

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

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Jim Roberts
Dave Sponseller

Peter Murphy
Dr. Richard Costlow
Todd Fisher

Laura Smith, Towamencin Supervisor, BOS Liaison to OSPAC

Absent:

Michon Blake

Also present: Andrew Dolan and Eddie Dolan

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

OPENING COMMENTS

None

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of May 10, 2021

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes to the May 10, 2021, meeting as drafted and distributed. There were none. Ms. Becker made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Mr. Costlow seconded the motion. All committee members voted to approve the minutes. These approved minutes will now be posted on the Township website.

BIRDWATCHING PRESENTATION

Birdwatchers and Towamencin Township residents Andrew Dolan and his son Eddie are avid birdwatchers who frequently “watch” in Fischer’s Park for their hobby. The OSPAC wanted to know more about birdwatching in general and more specifically how the Township’s parks and open space provide a habitat to the many birds in the area. They were invited to talk to the OSPAC committee about this topic.

Andrew thanked the committee for the invitation. He and Eddie present thoughts about birding including:

- In general, the popularity has increased from 2019 to 2020, likely because of covid restrictions on what people could and could not do.
- Montgomery County is considered the capitol of birdwatching in the US. likely because it was the home of John James Audubon the renowned ornithologist, naturalist, and painter.
- Southeastern PA is the best part of the state for birdwatching
- Montgomery County has the ninth highest number of species in the state and the second highest number of birdwatchers.

He said when he and Eddie started birding in Fischer’s it was not considered a birding hot spot. After their success there, they suggested it be placed on the hotspot list and it has now become a favorite. He said they have observed 133 species in Fischer’s Park. He said there are 218 hotspots in Montgomery County and Fischer’s is tied for 33rd for the highest number of species.

He described what they do to add a species to the list.

They then talked about what makes Fischer's Park good for birds. He said it provides a variety of habitats:

- The creek with its water and insects
- It has trees along the waterway
- It has old trees which make good nesting sites.
- It has "pocket woods" clusters of trees with clearings that allow light through and provide protection
- It has a different type of trees in different areas where groups of birds hang out away from other groups
- It has the uncut field in the northern section which attracts birds that like grassy areas
- It has rather good "open sky" for observing migratory birds

Combined, these aspects make Fischer's a good place for birds and birding.

They talked about the best time of the year for birding. They said May is the best time and then September. They said these are the fun times for birdwatchers.

Mr. Meehan asked Andrew what improvements might benefit birdwatching in Fischer's. He said he has thought it would be great to have a birdwatching deck there, probably somewhere close to the Arneith House and barn. This location has a clearing on one side and trees on the other for protection. Something simple with a raised deck and some benches and perhaps some bird illustrations and a sign asking people to look for this or that bird. Along with this would be some birdhouses and a couple of feeders for different birds. He said some martin houses would be great. Feeders however require that they be filled and maintained regularly, with birdhouse once a year. This could be a great task for individual with interest in birds as part of the Friend of Fischer's Park initiative

Andrew said he is willing to host bird walks in Fischer's in September which is a good time. He said the number of people would need to be limited to no more than twenty because some of the park's paths are narrow. Mr. Meehan invited Andrew to come to Towamencin Day and pass on some of the information he provided to this committee tonight. He said he is willing.

In conclusion, Andrew said Fischer's Park is a great place for birdwatching, but he would not expect that it attracts the most serious birders. The number of species there is limited, and serious birders go to where there are more opportunities to see more species. He said it is however great for those just getting started and for youngsters to develop a greater interest in this hobby.

The committee thanked Andrew and Eddie for taking the time to share their great knowledge of birds and birdwatching.

OLD BUSINESS

a. BOS action on the OSPAC Recommendations coming from its May 2021 meeting.

Ms. Smith provided the Committee with an update of the BOS review of the recommendations coming from the May OSPAC Meeting.

- The Towamencin Swim Team (TST) requested financial assistance to help it cover additional costs for lifeguards during swim meets which StandGuard is now charging it for. With Covid the TST has a reduced ability to fundraise, and the additional StandGuard charges are an unexpected burden on the TST. *Ms. Smith said the BOS referred this request to the Finance Committee for review. The Finance Committee will then get back to the BOS.*
- Request the Township arrange a stakeholder meeting to discuss the possibility of closing Kriebel Road from Bustard Road to Springer Rd so a safe crossing could be established between the north and south portions of Fischer's Park. *Ms. Smith said the BOS has the Township staff gathering stakeholder information.*
- The OSPAC wants to establish a group of volunteers know as Friends of Fischer's Park. *Ms. Smith said this concept was well received by the BOS and sent back to the committee asking for a recommendation.*

Mr. Meehan noted several other items that the BOS acted on subsequent to the last Committee meeting.

- The BOS approved changing the water fountains in Fischer's Park to bottle fill type fountains. Staff will look into the different types available. If they are a success in Fischer's, all park water fountains will then be changed.
- The BOS decided to apply to DCED for a grant for the KRI trail from the PECO Powerlines to the Hanks House site. The grant application was submitted on May 27, 2021.

b. Ongoing problem with conditions at park restrooms

Over the last several weeks, incidents of vandalism have taken place at the Township's parks bathrooms. Mr. Meehan said the reports he received from the Township Manager were of disgusting overflowing of toilets and human waste spread around the bathrooms. The cleaning service workers have complained about what they are being asked to clean up. The Township has asked for the OSPAC's help in the form of recommendations that might lead to solving this problem.

This has been a recurring problem and one that the OSPAC has discussed at length last year. Since those 2020 occurrences, automatic flush valves have been installed and "Keep or Bathrooms Clean" signs posted in the bathroom stalls. The problem still persists. The OSPAC is also frustrated by the lack of common courtesy and hygiene by restroom users...something that is unexpected in our community. Mr. Murphy pointed out that in addition to the disgusting appearance, the filthy conditions create a health hazard to anyone entering the restrooms before they are thoroughly cleaned.

The committee also feels this is a behavioral issue being done by a few individuals, however it presents a bad impression of the park as well as a health issue and disservice to all others who use the park and respect its facilities.

After a lengthy discussion of what might be the cause of this kind of disrespectful behavior and how the Township might eliminate or greatly reduce these occurrences, the committee offered the following suggestions:

- Not excusing or acceding to the behavior, but to make the restrooms clean and safe for others, have "attendants" at the restrooms at times when there are expected to be heavily used. The "attendants" would monitor the restroom conditions and, if necessary, take immediate action to remedy problems. It is also felt their presence would be a deterrent to anyone considering vandalism. This would add to the cost of operating the parks but would also be offset to some extent by reducing the cost of any vandalism cleanup
- Try to use information the Township already has available to isolate when the incidents occur and who was using the park during this time. Do they occur as a result of a particular type of event? Events with a large number of kids/teens? The Committee acknowledges this would still not be able to pinpoint the individuals responsible.
- Put up some sort of time reporting sheet where the public could comment on the restroom condition and the time similar to what is used in public restrooms at rest areas along highways. Something simple, with a time and a box to check whether the restroom is clean or not. This would help isolate when problems occur.
- The message on the signs now being used in the toilet stalls might be too "long and wordy". Simplify them and make them larger. In addition to those in the stalls post signs outside the stalls with a simple message to ask everyone to help keep the bathrooms clean.
- Place waste containers in each of the bathrooms in or near the stalls. It is felt that some people use "wipes", many of which are not "flushable", for the toilet seats and currently there is no convenient place to deposit the used wipes. Flushing these wipes could be the cause of the clogging and overflow problem.
- Install cameras outside the restrooms so that activity into and out of the restrooms could be monitored. Maybe just install dummy cameras as a deterrent to make people stop and think before doing something that causes a problem.

Mr. Meehan said he will forward these recommendations/suggestions on to the Township Staff.

c. Naturalized Areas or Meadow Areas

At last month's meeting, Ms. Blake pointed out that as a result of the Kibler Meadow Park no longer being mowed, thistle and trees have begun to grow in the grassy meadow and in time the "meadow" would become a woodland. The Committee consensus was that a "meadow" was what was desired but understood that this park was not being mowed to help meet MS4 requirements to reduce sediments being carried to waterways.

The Committee wanted to get a clarification of what constituted a "meadow" area. Prior to tonight's meeting, Mr. Meehan contacted Mr. Ford who sent him a copy of the Townships MS4 Mowing Transition Plan Update, dated May of 2016. Mr. Meehan said the Transition Plan that he received was in the form of a power point presentation. Ms. Becker requested the plan be distributed to the Committee. Mr. Meehan said he would email it to all.

The transition plan added another term into the mix. It talked about the conversion of Township property from 'Maintained' to 'Naturalized' areas including the conversion from 'lawn or farmland to meadow'. This conversion was part of the MS4 Plan. It seems a meadow meets the criteria of a naturalized in that it provides a similar level of sediment reduction. This will be confirmed further with the Township Engineer who prepared the MS4 Plan.

Ms. Smith suggested that just like the EAC's invasive species removal in township parks, a similar removal of the objectional thistles and trees be undertaken to maintain the "meadow" in this park. The Committee agreed that this is something that should be pursued since Committee members feel that Kibler Meadow is a wonderful Township asset and should remain a meadow and not revert back to woodlands.

d. Friends of Fischer's Park Volunteers

Mr. Meehan said Mr. Ford forwarded an email he had received from a resident who noticed the "greenhouse" in Fischer's Park near the Metz Road entrance. She wondered if the Township would allow gardeners to use the greenhouse. Mr. Meehan said he responded to her and informed her of the OSPAC efforts to establish a volunteer group, Friends of Fischer's Park, and suggested that using the greenhouse might be something the group might pursue.

Mr. Costlow said he would be willing to follow up with her and asked for her email information. He said he has seen the greenhouse and said it has some broken glass and needs repair. He also wondered if it had a source of power and water noting that these are essential to a workable greenhouse. He said he will follow up and look into these questions. He also agreed this type of volunteer involvement would be an initiative that fits with the idea of Friends of Fischer's Park.

Mr. Costlow added that he knows individuals who are interested in helping with management of the bocce courts. They would do some of the work of preparing the courts and public works could then use its roller to compact the playing surface.

He said both greenhouse group's interest and the bocce group's interest demonstrate that people with different interests are willing to help in different ways in maintaining the park. This is the basic concept of Friends of Fischer's or as he likes to refer to this, an Adopt a Park Initiative.

Mr. Meehan said following up to the discussion at last month's meeting he contacted Mr. Hillmantel and asked him for a list of projects that the Friends group might be able to help with. Mr. Hillmantel responded stating that the top three items he would like to see accomplished are the pressure washing and painting of the Creekside Pavilion, the Carriage House Pavilion, and the Stable Pavilion. He said he would like to get these done before Towamencin Day on September 11th. Secondary to those would be the pressure washing of the newer pavilions and picnic tables. He also responded that if there were volunteers with skills like carpentry, electrical or landscaping he could provide some more specialized projects. He also mentioned that just picking up trash on a daily basis is something that needs to be done. Mr. Meehan said he let Mr. Hillmantel know he preferred to have more meaningful projects for the volunteers than picking up trash.

Mr. Costlow mentioned that the group that plays bocce might be interested in doing the work at the Stable Pavilion since it is adjacent to the bocce courts. He said he would mention this to them.

With these projects Mr. Meehan said he will work on an advertisement seeking volunteers and get it posted on to the Township website, the e-news site and also on other social media platforms.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Food Trucks at the Pool during swim meets as a TST fundraiser.

Mr. Meehan noted that a letter sent by the TST to the Township was forwarded to him late this afternoon, June 14th. It requested the BOS consideration of and approval for the swim team to have a vendors food truck on site at the Township pool parking lot during swim meets. It said it is making this request in accordance with Township Regulation 107-2. The vendors would be sharing “a portion of their profits with the swim team in an effort to compensate for lost monies the team continues to endure as a result of the Pandemic”. The request continues stating it will sell only items that will not compete with StandGuard’s snack stand.

The Committee discussed this request with its biggest concern being that StandGuard might consider this request a “poke in the eye” to its snack stand and outside food policies thereby stressing the relationship the Township has with StandGuard.

The Committee consensus was that it had no objections to food trucks in a safe and appropriate area of the pool parking lot during swim meets with the profits being shared with the swim team as a means of raising funds, as long as it was also acceptable to StandGuard. Mr. Meehan asked for a motion in this regard. Ms. Becker made a motion “that food trucks be allowed on the Township premises during swim meets, as a fundraising effort for the swim team, as long as StandGuard gives its approval.” The motion was seconded by Mr. Costlow. The motion was then approved unanimously by the Committee members. This recommendation will be passed on to the Township staff. The BOS will make the final decision on this request.

b. Senior softball players requested a rental fee reduction for use of the Bustard Road Fields on a regular Basis

Mr. Meehan informed the Committee that a men’s senior softball group of residents uses one of the Bustard Road Park fields once a week in the morning between May and October for softball games. The field is not being used otherwise and TYA is acceptable to its use by them.

The group requested a “senior” rate for the use of the field. Mr. Meehan said we want to encourage such activities for seniors. He thought a reduction was acceptable and sent an email to Mr. Ford to that effect. The BOS thought the same and granted their request.

c. Senator Mensch “groundbreaking” at Veterans Park

Mr. Meehan announced that a date has been set for a ceremony at Veterans Park recognizing Senator Mensch’s support in obtaining a DCED grant for the preparation of a Master Plan for the park. The Event is set for July 29th from 10:30 to 11:30 at the park. Plantings will be installed around the sign base as part of the event. The DAR has said they will participate and Fiona Hodgson a talented vocalist has offered to sing the national anthem. More details will be coming.

d. Towamencin Swim Team request to install a sponsor banner along the Grist Mill Park fence at Allentown Road and Forty Foot Road.

Mr. Sponseller said the TST is looking to get more sponsors and to help with this they would like to be able advertise their sponsors on a banner along the Grist Mill Park fence along Allentown Road and Forty Foot Road. The committee discussed this request. TYA has similar banners along the Grist Mill Park fence and the OSPAC feels the TST should be allowed the same. Mr. Meehan mentioned that there are numerous banners along this fence. TYA has registration banners, sponsors banners. The township puts event banners there also. He feels each banner should be allowed for a fixed amount of time and then removed so there are not numerous banners at one time. He also noted that the logos and names on the sponsor banners are small, and they are difficult to read while driving at the speed allowed on Allentown and Forty Foot Road.

After discussion, the Committee consensus was to allow the TST banner to be placed as requested. The final decision is to be made by the BOS.

TOWNSHIP PARKS GRANT UPDATES

Grant Updates. Mr. Meehan provided the Committee with the following updates regarding Grants for Parks and Trails.

- ***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. Gilmore and associates were given approval by the BOS to proceed with the design of a 2500-foot section of the KRI II trail from south of the sewer treatment plant to Bustard Road
- ***Kriebel Road Trail I (TA Grant) Valley View Park to Trumbauer Road*** – PennDOT’s letting date for this project is July 15th. It is currently advertised for contractor’s bids. Construction notice-to-proceed is anticipated to be October 12, 2021. The construction completion date is specified to be July 12, 2022.
- ***Kriebel Road Trail II (DCED Grant, 2021 round) - PECO Powerlines to Fischer Park*** – The Township BOS decided to apply again for the DCED Grant in the 2021 round. The Grant application was submitted on May 27, 2021
- ***Veteran’s Park DCNR Master Plan Grant and Veteran’s Park DCED Master Plan Grant*** – Using the combined Grants, Simone-Collins has begun work on this Master Plan.
- ***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 was submitted by May 31, 2021

ITEMS OF INTEREST

- a. **Backyard Chickens.** Ms. Smith said she is continuing to look into is looking into changing the Township’s ordinances regarding raising backyard chickens to make them a little more lenient. She said raising backyard chickens his has become a recent “thing” which is gaining popularity. More to follow as time goes on.

With there being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:25 PM

The next OSPAC meeting is on July 12, 2021

Respectfully submitted,

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