. Francis Bellitti who was in attendance, had contacted the Township asking for consideration of displaying his artwork in Fischer's Park. He was directed to present his request to the OSPAC and was invited to come to this meeting.

Mr. Bellitti made a presentation to the Committee and Ms. Marengo.

He said he is a “do it yourself” type of artist and is looking for a place to display his art pieces and also use the park as a background for photoshoots of his art. He said he is rebranding his business of creating artwork and he saw places in Fischer’s particularly near a shed behind the Arneith House that would be an appropriate backdrop for his artwork.

He is seeking permission to exhibit his artwork to allow people to see his work and create interest in it. He would not be selling his artwork. He said it would be for maybe only a day, or perhaps several days. The Committee suggested Towamencin Day. He described his sculptures as being Tim Burton style. His sculptures include an Easter rabbit, and Krampus (a folkloric horned Christmas devil that punishes naughty children in order to help Santa Claus.) Ms. Marengo said this style of sculpture can be frightening to children and she had reservations about when it would be exhibited as for instance at Towamencin Day when there are many children who attend. He agreed that children might be frightened by his sculptures and that was his behind his thinking that it be exhibited near the Arneith house away from areas normally used by youngsters. Mr. Bellitti said he liked the backdrop near the Arneith house since it was in keeping with the weird and freaky style of his work and would also attract those who might be interested to see his work to cross the new bridge to that area of the park.

The Committee and Ms. Marengo liked the idea of exhibiting art in the park. Ms. Marengo said we need to welcome it but also responsibly manage it. There was a discussion of how we might do this. Ms. Blake suggested an exhibit be done in conjunction with the concerts in the park. It could be set up ahead of the concert for people to enjoy before the concerts as they come in and get settled. Ms. Marengo was receptive to this idea. The Special Events committee could let other arts beside Mr. Bellitti know that this would be a venue for an exhibit of their work. This would add to the concert “experience” in the park. No artwork would be sold at such an event, but artists could pass out business cards to anyone interested in their work. This idea could be expanded further to include art students from the local schools.

Ms. Marengo suggested Mr. Bellitti contact her at Events@Towamencin.org regarding upcoming concerts and discuss arrangements for displaying his work at one or more of them. He said he would do so.

Mr. Bellitti thanked the Committee for this opportunity to discuss his request. He left the meeting at this point.

Ms. Marengo said planning for Towamencin Day on September 11th is well underway and is on “auto pilot” right now. She said the event format will be the same as previous years.

Ms. Marengo said there is also an event exhibiting cultures from various countries being planned for September 25th at Fischer’s Park and she is working with Carmina Taylor in coordinating it. This multicultural fair will be held in Fischer’s Park, but is a Montgomery County event and not a Township sponsored event. Attendance could be as large as Towamencin Day so there is planning underway for additional parking and other logistics. The Committee discussed and made suggestions for remote parking at this event.

As far as Ms. Marengo knows there is no rain date planned for this event.

Ms. Marengo also noted the BeerFest to be held on June 12th at Mainland Golf Course. She said only 150 tickets are being sold this year so there is no need for remote parking and parking shuttles. She said there will be wine and beer tasting, live music, and lawn games.

Ms. Marengo was asked what she would be looking for from the OSPAC to help make the planned events better. She said, “electric power toward the new bridge and more parking”.

There was a discussion of using Grist Mill as an event site. The discussion did not come to any consensus.

Ms. Marengo asked for suggestions from the OSPAC that might help the Events Committee. The OSPAC noted that the Special Events Committee’s being open to things like the Art in the Park is a great step toward diversifying events and encouraged more events like this. Mr. Costlow asked if they look at events for different demographics of the township like millennials, when planning events. Ms. Marengo said they do and the BeerFest is a result of that. There was a discussion and other possibilities such as swing bands or folk music were suggested.

The Committee thanked Cortney for coming. Cortney then left the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

- a. **Pedestrian Crossing at pedestrian bridge trail crossing Kriebel Road** – The Committee had been sent a summary of the conditions at the Kriebel Road crossing prior to this meeting. (A copy is enclosed with these minutes)

Mr. Meehan summarized the options as shown in the summary of conditions to provide a safe pedestrian crossing of Kriebel Road where the trail from the southern part of the park crosses to the northern part. The options are:

- Recommend the BOS/ Township arrange a meeting of all stakeholders who would potentially be impacted by a permanent closure of Kriebel Road between Bustard Road and Springer Road. Gather the stakeholder's input on any impacts and what might be done to remedy the impacts.
- Move forward with the engineering necessary to advance the realignment of Kriebel and eliminate the poor sight distance at the trail crossing.

The Committee discussed the options and the background leading up to them and again fell back into discussing solutions rather than a discussion on moving forward with the options.

Another option was presented and discussed briefly. It was to not do anything beyond controlling the crossing with signage, or warning devices. This was dismissed based on the comments made at a previous meeting by the Township's Traffic Engineer that this would not solve the sight distance problem and should not be considered an adequate solution.

The Committee agreed that these options should be brought to the BOS for their action. The Committee also agreed that the stakeholders meeting should be first and formatted such that a consensus be sought determining that a permanent closure would be acceptable or not. If not, action would then move to spending the necessary funds to begin engineering work for the second option, realignment. Mr. Meehan said he would pass the Committee's recommendations on to the Township staff.

The Committee also discussed immediate measures to discourage park users from crossing the pedestrian bridge and continuing up the trail and attempting to cross Kriebel Road. The committee agreed as suggested at last month's meeting that creating a cul-de-sac at a point on the trail short of Kriebel Road and placing benches around the perimeter would indicate to trail users, that for now, this point is the end of the trail. The Committee recommended moving forward with constructing this cul-de-sac and placing some benches in it. Mr. Meehan said he would inform the Township staff of this recommendation.

- b. **Towamencin Swim Team (TST) request for financial assistance** – Mr. Meehan updated the Committee on action taken on this request since last month's meeting. Standguard is charging the swim team more in 2021 than in previous years and this puts a financial burden to the team. He said since last month's meeting Mr. Ford suggested TST make their request in writing directly to the Board of Supervisors. TST sent a letter to Mr. Ford who then forwarded it to the BOS for its review. It is expected the request will be discussed at an upcoming BOS meeting.

The Committee discussed whether this would lead to a similar request from TYA if financial assistance were provided. It was pointed out that the TST request was a one-time request created by the impacts Covid had on pool membership and pool use restrictions. Last year TYA's fee to the Township for field maintenance was reduced similarly.

- c. **Friends of Fischer's Park/Towamencin Parks** – Mr. Meehan informed the Committee Mr. Ford had spoken to Mr. Marino about what his intent was when he suggested have a group of volunteers help with improving Fischer's Park. Mr. Ford said the conversation went back to using as a model what the Township's veteran's committee had done in cleaning up the ME Cemetery behind the Holiday Inn. It was a group of willing volunteers organized by the Veteran's Committee who determined what needed to be done and then went and did the work on a certain date.

Mr. Costlow asked about what the veteran's group did. In the case of the ME cemetery, the Veteran's volunteers picked up trash, removed overgrowth, cleared around the headstones, and cut the grass. He asked how is this different from what the Township public works does. Mr. Meehan said the work for the Friends of Fischer's Park would supplement what was done by public works and it was the "organizational model" that would be similar to the Veteran's group and not the work done.

The Committee discussed potential projects and signing up volunteers and which had to occur first. It was agreed the volunteers need to be organized and operate and be overseen by the OSPAC and the Township. Ms. Blake reminded the Committee that Mr. Hillmantel, when he attended our meeting several months ago, said he could provide a list of projects in Fischer's Park. She suggested we pick a few dates in the coming months and then seek volunteers to work on these dates. We could create and advertise the work as an 'event' on the dates chosen. as an event. Mr. Costlow said we needed projects first. Mr. Meehan suggested we have "sample projects" such as "painting, sign repairs" for use in getting volunteers so people know what they are signing up for. We would try to establish an organic group and then have the work follow.

Seeking volunteers would need to be done through the Township staff. Mr. Meehan said he would ask Mr. Hillmantel for some easy sample projects to include in the advertisement and then get recruiting of volunteers underway so we get some work accomplished this year and use the experience gained in moving forward for next year. Mr. Murphy said recruiting volunteers could be done through social media using the "boost" feature. Mr. Costlow also suggested posting for volunteers in Fischer's Park.

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*** – Grant awarded. Needs to be completed within 24 months from the date the applicant is sent a funding contract...that completion date is 6/30/22.
- ***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*** – The Township was notified on April 22, 2021, **that it had not been awarded the requested DCED Grant.** The question now is whether the Township reapplies by the end of May 2021 for the next round.
- ***Veteran's Park DCNR Master Plan Grant*** – This Grant combined with the award of the Veteran's Park DCED Grant, work by S-C on preparation of a Master Plan can begin.
- ***Veteran's Park DCED Master Plan Grant*** – **The Township was notified it was granted the award of \$25,000 on April 21, 2021.** This will now be combined with the DCNR Award and work on preparing a master plan can begin.
- ***Grist Mill Park Improvements DCNR*** – Application requesting a grant of \$250,000 was submitted on April 15, 2021.
- ***Grist Mill Park Improvements DCED*** – Application requesting a grant of \$250,000 is in its final stages at Simone-Collins. It will be submitted before the end of May.

Further discussing the grant updates, Mr. Meehan said the Township was not awarded the DCED Grant for the Kriebel Road Trail beginning near the PECO powerlines a going west to the Hanks/Arneith houses in Fischer's Park. A new cycle for applications is now underway with a deadline date of May 31, 2021. The Township could re-apply again in the new cycle. Keeping in mind that we are already submitting for a DCED grant in the amount of \$250,000 for Grist Mill Park, might we be competing against ourselves by also seeking another grant in the same cycle. The committee discussed this.

Mr. Costlow asked if the Township received reasons why the trail grant was not awarded. There was no detail in the letter from DCED only saying there were not sufficient funds to award all grants.

Mr. Meehan said the Montco 40 Grant for this same trail for which the Township was seeking the DCED Grant to provide matching funds has been on hold until the DCED Grant awards were announced. The decision on the DCED Grant awards was slowed due to covid and now the Montco 40 which has a required completion date in mid-2022 is in jeopardy of not being completed as required. He said we cannot allow the 2021 cycle announcement to hold up the development of trail engineering plans and bid documents. With the fact that we will be competing against ourselves, the fact that the deadline for the expiration of the Montco 40 grant is drawing closer and the fact that the Township Finance Committee in February 2020, had reviewed budget projections and determined the Township's match was manageable, he asked for the Committee's consensus on whether reapplying in the 2021 cycle should be withdrawn from the BOS agenda of its next meeting. The consensus was to not re-apply for the DCED grant in the 2021 cycle. Mr. Meehan said he would pass this along to Mr. Ford.

NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Request to use the Bandshell in Fischer's Park** – Mr. Ford reported that the Montgomery County Concert Band asked it could use the bandshell in Fischer's Park for band rehearsals. It has concerts in June and July but has no place to practice. They requested using the bandshell on Tuesday evenings from 7 to 9 PM. The Township saw no reason to not allow their practice and thought it would be good for youngsters in the park at those times to get the experience of hearing an adult concert band, even if just a practice and it was approved by the BOS.

- b. **Birdwatching.** Mr. Costlow saw a birdwatcher and his son in Fischer's Park, and spoke to them. They said they are avid birdwatchers who frequently "watch" in Fischer's Park. Mr. Costlow suggested he contact the Township about his interest in birdwatching and how Fischer's Park was such a good place for doing it. The resident contacted Mr. Ford who passed it on to Mr. Meehan who then contacted the resident and asked him to attend the OSPAC June meeting and tell the Committee about the birds he sees in Fisher's and about It being an ideal habitat for birds. He said he will attend.

- c. **Changing Water Fountains in Township Parks** – Ms. Smith said she had a conversation with Mr. Wilson, Chairman of the BOS, discussing the water fountains as they were related to covid precautions. Presently the fountains are turned off as per covid guidelines. Ms. Smith said many regular fountains were being replaced by "bottle fill" fountains and they wanted to get the OSPAC's thoughts on making such a change. The committee really liked this idea and will recommend it be implemented starting with Fischer's and then extending to all the Fountains in Towamencin Parks. Ms. Smith said she would bring this message to the supervisors.

- d. **Mowing at Kibler Meadow** – Ms. Blake noted that unlike in the past, the meadow at Kibler Meadow Park is not being cut on an occasional basis as it had been in the past. She said thistle and even trees are starting to take hold and if allowed to continue, it will no longer be a meadow. She was wondering why the change from the past. Ms. Smith said as a result of mandates from the state and federal government, (known as MS4) the Township must reduce sediments flowing into streams and waterways. Not mowing certain designated areas in the Township is one way of reducing sediments and Kibler Meadows is one of the designated areas of this program. She said the Township engineer developed the plan. It along with other Townships, known as the 'Consortium' are working together to reduce sediments flowing off properties. Changing the plan is complex and involves more than just Towamencin.

Committee members discussed this and felt that Kibler Meadow is a wonderful Township asset and should remain a meadow and not revert back to woodlands. This might be accomplished using selective herbicides to stop the woody plants but allow the grasses to grow and thrive. It was suggested the

Township look into having a “Meadow Management” plan. Mr. Meehan said he would pass this idea along to the Township staff.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

- a. **Items of Interest.** The “BookMobile” is in Fischer’s Park every other Saturday. It was noted that Towamencin should be proud that it has one of the highest “BookMobile” participation rates in the county.
- b. **Farming Veteran’s Park Field.** The Township has given a farmer permission to farm the Township’s open field in its Veteran Park property. The farmer has been informed this will be the last time for farming this property.
- c. **Backyard Chickens.** Ms. Smith informed the Committee she is looking into changing the Township’s ordinances regarding raising backyard chickens to make them a little more lenient. She said raising backyard chickens has become a recent “thing” which is gaining popularity. At this point she said she is just researching. More to come as time goes on.

The next OSPAC meeting is on June 14, 2021

With there being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:13 PM

Respectfully submitted,

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