

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
March 13, 2023
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Michon Blake
Dr. Richard Costlow
Robert DeHaven
Katie Cleary, Towamencin Special Events Coordinator

Absent:

Dave Sponseller
Todd Fischer
Dan Vaitis
Joe Rumsey
Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to OSPAC Committee

Chairperson Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM

All present participated in the pledge of allegiance.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan noted that he records the audio of the meeting for his convenience in preparing the minutes.

Mr. Meehan also noted that he met with Dave Kraynik and Dennis Carney on March 8th and they provided a verbal update on items the OSPAC has been following. Their update comments will be passed on to the Committee as shown in the minutes as "Mr. Kraynik or Mr. Carney reported" as the individual items are discussed in tonight's meeting.

Mr. Meehan noted that five women bocce players were in attendance. He welcomed them and asked them to introduce themselves to the Committee. They were Sharon Stigler, Marsha Ehrhardt, Jean Rowan, Nancy Adams, and Sue Livesey.

Mr. Costlow spoke about the survey regarding potential pickleball court locations that the OSPAC members were asked to review and complete prior to tonight's meeting. The data was to be used in selecting a site. He said he got only six of the ten surveys and didn't have the data he was expecting and felt without the remainder, the results would not be a true indication of a preferred location. He asked that this item be deferred to the next meeting and he would again ask the members to submit their completed surveys.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan asked if the bocce player group had any public comments.

Ms. Stigler said bocce in Fischer's Park is important to the women's group and they would like to see the court's drainage problems corrected so they can again get back to playing as they had for many years. She said they played on the courts for a long time and for their first four years the courts were fine. She had no idea why they became unusable after that but wanted to be able to return to playing there. There were no other comments from members of the public attending.

Mr. Meehan said he had gotten an e-mail public comment from a resident and he read the e-mail to the committee. It said:

Hi Joe

I am not sure if you accept email public comment for the Open Space Meetings but wanted to express a comment about the possible chicken ordinance.

A neighbor that backs up to my property had chickens (in violation of code) but I was not bothered by it at first. Then they added quail to their flock. Apparently, quail shouldn't be raised with chickens (quick google search) and problems arose.

This neighbor then decided to let the quail loose. In their words “they can just meet their maker.” So, there were quail running around my yard and other neighbors. We collected as many as we could and called around to see where we could safely take them. Those neighbors, while all this was going on, were in the process of moving. They obviously didn’t care about the quail and just needed to get rid of them. I share this with you as sometimes there are unforeseen situations that can arise as I’m sure you are aware of. I think we’re better off not changing the chicken ordinance. So many properties are connected (like mine) and some are in close proximity to neighbors. You can’t regulate neighbor behavior, and the police have better things to do.

*Thank you
Tina Gallagher*

Mr. Meehan said we would be talking about the chicken ordinance later in our meeting. There were no other Public Comments.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES - February 13, 2023, Meeting

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes of the February 13, 2023 OSPAC meeting as drafted and distributed. There were none. Mr. DeHaven made a motion to approve the minutes as drafted. 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

TA Trail - Valley View Way to Trumbauer Road

Mr. Kraynik reported that the final paving of the path between the new bridge and Valley View Way is waiting on warmer, more favorable weather. In addition, there is other miscellaneous work that needs to be done which will be finished once the contractor remobilizes. Mr. Meehan said portions of the trail are being used by walkers and because the trail is still not complete this is being discouraged. The Township has added vinyl fence at the ends to make the public aware the trail is not open.

Mr. Meehan noted that in his meeting with Mr. Kraynik and Mr. Carney they reported they expect the trail construction will be completed in the coming spring.

KRT Trail - PECO Powerline Crossing on Kriebel Rd to Green Lane Rd

Mr. Kraynik reported bids were received for this project on February 28th. He reported the low bid was about \$135,000 and was quite a bit lower than the second bidder by about \$70,000. The low bid contractor has indicated it will live up to its low bid and construct the trail as shown in the bid documents. This section of trail construction should be underway in early spring.

Updates of Budget Items approved for 2023.

Site for a new soccer field

Mr. Kraynik reported CKS is looking at locating a field at Green Lane Park adjacent to the sewer treatment plant rather than at Nash School which was found to be too small for the size field being considered. He reported CKS is gathering topographic engineering information at the present time. This review is just in the preliminary stages at this point and no conclusions on the suitability of this site have been made.

Drinnon Park Improvements

Mr. Meehan said the preliminary path alignment was reviewed with Mr. Hillmantel, the P.W, Director, who felt he could construct the path on the proposed alignment and stay within budget. Considering concerns expressed at the last OSPAC meeting about the possibility the original alignment might infringe into an open lawn play area used for pick-up games, Mr. Meehan said he revised the alignment away from that area to maximize the lawn area. Further Mr. Meehan said the Township is proposing the path be widened from six foot to 9 foot for ease of construction. (Paving at 9-foot width is more efficient because of paver width limitations).

Mr. DeHaven questioned adding more impervious surface to the path with the widening. The Committee discussed the pros and cons of a paved (impervious) surface and although the OSPAC favors pervious surfaces, there are reasons including ADA compliance where a gravel (pervious) surface will not work.

Ms. Blake commented that the gravel path in Firehouse Park is in constant need of maintenance due to erosion and washouts.

In addition, the committee felt having a paved path would give the neighborhood a “wheeled toy friendly” path for toddlers and youngsters. Mr. Costlow said we should not dismiss gravel paths out of hand.

The alignment is still not finalized, and Mr. Meehan said the committee should meet with the neighborhood residents and let them comment on the proposed plan. Mr. Meehan said he will discuss arranging a residents’ meeting with the Township staff.

Butch Clemens Field - Engineering for Pavilions/restroom

Mr. Meehan reported he has not gotten feedback from TYA regarding their preferred location of a restroom/pavilion facility. He said he had requested the information several times and will now ask again.

In the meantime, Mr. Carney has been investigating connections to exiting utilities in the area around home plate and the left field foul pole. The foul pole site is shown on an old drawing as a potential site for restrooms. Mr. Carney provide the OSPAC with a copy of an old Butch Clemens Field site grading survey drawing which Mr. Meehan showed the Committee. Mr. Carney will continue to investigate utility connections.

Bocce Courts Repair and Improvements

Mr. Kraynik reported the bocce court rehabilitation bids were received on February 28th and there was only one bidder who bid a cost of \$76,000 for the retaining wall, paver walkway and drainage construction. The add-on work for the replacement of the court material was bid at \$20,000. Combined, these bids far exceed the budget. Ms. Blake, who has experience of reviewing project costs, said prices have risen greatly recently, sometimes seeming to almost double from one day to the next so higher bids at this time should not be unexpected.

Mr. Meehan also noted for the benefit of the women bocce players who were present that the shade structures requested at the bocce courts were not approved to be included in the 2023 budget.

The Committee discussed getting only one bid and the fact that the bidder is a landscape contractor and not someone who has experience in bocce courts. The Committee feels bocce court construction experience/expertise is very important in obtaining a final product that will be acceptable for continued use. Mr. Costlow added that the bid documents should be specific about a contractor’s qualifications and ask bidders for demonstrated experience.

Mr. Meehan reported the BOS at its March 8 meeting, decided to defer making a decision on the bid until CKS can check on the possibility a COSTARS contractor who did not bid, could perform the work. CKS said other contractors saw the estimated price and knew they couldn’t do the work for that price, so they didn’t bid. The Committee will wait on the results of CKS’ findings.

Tree Planting for 2023

Mr. Costlow presented a plan he prepared for planting trees along the Kriebel Road Trail and the TA trail based on information he had obtained from Penn State Urban Forestry and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. He said he also spoke to Hatfield Township’s Park Director to see what he does to maintain freshly planted trees. He summarized his findings indicating suggestions were made to plant species like river birch trees in riparian areas; plan to plant trees of all tree species further apart initially and then come back and plant additional trees in between to vary the ages and allow for tree removal without damaging the aesthetic years from now.

He discussed other findings from his discussions with the Hatfield Parks Director including the need to water the new plantings every week for two years. Expect that care of new trees will be very labor intensive even if using “gator bags”.

Mr. Meehan thanked Mr. Costlow for his work in researching and developing the plan. Mr. Meehan added that there are other factors beyond spacing that need to be considered for a planting plan. He said there are underground utilities and the new Kriebel Road interceptor sewer line footprint as well as

wetlands that need to be avoided. Mr. Costlow added that he recalls Mr. Hillmantel not wanting trees too close to roadways to avoid leaves collecting on the road.

Mr. Meehan said plotting trees along this alignment needed to be noted on a more detailed plan showing all the obstructions that need to be avoided. He said he was attempting to obtain a larger scale drawing along the sewer line showing a more easily read plan for laying out the trees. He said he would get such a full size plan and forward it to Mr. Costlow.

Mr. Costlow also added that because watering of the newly planted trees was critical to their survival and Public Works Department manpower is stretched so thin, that Towamencin might follow Hatfield's lead and contract out the initial maintenance to ensure that it gets done on a regular schedule.

The Committee discussed the number and timing of planting trees along these trails. Because a contract for planting needs to be drawn up, planting in the fall of 2023 is better than rushing for spring planting in 2023. Mr. Costlow suggested the trees along the existing gravel trail parallel to Kriebel Road be given first priority and the trees along the new Kriebel Road Trail which is already within a woodland corridor be given second priority.

Possible Turf Field at Grist Mill Park

Mr. Vaitis was not able to attend tonight's meeting. He will update his conversations regarding a potential turf field at a future meeting.

Potential Pickleball Court Site

Mr. Meehan said there were some new thoughts from the Township staff regarding a pickleball court location and parking at Fischer's Park for major Township events. He said he will combine both topics in one discussion.

Mr. Kraynik and Mr. Carney reported when looking at the parking issue they thought an easy solution was to construct a permanent parking area on a portion of the ballfield now used for overflow parking and maybe at the same time construct pickleball courts adjacent to the parking. They reported they are leaning toward this as a solution for both items.

The committee discussed this new thought on a solution. Ms. Blake asked if besides the overflow parking, did anyone use the ballfield? It was noted that because of an unwritten restriction on organized sports in Fischer's it is used for occasional "pickup games". The field is large enough that some permanent parking could be accommodated as well as pickleball courts and still leave an area, albeit smaller, for a ballfield. Mr. Meehan said that although it should not influence any decision on these changes, he wanted to note that this part of Fischer's Park is in Worcester Township.

Mr. Costlow asked when could pickleball courts be constructed and be available to fill the demand for courts that people want. He again suggested going back to converting the tennis court at Heebner Park to pickleball courts. He said this is cheaper and faster than building new courts. He said he has done the research and finds that he feels decision makers are basing decisions regarding noise from pickleball based on outdated information. He felt we should use information presented by people who "know about sound". He said there are acoustic barriers that could be added to address the sound concerns at Heebner Park. Ms. Blake asked why the Township should spend money on a questionable location when we have more viable sites.

Mr. Meehan noted that this was discussed at last month's OSPAC meeting and the committee saw potential other problems at the Heebner site, including parking on residential streets, lack of restrooms, as well as the sound concerns. At that meeting, members of the committee didn't feel this was a good choice. The Committee again at tonight's meeting expressed the same thoughts.

Ms. Blake recommended the Committee move forward in gathering the remaining survey data, reviewing it and making a list of recommendations by priority and forwarding the list to the Township staff. The Committee agreed to make this a focus item at next month's meeting and agree on a list of sites and send them forward to the Township Staff and Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Costlow asked if we would be providing cost information with these recommendations. Mr. Meehan said we should leave this task for the Township Engineer. He also asked if other Committee members could complete his survey if they chose to. Mr. Meehan said all input would be taken.

Insect Hotel

Mr. Meehan said he spoke to Mr. Hillmantel about installing the insect hotel which was delivered to Public Works. Mr. Hillmantel said he has the mounting post fabricated and will install it as soon as he has manpower available to do it. He is hoping to get it done next week.

Interior Review of Arneith House

Mr. Meehan noted that at his meeting with Mr. Kraynik and Mr. Carney, when he mentioned "touring" the house, the reply was "don't wait too long." Mr. Meehan said at that meeting he was given a cost quote for the demolition, indicating to him the Township was looking into it. The Committee was surprised at the low cost (\$21,000) for the demolition. The Committee also felt that if demolition was imminent, why spend the time "touring" the house. Committee members noted that there are some items from the house that should be preserved as memorabilia of Fischer's Park, one specifically being a "dinner bell" on the porch. Ms. Cleary said she would still like to look inside the house. Mr. Meehan said he will pass this information to Mr. Kraynik.

Memorials in Fischer's Park

Mr. Meehan said he mentioned creating a policy for memorials in Fischer's Park to Mr. Kraynik and Mr. Carney. They asked if there was a problem and mentioned they had not heard of any problems from Public Works. Because this could be a very sensitive issue with a family dealing with a loss, they strongly suggested not establishing a policy unless there is a problem. They said from their experience with similar emotional issues, it can get very complex and you can stir up emotions that add another aspect to the issues as you try to fix it. They recommended leaving this issue alone unless there is a problem. The Committee agreed with this recommendation and for now will not look at creating a policy.

Mr. Meehan also added that Mr. Rumsey had volunteered to find out more and check if others have a policy. He had limited success in getting information. He was not in attendance tonight, and Mr. Meehan said he will inform him of the Committee's decision.

Towamencin Day

Mr. Meehan noted Towamencin Day will be held on May 13th and the OSPAC will have a presence at a table. He said he will ask for commitments from Committee members to be present for some time that afternoon. He will get availability information from members at the next OSPAC meeting in April.

Grist Mill Park Engineering Plans

Mr. Meehan said Simone-Collins (S-C) has been asked by the Township to prepare engineering plans for the bidding of the Grist Mill Park Phase I improvements.

Since the first grant application years ago, some of the concepts of the park have been rethought and changes proposed. Mr. Meehan said he wants S-C to consider this when preparing the engineering plans and wants to consider inviting Peter Simone to meet with the Committee and discuss them. Maybe the April meeting if possible. We would also try to have Mr. Kraynik or Mr. Carney attend.

Chicken Ordinance Change

Mr. Meehan said the Township chicken ordinance is outside the topics the OSPAC reviews but Ms. Becker said she wanted to share some information that came up at the Planning Commission meeting. She said there have been requests by residents, particularly those living in the panhandle with larger lots to change the Township Ordinance on allowing residents to raise chickens on their property. The proposed change would not allow roosters but would reduce the acreage required to have chickens. She was just passing this on for information. She had some information about ordinances in other Townships. Mr. DeHaven took a copy and said he would scan it and send to all Committee members.

Connectivity Study

Ms. Becker also mentioned that the time period allowed for answering the online Connectivity Survey is coming to an end in early April. She recommended that anyone who has not completed the survey do it as soon as possible so their data will be included in the study results.

With there being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.

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

The next OSPAC meeting is on April 10, 2023