

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
June 13, 2022
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Michon Blake
Dr. Richard Costlow
Todd Fisher
Dan Vaitis
Dave Sponseller

Laura Smith, Liaison Board of Supervisors

Absent:

Peter Murphy
Nancy Becker

Chairman Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan noted he had met with Mr. Delamater, the Township Manager, on June 10, 2022. Mr. Delamater provided him with 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.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Other than the Committee members, there were no others in attendance and therefore no public comments.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of May 16, 2022

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes of the May 16, 2022, OSPAC meeting as drafted and distributed. Mr. Costlow asked that the reasons why each bocce court site was not favored be included in the minutes. Mr. Meehan said that information would be added to the minutes. Mr. Costlow made a motion to approve the minutes as written and amended to reflect the reasons each court was not favored. Mr. Fischer seconded the motion. All Committee members voted to approve the amended minutes. These approved minutes will now be posted on the Township website.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Meehan passed the following information about the status of ongoing projects that are of interest to the Committee.

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

Mr. Delamater said work on the bridge design has been completed and has now moved into the fabrication stage. Fabrication will take about twelve to fourteen weeks and the bridge is scheduled to arrive on site in early September. The contractor will phase the site work to mesh in the schedule with the delivery of the bridge structure. The contractor does not want to mobilize and then wait for the bridge work and have to mobilize a second time. Site work is expected to begin in early July with all work being completed this year.

The grant deadline date for this project is July 23, 2022, which will not be met. A time extension will need to be requested by the contractor and approved by PennDOT.

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

The Township's application for a 2022 Montco 40 Grant was denied. This grant was intended to provide funds to complete the trail as designed running from the PECO powerline crossing to Bustard Road. Without the added funding, the scope of the work will need to be reduced and the western terminus of the trail will be at Green Lane Road.

The bid documents up to Green Lane Rd. will now be prepared by Gilmore and Associates and put out for construction bids. The remaining part of the trail into Fisher's Park from Green Lane Road will be looked at as a future project.

- **Grist Mill Park DCED Grant Application**

The Township submitted a DCED Grant Application prepared by Simone-Collins for funding of the improvements at Grist Mill Park. If approved, these funds will be used to match the funds approved by DCNR for these same improvements.

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

The Committee discussed the obstacles popping up that are preventing the shade sails from getting approval to be installed. Among them, size, foundation depths and related costs.

Earlier plans for shade sails at the tot lot at Fischer's were significant in the amount of area covered with much of it not being needed to achieve the goal of providing shade to the tot equipment. A large structure covering the entire tot lot had been suggested as a possibility but is not preferred because of its size and cost.

Only the immediate area of the equipment needs to be covered. After seeing smaller shade sails at other parks, the committee feels we should reduce the size of the shade sails and cover only the swings, the slide, and the see saw (see sketch) and minimize covering the surrounding areas. The structures for each shaded area would be independent and self-supported with four smaller posts each. Smaller sails would result in smaller support structures (foundations, poles, smaller opening in the rubberized surfacing, smaller sail surfaces requiring less maintenance, easier installation, and overall lower cost). The Committee suggests smaller rather than larger shade sail options be investigated along with their costs.

The Committee also suggests contacting the tot lot equipment supplier to see if they have shade sail retrofits similar to what has been seen on new equipment installed at other Township's parks.

Mr. Meehan said he would pass this information to the Township staff.

- **Bocce Courts**

The Committee discussed another alternative for moving the bocce courts. Grist Mill Park was suggested as a site for courts and the Committee thinks this would be a great alternative location. The current plan for Grist Mill includes a "placeholder", a sand volleyball court. The Committee feels a volleyball court would not get good use and, in its place, new bocce courts be substituted. Courts there would be convenient to parking, bathrooms and shade would be provided by placing the courts under cover of a roofed structure.

Bocce courts at Grist Mill would provide an activity for another group of uses and work well with the other court activities planned there i.e., pickleball and basketball. New bocce courts at Grist Mill would be constructed to the highest standards, using the right materials, and become the home for passionate players' use. The shade structure would help with any drainage issues and allow "all weather" use of the courts.

Until new courts at Grist Mill are designed and constructed, the current bocce courts at Fischer's Park would be repaired to make them useable for the passionate bocce players and all others, until new courts are constructed and ultimately, the courts at Fischer's Park would become "recreational courts" for casual use connected with the pavilion rentals. The Committee feels making the courts useable at Fischer's could be done by Public Works or if that is not workable given their heavy schedule then a contractor be engaged to do the work. Once they are made useable, they would be reworked by PW as their schedule allows and dressed up by the court users prior to play.

Actions that the Committee recommends that will be passed on to the Township staff:

- Start work to fix the bocce courts at Fischer's so they are useable.
- Modify the Grist Mill Park improvement plans to remove the volleyball courts and add bocce courts and a covering structure.
- Begin designing the new courts for inclusion in the Grist Mill Park plan.
- Include the Grist Mill bocce courts in future (2023) budgeting.
- Work toward getting full funding to implement the Grist Mill Park improvements and get them underway as soon as possible.

- **Do Not Feed the Ducks Signs**

Mr. Costlow looked at options for signage informing park users about what should and should not be fed to ducks along the creek and pond in Fischer's Park. The Committee agreed that an educational sign showing what they can be fed and what they should not be fed is what we would like to have in place. Using this feedback from the Committee he recommends a sign, a copy of which is attached. The Committee agrees this sign conveys the message it wants to deliver. The Committee recommends the Township use this as a template and have a "sign maker" prepare an attractive sign based on it. The Township would then have four fabricated for placement in Fischer's Park at locations to be chosen.

- **Native Tree Trails**

Mr. Costlow reached out to Penn State University main campus to make a connection about advice on planting native trees along a trail or in other areas of the Township. PSU has a Forestry Resources Program and they told him that the local person responsible for Urban Forestry is found in the Montgomery County Extension center in Creamery. PSU as well as Mr. Costlow sent emails to her asking her to contact him. By the time of this meeting, he noted she had not responded to him yet. He will follow up on having a conversation with her and see if she could look at the trail alignment and provide some input.

There was also a possibility of such help coming from Temple University, Ambler, or even from Tim Gallagher, a Township resident who has years of experience in landscape planning and maintenance work.

NEW BUSINESS

- **"Day of Service" in Fischer's Park**

The Township passed on to the OSPAC a request from a local church group looking for opportunities for a large group of about 15 to 20 members to perform "a day of service" in Fischer's Park. Mr. Meehan said he had already responded by e-mail to the representative asking for more information about the group. The response was that the group was of all ages and was looking for a park cleanup day that could be something all ages could take part in. Knowing that the PW crews are diligent in their park cleanup work, and a group of this size would not have enough to keep them busy even for an hour, Mr. Meehan asked the committee if there were any other suggestions they could think of. The committee had none at this time.

- **Problems with the Township "H" Pool**

Mr. Sponseller updated the Committee on a problem with a leak in the plumbing of the "H" pool at the community pool complex. This pool has been drained and because of the leak the Township has closed this pool for the season. The other pools in the complex remain open. He said the "H" pool is used to give lessons to young swimmers and with its closure these lessons are being moved to the competition pool which affects the activities of the swim team which uses it. He said this is far from ideal.

He said family membership in the pool has increased from previous years and the pool was making a comeback from the rough years of the pandemic and now this happens. He said he is getting a lot of blowback about the closure and that some members want their money back.

He continued saying that there was also a leak last year, but the pool was kept open and limped along even with the leak. Why not the same this year? The pool managers wonder how bad the leak is and feel they could limp along and keep the pool safe just as was done last year.

He said lack of information going to pool members about the reasons behind the closure has led to membership discontent. If there is nothing that can be done to have a safe H pool for the rest of the season, so be it, but as long as possible solutions to the problem exist and are not addressed and passed on to the membership, people are thinking the Township is not giving this problem adequate attention. Ms. Smith said this is certainly not the case.

She noted some of the circumstance of what was known about the leak; that it was in the piping directly under the pool in the area of the drains and that in order to get to the leak a portion of the pool would have to be excavated; parts for the repair are not readily available because of supply chain impacts and they would not be available until July; replacement and curing of the pool concrete would take the repair into the end of the pool season. She said does anyone really think the Township wants to close the pool for no good reason! She said anyone who thinks the Township isn't seriously concerned about the consequences of the closure is greatly mistaken.

With the information being provided, the Committee feels the closure of the H pool for the season because of the leak is a threat to any success of the pool this year. This closure seriously affects the "feeder" swim program which teaches younger kids how to swim and get to love being in the pool. Also, the lack of communication about the closure is causing a serious loss of credibility between the pool membership and the Township.

From what the Committee is hearing, pool members are going to petition to reverse the decision to close the H pool. The Committee also feels there is a communication problem between the Township and the membership about the details of the leak and about all the options that have been looked into to try to keep the pool open.

The committee is hearing several problems it feels need to be addressed.

- Pool users feel they are not getting sufficient information about the leak problem and what is being done to correct it. A full statement with details of the decision to close the pool need to be presented to the membership.
- How bad is the leak and is there a quick fix or could it limp along through the 2022 season? But limping along is not to be at a compromise of safety of the pool for its users.
- What are the consequences of "limping along" for the rest of the season with the leak (Further damage to pool facility, water damage to adjacent properties, treated water seeping into the adjacent creek, safety of the pool water?)
- The Committee suggests getting another pool company or pool facility expert to provide an independent second opinion on the leak and have them offer a solution and or a confirmation that closure for the season is the only option.

- Find out who other pool operators are using for pool maintenance and see how their maintenance compares to Towamencin's pool maintenance.
- If the leak is not fixable for 2022, it needs to be addressed at once upon pool closure in September and have the pool fully operational for 2023.

The Committee acknowledged that it doesn't know the full circumstances of the leak and what the solutions might be. We are not pool experts. We do however recognize that this closure will have severe impact on a recreation program that is very important to the Township and want to add our recommendation that if it is not being done already, within reason, everything be done in an "emergency timeline", to come up with a solution that will return the pool and its programs to normalcy for the remainder of the 2022 swim season and that this information toward this end be passed on to pool users in a timely manner.

- **Budget Items for 2023**

Mr. Meehan mentioned to the OSAPC Committee members that 2023 budget discussions are fast approaching and we need to begin thinking about 2023 budget requests. To help with this, he distributed two summaries of cost data. Both are attached to these minutes.

One was a cost summary based on Simone-Collins Park Evaluation Report prepared in 2021. He noted the Committee should ignore the timeline shown as headers to the columns and use only the cost recommendations shown for each park. The second was a summary he prepared based on information from the Township budgets from the last two years with the top part showing revenues as he interpreted them, and the bottom part being parks and open space expenditures.

He said some of these figures are "soft" since he interpolated by using other cost information. These will be refined as we go forward. One of those was the Impact Fee for the storage facility on Franklin St.

He noted to the Committee that for the rest of 2022 and 2023 there are not large revenues coming for OSPAC capital projects. Some are on the horizon but not "in the books" and cannot be counted on for budgeting. He asked the Committee to use this information and anything else at their disposal to think about recommendations for items to include in the 2023 OSPAC budget requests.

The first immediate response came from Ms. Blake who reminded everyone that for the past several years the OSPAC has given improvements to Grist Mill Park a high priority. A Grant from DCNR was received for its development and an added grant application has been submitted to DCED. Both reflect the priority given to this park.

After a short discussion, the consensus of the Committee at this time is the need for a Pavilion at Grist Mill Park should be given highest priority. Mr. Meehan noted that Supervisor Marino at last years budget meeting commented that he thought the pavilion as shown on the current plan is too small for the needs at this park. Mr. Meehan feels plan needs to be changed to adjust this and to add other items that have come up like the trail connecting this park to Grist mill Drive but these can come with time and should not delay making an appropriately sized pavilion the top priority for our 2023 budget request.

Mr. Meehan also noted that with the added users at Grist Mill, parking might become an issue. Mr. Fischer mentioned that if soccer fields were developed as originally planned at Nash School those fields could take the pressure off the soccer use at Grist Mill Park and relieve the parking. He said in the big picture having a field or fields there would be a good thing for the growing soccer program.

Mr. Vaitis mentioned he knows of a Group of investors interested in installing a turf soccer field perhaps in one of the Townships Parks. They are interested in building a community turf soccer facility and he thinks this would be a great idea. He thinks Grist Mill Park would be a good location,

elevating this park to a “crown jewel” status. The committee liked this possibility and discussed some of the good that comes from having a turf field, such as no maintenance and having it at Grist Mill where you have many other recreation facilities and activities in one location. Ms. Smith mentioned that she heard that other Townships including Montgomery Township are also looking at allowing a turf soccer field be installed there. The preliminary, general feeling of the committee was that if someone wanted to install a turf field at no cost, why not go for it. Mr. Vaitis will continue to talk to these investors and let us know more at future meetings.

Mr. Vaitis also proposed an arrangement with TYA to plant more trees in Grist Mill Park and at other ballfields in the township, where TYA take the responsibility for planting and maintaining the trees. The committee agrees with such an arrangement and would like to see it go forward.

Towamencin Day October 1st.

Mr. Meehan informed the Committee the Township is considering trying again for Towamencin Day in 2022. It would be on October 1, 2022. Ms. Cleary, the Township Events coordinator just needs to confirm that this works with the vendors.

With there being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM

**The next OSPAC meeting is on ~~July 14th 2022~~
July 18, 2022**

Respectfully submitted,

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