

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
July 18, 2022
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Dr. Richard Costlow
Todd Fisher
Dave Sponseller

Absent:

Michon Blake
Peter Murphy
Dan Vaitis
Laura Smith, Liaison Board of Supervisors

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 July 15th. 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.

Mr. Meehan also mention that the Board of Supervisors recently announced that Mr. Delamater will be leaving his position of Township Manager in September 2022.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Residents were in attendance. Mr. Meehan asked all present to introduce themselves and everyone did. The residents in attendance were Ms. Sue Wolfe and her husband Mr. John Ginther who live on Springer Road, adjacent to the northern portion of Fischer's Park and resident Mr. Eddie Dolan who along with his dad, Andrew, are avid "birders" in Fischer's Park. Sue noted the location of their property in reference to the area of Fischer's Park about which she has concerns. She prepared a summary of her concerns which was distributed to the Committee members. A copy of her concerns is attached to these minutes.

Ms. Wolfe summarized her concerns to the Committee. She said recently that the field in Fischer's Park near her back property was a brown, dead field and poisonous herbicides were being used in the farming of this Township property. Mr. Costlow wanted to note that he is a toxicologist (Dr. Costlow) very familiar with the chemicals noted in her summary and being used. He noted that if corn was the crop being grown, which is the case, it is a "cultural practice" that you have to use "Roundup" if you plant "Roundup Ready" corn. Ms. Wolfe said her point is that her ultimate goal is to have this as a meadow and not a farm. She said a meadow is more consistent with what a park should be about. A meadow is not going to impact anyone with health issues or impact the environment. When it was a meadow, she said they saw incredible growth there with new plant species and with a wonderful bird population.

Mr. Dolan expanded on the birding seen in this area. He said that prior to 2020 he and his dad and other birdwatchers found a few birds in this section of Fischer's Park not seen elsewhere in the park. Since as birdwatchers, they are always looking for different species, they then focused more in this area which at that time was meadow, and they found there, and exclusively there, at least 4 species

of bird that they have only ever seen in this meadow. This area is a unique bird habitat in terms of Fischer's Park.

Ms. Wolfe said as neighbors and stewards of the environment they would like to see this area as a meadow and not a farm and are presenting data in support of this request.

Mr. Costlow said he can agree with not allowing farming, but he cannot agree based on it being done to protect people from pesticides. He said there is no conclusive evidence that these pesticides/herbicides are not safe when dosed and applied properly adding that 'Roundup' although widely thought to be a human carcinogen, is not, and is one of the safest herbicides /pesticides in agricultural use. He agrees however that for the other reasons discussed, he is in favor of stopping farming in Township parks.

Ms. Wolfe said what they envision is a return to a meadow, but if the Township decides to allow continued farming, she had contacted Penn State Extension Agricultural services and spoke to Dr. Frankenfeld who suggested crops which do not need herbicides. Crops such as red clover and orchard grass. She continued, asking why is the Township leasing Park property to a farmer who farms one hundred acres next door to the park property? The Township does not get compensation from the farmer for its use. She asked the Committee how the farmer was granted permission to use the property. The Committee members did not have that answer since they were not aware farming was continuing in Township parks. She posed that same question to the Township staff in an email to which they responded the Township wanted to maintain good relations with the farmer and to lessen the load of maintaining the fields by Township public works department. Ms. Wolfe said if it is a meadow, what effort is needed from public works. Similar to Kibler Meadow Park, it would just need occasional mowing around the perimeter. She again asked why Fischer's Park was being farmed which is not consistent with park preservation which should be encouraging wild open space and supporting environmental health rather than environmental destruction.

After further discussion about

- why is farming being permitted,
- the health of the habitat,
- the safety of herbicides/pesticides,
- the potential for chemicals to get into the runoff leading into Towamencin Creek tributaries, and residents' well water,
- managing meadow areas,
- compensation for the use of Township Park property,
- how many Township owned parks and open space areas are being farmed?
- farming as part of Towamencin's heritage,
- what do the park master plans show for use of open areas,
- public works department availability to maintain meadows,
- MS4 impacts,
- legal obligations associated with the framing license,

After discussing several recommendations, the Committee wanted to propose a measured, focused recommendation on this matter.

A motion was made by Dr. Costlow that:

The Township terminate farming in Fischer's Park and Veterans Park unless or until we learn we have a legal obligation to continue.

Mr. Meehan seconded the motion. The Committee members voted in favor of this recommendation with none objecting or abstaining.

The Committee noted that action on this recommendation needs to be taken very soon and the farmers notified so that they do not make preparation for farming these areas next year or anytime in the future. Mr. Meehan said he would pass this recommendation on to Ms. Smith and the Township staff.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Meeting of June 13, 2022

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes of the June 13, 2022, OSPAC meeting as drafted and distributed. There were none. Mr. Sponseller made a motion to accept the minutes as drafted and distributed. Mr. Fischer seconded the motion. All Committee members voted to approve the 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 trail construction is scheduled to begin on July 25, 2022, with the sub-structure for the bridge crossing the creek to be done around end of September and the new bridge structure set in early October. In the meantime, other trail work will be underway. All work is expected to be completed by December 5, 2022.

The contractor has requested a time extension up to this date and it is being reviewed.

- **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. are now being prepared by Gilmore and Associates and will be 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. The preparation of bid documents is still underway with no new developments since the last OSPAC meeting.

- **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. The Township is waiting to hear from DCED about the grant, but this is not unusual since announcements are usually made in the fall.

- **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. He said the pool water level drop in the pool has now been resolved and the H pool is now re-opened to the pool membership.

There was a brief discussion about what caused the pool water level drop. Mr. Meehan said a pool leak detection professional was brought in to evaluate the pool water level drop. He said based on his understanding of what this contractor found, there were four potential sources of the loss of water level. One and the most minor was the leaks along the interface of the stainless coping and the concrete pool. These were repaired immediately by the contractor. The second was at the hydrostatic relief valve which might have gotten stuck in the open position while the pool was first being filled but then corrected itself as the water filled the pool. The contractor said this happens sometimes after the pool is empty over the winter and is first refilled. The valve was now confirmed to

be operating correctly. The third was in the drain return line to the pump house but by testing water loss by isolating different feed and drain lines, it appears that if this was leaking it was not significant enough to account for the large water loss. That left the pressure pipe leading to the slide. When it was taken offline, the water loss decreased. The thinking is that this pressurized pipe is the primary source of the water loss. By taking the slide offline and fencing that area off, the pool could be reopened.

Mr. Sponseller want to note that the pool Mangers, Ken Hall and Matt Potts, did a thorough, data driven job of testing and isolating pipes and pumps and taking and recording readings to help with the solution. He added that they are doing an excellent job managing the pool this year, greatly contributing to its successful year. It would be great for Towamencin to have them as pool managers in future years.

Mr. Sponseller continued that in view of the problems with the H pool, there needs to be a debrief at the end of the season with Standguard and the Township on the issues which occurred while first filling the pool to prevent them from occurring again. Early in 2022, Standguard requested permission to fill the pool, but Township denied the request. StandGuard's pool experience might have been able to troubleshoot the water level drop problem early and come up with a workable solution and avoid the shutdown of the H pool and blowback from the membership that occurred this year.

The Committee discussed roles and responsibilities of the pool manager and the Township regarding the pool's systems, and concluded that if we have a pool manager, the manager should be in control of the pool and pool systems from the beginning to the end of the pool usage each year. Also discussed was communication between the parties involved.

After the Committee's discussion, Ms. Becker made a motion:

If the Township is having a pool manager (StandGuard) manage the pool, the Township should have them manage the pool and its systems from start to finish of the pool season.

Mr. Sponseller seconded the motion. The Committee members voted in favor of this recommendation with none objecting or abstaining.

- **Kibler Meadows Park Parking Area**

Mr. Meehan reported the Kibler Meadows Parking area work is underway and is about 80% complete. The parking area is fenced with a post and rail fence, the lot has been excavated and stone base has been placed. Only the placement of milling surfacing remains to be done. The millings are not yet available because the 2022 paving work in the Township has not gotten started yet.

Mr. Meehan also told the Committee that nearby residents circulated a petition asking that the parking lot be stopped because of concerns that hunters hunting in nearby Evansburg Park will use the parking area during hunting season. To his knowledge, no action has been taken on the petition. Mr. Delamater indicated some kind of signs would be placed at the location saying it is for use of users of Kibler Meadow Park. Mr. Meehan also said he provided some background information to Mr. Delamater related to this Committee's recommendation to install the parking lot and provide a safe access to Kibler Meadow Park for all township residents.

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

Mr. Meehan said on July 8th, he and Mr. Delamater and Mr. Hillmantel met with Mr. Larry McCullough, a representative with General Recreation, Inc. a shade sail provider to get his thoughts on shade sails at this site. Mr. McCullough reviewed the site, took measurements especially between playground equipment pieces. His conclusion was that the site is difficult to install shade sails. This was based on the close distance (close to the six-foot minimum) between play equipment and shade sail poles and

other site restraints. When this distance is not available, the other option is to cantilever the supports to hold the sails which makes the supports larger but has the benefit that if the cantilever poles were installed outside the fenced tot lot, it would avoid cutting into rubberized surface which needs to be carefully cut into and then repaired in order to install foundations. Mr. Hillmantel also pointed out that an old swimming pool at this location had been broken up and buried and that might also cause excavation problems.

Mr. McCullough said cantilevers from outside the tot lot might be the best solution and are not unreasonable priced. He said cantilevers seem workable for the Seesaw and the slide but for the swings, the sail would have to be so large and high and the cantilever so long that it would not make sense to install a cantilever support there. He added that attachment of sails to the equipment itself might be an option but generally equipment manufacturers do not allow this because the equipment is not engineered to take the additional loads. He said this is especially applies to swing sets where manufacturers are do not want to account for any additional torque loads on their equipment.

He said he would take all his measurements and information and get back to Mr. Delamater with a proposal and pricing for what he could do under the circumstances.

As an option, during the Committee's discussion of the required distance between poles and the play equipment, Mr. Costlow suggested padding the shade sails' poles to be able to put them closer than six feet to the equipment.

- **Bocce Courts**

Mr. Meehan reported that on the same day he met the Township staff regarding the shade sails, they stopped at the bocce courts to talk about what was being done about them.

At that meeting Mr. Delamater said the township engineer was tasked with coming up with a solution to the drainage problems at the existing bocce courts. He said new courts at Grist Mill Park are not out of the question, they just are dependent on funding. The township plans to make the bocce courts in Fischer's Park playable and if an additional grant is received from DCED, build new courts at Grist Mill Park. Mr. Hillmantel said the surfacing placed on the bocce courts this spring is a bocce court mix which was what was asked for. He also said public works is too busy and cannot continually spend time fixing these courts.

Following this meeting, Mr. Meehan told the Committee he contacted New Enterprise Lime and Stone to ask about the mix and get advice about the problems we are having with condition of the surface. The representative said this material is not maintenance free. It requires a maintenance plan and regular maintenance.

Mr. Costlow said he has four players who have volunteered to perform "light" maintenance on the courts, but they need the tools to do it such as wide rakes, a broom and roller. These tools along with a storage shed for them was requested from the township years ago but has never materialized. He also mentioned that the courts needed to be shaded preferably with a roof like the courts in Skippack and if that is not part of the plan for Fischer's Park, we should just drop the plan to make the courts at Fischer's useable. Mr. Meehan said the plan is to have a cover over the courts at Grist Mill but not at Fischer's.

- **Do Not Feed the Ducks Signs**

The committee has selected its preference for a sign. However, there are concerns about possible trademark infringement for using the sign seen on the internet. Mr. Costlow suggested using clip art to avoid such infringement issues.

Mr. Meehan said he contacted an artist about a sign design similar to the one the Committee has chosen. He has not gotten a response yet.

The Committee will continue to pursue getting the signs.

- **Native Tree Trails**

There was nothing new to report this month. It will be kept on the agenda for future meetings and information and recommendations sought from Penn State Extension will be pursued.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Budget Items for 2023**

Mr. Meehan prepared a summary of projects request in and approved in the 2022 budget and each items status. This was used as a start of Committee discussions for projects for the 2023 budget. Mr. Meehan noted that the one item the Committee had agreed should be at the top of requests for 2023 was a pavilion at Grist Mill Par. Mr. Delamater cautioned that the pavilion was included in the Grist Mill Grant Application and if it is requested in the 2023 budget it will be put aside pending the outcome of the grant awards. So, the Committee needs to have other priority items for 2023.

The Committee discussed possibilities. Mr. Fisher noted the need for additional soccer fields to take off the pressure to squeeze fields in at Grist Mill Park if the new facilities are funded there. He suggested a new soccer field along the powerlines in Bustard Park. Mr. Meehan suggested revisiting the planned soccer field at Nash school as a low-cost project that could possibly be implemented with little work. He suggested material coming available from the trail work might be able to be utilized in grading a new field. Mr. Fischer said he would talk to Mr. Marino to get his thoughts from a construction perspective on what needs to be done there.

Mr. Costlow suggested budgeting for roofs over the Fischer's Park bocce courts and other courts. He also suggested converting other basketball and tennis courts to pickleball courts.

All these items will be discussed further going forward to get a consensus on what the Committee will request in the 2023 budget.

Veterans Park Draft Plan

Mr. Meehan noted that Simone-Collins has completed the draft of the Veterans Park Master Plan. He said he is waiting to receive a hard copy of the plan which is quite lengthy at 212 pages. He will bring a copy to the next meeting so the Committee can get a preview of the plan.

Towamencin Day October 8th.

Mr. Meehan informed the Committee the Township has decided Towamencin Day will be on October 8th, 2022. Ms. Cleary, the Township Events coordinator has confirmed that this date works best for vendors.

With there being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM

The next OSPAC meeting is on August 8, 2022

Respectfully submitted,

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