

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
February 14, 2022
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Michon Blake
Dr. Richard Costlow
Todd Fisher
Dan Vaitis
Laura Smith, Towamencin Supervisor, BOS Liaison to OSPAC

Absent:

Dave Sponseller
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 noted he met with Mr. Delamater, the Township Manager, on February 9, 2022. Mr. Delamater provided updates on items that would be of interest to the OSPAC, and his update information will be included in the items as they are discussed this evening.

Mr. Meehan introduced Mr. Dan Vaitis to the Committee. Mr. Vaitis was appointed by the BOS at their January 12, 2022, to serve on the Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee (OSPAC). The Committee Members introduced themselves to Mr. Vaitis.

Mr. Costlow asked for an updated list of contact information for the Committee members. Mr. Meehan said he will provide an updated list.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of January 10, 2022

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes of the January 10, 2022, 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.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Lighting in the “core area” of Fischer’s Park**
Mr. Meehan passed on information provided by Mr. Delamater that lights mounted on the pavilion structures behind the Arneith Entertainment Center are now essentially complete and functioning.

- **A trail connecting Grist Mill Park and the Grist Mill neighborhood at Grist Mill Drive**
The Township Public Works (PW) Committee reviewed the proposed trail alignments for a trail connecting Grist Mill Park to Grist Mill Drive. Because there were issues with both the route across the Texas eastern Pipeline easement as well as the route though the Township owned

property between the Grist Mill residential properties, the PW committee recommended this trail be put on hold for now but be included in the future development plans for additional recreational facilities in Grist Mill Park. In the meantime, the Township engineer will continue to look at which route might be best, but no construction of the trail would take place until the Grist Mill facility addition work goes to construction. BOS agreed with this recommendation.

- **Kibler Meadow Parking Area**

The PW committee reviewed the recommendations from the OSPAC to reduce the size of the planned parking area at Kibler meadow and agreed with this recommendation to limit parking to eight to ten vehicles. PW also recommended that the parking area be in a “horseshoe” configuration to allow easy access in and out for vehicles trailering horse trailers. The action is now with the Township Engineer to prepare a plan that meets these criteria.

- **Kriebel Road Trail – Valley View Road to Trumbauer Road (TA Trail Grant)**

An update provided by Mr. Delamater was passed on to the Committee by Mr. Meehan.

The construction contractor is eager to get started. He is waiting for the weather to improve. He is looking for an alternative site for the field office since there is not easy access to electric and internet at the location at the end of the Valley View Way Cul-de-sac indicated in the contract documents. The construction drawings indicate the bridge steel is to be painted. The contractor asked for direction on the color. At its meeting the BOS of January 23rd, wanted to look at the bridge being constructed of weathering steel and not be painted, the same as the pedestrian bridge crossing Towamencin Creek in Fischer’s Park. Gilmore and Associates, the Engineer of Record, will look into this.

- **Kriebel Road Trail II PECO Power lines westward along Kriebel Road toward Fischer’s Park.**

An update provided by Mr. Delamater was passed on to the Committee by Mr. Meehan.

At the January 23rd BOS Meeting Gilmore and Associates (Gilmore) provided an update on the Kriebel Road Trail II noting the Township did not receive additional funding through a DCED grant application. Therefore, Gilmore recommended two requests to the Montgomery County Planning Commission - requesting a one-year extension for the completion of the Kriebel Road Fischer’s Park trail for the existing Montco 2040 grant (\$190,000) and permission to scale down the trail’s scope to keep within the limits of available funding, while at the same time applying for additional grant funding to continue progress with this trail. The BOS accepted these recommendations and directed the staff to contact Montgomery County to pursue the recommendations.

- **Grist Mill Park**

Towamencin has been awarded a DCNR Grant in the amount of \$250,000. to add recreation facilities at this park. It did not receive a matching grant in the same amount from DCED. This leaves a funding gap for the improvements. At his meeting with Mr. Delamater, Mr. Meehan proposed seeking another grant from DCED in the 2022 round of grants. Mr. Delamater said he thinks the Township has received its share of DCED grants recently and we should look at other grants. He said Peter Simone had suggested other sources. Mr. Delamater will talk to Peter and look to pursuing those sources.

Mr. Costlow suggested using PA liquid fuels money for trails. Ms. Smith said liquid fuels monies fund the Township roadway paving program and is not an option. Mr. Costlow said he has worked with Penn State advising PennDOT on a program providing funds for dirt roads. He suggested that a trail is like a dirt road and suggested that those funds might be accessed for trails. He did not know the program details and the conditions under which those funds could be used but would look into it further.

- **Shade Sails at Fischer's Park Tot Lot**

The Township finance Committee at its December meeting again looked at funding only the tot lot shade sails. A price quote for only the tot lot sails was obtained it was \$59,000 still above the budgeted amount of \$41,000. Mr. Delamater noted that the Finance Committee recommended this item be put on hold as an item "below the line" and if the gap funds became available, the shade sails will be raised back up to the status of a funded project. He also said the latest price quote was not for the changed alignment of the shade sails to cover the most swing and see-saw areas. Mr. Meehan suggested to Mr. Delamater that there were some other items in the budget which were looking like they will be deferred in 2022 (Morgan Way Playground and the Trail Connection from Grist Mill Park to Grist Mill Drive) because of new-found problems with them and some of the funds allocated for those items might be transferred to cover the gap in funding for the shade sails. Mr. Delamater will be looking into this as a possibility.

Mr. Meehan expressed frustration to the Committee at not getting items thought to be budgeted approved to be constructed. Mr. Costlow asked what shade sails we could get for the \$41,000 that has been budgeted. This would be the same approach as the Township proposed for the Kriebel Road Trail which also falls short in funding. Ms. Smith said she would take this approach forward. Mr. Meehan said he would ask Mr. Delamater this question.

Ms. Becker suggested the Township check with Montgomery Township to what company provided the shade sails recently added to their playground.

- **Bocce Courts Improvements**

Late in January Mr. Delamater was asked about the status of the improvements to the bocce courts. The improvements were approved in the 2022 budget. He said a meeting needs to be held to discuss what needs to be done and the approach to getting it done. Mr. Meehan and Mr. Costlow would attend as well as Mr. Delamater and Mr. Hillmantel. Setting up a meeting did not happen because Mr. Hillmantel was heavily involved in starting up some big projects. Ms. Smith confirmed the amount of project work he is involved with.

Once the Township has determined the solution to the drainage problems, they need to have biddable plans showing details of the improvements, the materials to be used, etc. With this they would be better able to determine the approximate cost and decide whether the work could be done by Public Works or needs to be bid. Key in this is PW's availability and therefore Mr. Hillmantel's input.

Mr. Costlow mentioned a storage shed was also to be placed near the courts for storage of tools and equipment needed to maintain the courts prior to their use by the serious bocce players. This shed was to be added last year but material/supply shortages delayed it. Mr. Meehan said he will check and see that this is still in the works.

- **Scout Projects in Fischer's Park**

Mr. Meehan informed the Committee a scout, Jack Ely, accepted the planning and construction of a kiosk message board in Fisher's Park as his Eagle Scout Project. This project had been proposed by Mr. Delamater last year and was now given approval to proceed with planning. Scout Ely will attend the March 2022 OSPAC meeting to show his concept and discuss his plan

Mr. Meehan said he has prepared a draft of a process a scout would follow in proposing and getting approval for a scout project in Township Parks. He sent this to Mr. Delamater for his input. He was going to talk to a scout leader and get his input also. This process would establish a written guideline and an idea of the time it takes to get approvals prior to starting a project in a Township Park. Mr. Costlow suggested the draft include the amount of time a scout would need to plan for to get all the Township approvals. A time will be added to the process draft. It will say four months are to be scheduled just for approvals.

Veterans Park Master Plan Update

Simone Collins is refining the concept plans for Veterans Park and distilling the three concepts they have drafted down to one. They are also interviewing “Key Persons” to obtain their thoughts about what the park should mean to the Township and how it could honor veterans. They will be continuing with this for several more months.

- **Friends of Fischer’s Park**

Mr. Meehan said he has contacted Mr. Hillmantel several times to meet and discuss what the Friends of Fischer’s Park could do in the park this spring. Projects would need his blessing. Mr. Hillmantel has not responded. Everyone acknowledges that he is very busy.

Mr. Meehan said he has had thoughts on what might be done such as refurbishing signs, painting pavilions, making/installing bat houses and establishing a bird house garden but feels there are others that are likely favored and higher priorities for the Township.

Mr. Meehan noted that Andrew Dolan, a Towamencin resident and avid birder, built and was given permission by the BOS to install two screech owl houses in Fischer’s Park.

- **Pool and Swim Team**

There was a recent meeting attended by the Township Staff, representative of the Swim Team and representatives of Standguard to discuss past problems and plan for the 2022 Swim season. Mr. Sponseller attended as a representative of the swim team. He was not able to attend tonight’s OSPAC meeting and will provide an update next month.

NEW BUSINESS

- Mr. Meehan suggested the Committee along with the Environmental Advisory Council as we use the parks and open spaces, try to identify note patches of milkweed growing in Township and we then point these out to the PW mowing crews to avoid. The milkweed areas are great habitat for monarch butterflies and should be preserved and not mowed.
- Mr. Meehan presented a draft article for the Township’s spring newsletter to the Committee for review and comment. He said the deadline for articles is February 15, so he needs comments quickly.
- Mr. Meehan said he requested from Mr. Delamater a summary of impact fees paid to the Township and projects to which these funds have been encumbered. One specific question was related to the impact fees from the Core 5 development paid to the Township for trees. The Committee feels these impact fees should be used for tree related projects like dead tree removal and planting new trees. Mr. Delamater said the BOS decides where the funds are to be spent. Mr. Delamater said he will forward the impact fee information.

The committee discussed moving 2021 and 2022 budgeted projects forward. It seems the projects get bogged down in the process when the full funding is not in the budget. With some budgeted items not likely going to go forward in 2022, it seems there should be flexibility in moving the funds budgeted for these items to fill the gaps when another item has gaps in funding which put a hold on that project. The budget needs to have some flexibility to not exceed the total budget but move funds between individual projects when other funds already in the budget are no longer be needed in 2022. Ms. Smith said she would discuss the funding red tape the park projects are encountering with Supervisor Wilson and see how she can expedite moving the budgeted 2021 and 2022 projects forward.

- Mr. Meehan mentioned that Towamencin Day 2022 on May 21, 2022, was approaching and the OSPAC committee would be sharing a table with the Environmental Advisory Council (EAC). He said the EAC theme this year is monarch butterflies, and they would be providing a craft for kids to construct a butterfly caterpillar from pipe cleaners. The Veterans committee which will have a table adjacent to the OSPAC/EAC table will be giving out “goodies” (balsa airplanes, and parachutes) for kids so we should expect the tables to be attract a crowd and be congested.

- Trail of Trees. The committee discussed this idea and will continue to research it. We will reach out to Dave Hillmantel and Township staff to get their thoughts and see how a plan for where and what native species tree might be planted. This work could be funded with the tree impact fees paid by developers.
- Mr. Meehan noted that in reviewing the new Township website, the references to the Townships Parks and Open Space are dated and need to be refreshed. This will be something the committee will be looking to update.

Mr. Costlow mentioned that the OSPAC meeting minutes are not posted on the webpage. Mr. Meehan said he will check and add them where they are missing. Mr. Costlow suggested they be shown in the columnar format used in the Board of Supervisors meeting agenda, and minutes page of the website.

Mr. Meehan asked if there any other new business the Committee would like to discuss. Mr. Vaitis said this being his first meeting he is taking it all in and learning. One thing that struck him was the inability to get plans implemented. Based on his work experience he feels the committee takes on too many tasks and with so many finds it difficult to push them through to completion. He suggests we “stop starting and start finishing”. He suggests we narrow the list, choose the items to “attack”, focus on them, and push them to completion.

The Committee discussed his observations and agreed that we get caught in the “red tape” of the many layers of process but at the same time we try to maintain flexibility to move to something quickly should an opportunity arise, that could be a benefit to the Township. Mr. Fisher said opportunities like for example “free fill materials” come along and we need to be prepared to take advantage quickly. Ms. Blake noted that the Committee and Township seek park funding grants but then find that we struggle to budget the required matching funds and the project can’t proceed.

Mr. Vaitis added that from his experience the OSPAC has too many “cans of paint open”. We need to narrow our attention to two or three items and focus on them and get them done. He added that he sees the process between the Township groups is broken. There is not enough communication between the Township staff, the OSPAC, Public works, and the finance committee. This leads to items bouncing back and forth between the groups rather than moving forward. Other committee members acknowledged this is the red tape always thought of in government adding that this is not necessarily bad. It provides checks and balances in the process but when it gets overwhelming the red tape must be identified and the process smoothed out.

Mr. Vaitis asked if there is a liaison between the Finance Committee and the OSPAC. Mr. Meehan said there is not. Ms. Smith said. Supervisor Wilson is a member of the Finance Committee, and we could ask him to come to our meetings occasionally.

Ms. Becker said we need to know more about what monies are available to use on park projects. Mr. Fisher said the sitting BOS has been willing to free up more money and are moving in the right direction. Mr. Meehan said the lack of money is the biggest obstacle in moving projects forward.

Mr. Vaitis gave his profile of work in the Township with TYA and he wants to contribute to making things better. He said he feels it would help if each project had a “champion” whose focus was on one project. He added again by saying “stop starting, start finishing”. Mr. Costlow said he has great interest in the bocce courts, and he will champion them. Ms. Smith said she would champion the shade sails.

Mr. Meehan told Mr. Vaitis’ that his observations as a new member were appreciated and the Committee knows it has gotten caught up in “red tape”, but it is good to look in the mirror and have someone from outside point this out to us. He said we will work to make changes.

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

The next OSPAC meeting is on March 14, 2022

Respectfully submitted,

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