

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

**Attending:**

Joseph Meehan  
Nancy Becker  
Michon Blake  
Dan Vaitis  
Todd Fisher  
Dr. Richard Costlow  
Dave Sponseller  
Joseph Rumsey  
Robert DeHaven

Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to OSPAC Committee

Chairperson Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM

All present participated in the pledge of allegiance.

**OPENING COMMENTS**

Mr. Meehan noted that he invited the new township manager, David Kraynik, to attend tonight's meeting and meet the Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee and provide a first-hand report on the parks and trail projects that the committee has been following. He noted Mr. Kraynik's experience, saying he has many years in municipal government having worked in Cheltenham Township, Upper Merion Township and most recently in East Coventry Township. The Committee members introduced themselves as did Mr. Kraynik.

Mr. Kraynik thanked the committee members for volunteering and giving up their time to make the Township a better place. He said he appreciates what the committee does and values its input.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no residents or others in attendance, so there were no public comments.

**APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES** January 16, 2023 Meeting

Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments or concerns about the minutes of the January 16, 2023 OSPAC meeting as drafted and distributed. There were none. Ms. Becker made a motion to approve the minutes as drafted. Mr. Vaitis seconded the motion. All Committee members voted to approve the minutes. These approved minutes will now be posted on the Township website.

**DISCUSSIONS WITH THE NEW TOWNSHIP MANAGER**

Mr. Meehan invited Mr. Kraynik to tell the committee what his expectation are of the OSPAC and also what he thought the Township's expectations are.

Mr. Kraynik said at this point he cannot speak for the Townships expectations, but his expectations of any citizen's volunteer committee are that the committee is the eyes and ears for the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and him, and in particular for this committee on matters regarding recreation infrastructure and parks in the township. Ideas for changes and improvements are what he would expect so the committee should come to him with advice and recommendations. He said email works very effectively and he will promptly respond. He also suggested the committee members come to the BOS meeting and provide their thoughts in that forum.

Mr. Vaitis asked if there was anyone on the Township staff who was in charge of recreation. The separation of recreation activities from the OSPAC was discussed with Mr. Kraynik saying there is not anyone on staff devoted purely to recreation activities although Ms. Cleary who was also present at this OSPAC meeting coordinates Township Special Events which are recreational to an extent. He noted she has a great program of events planned for 2023.

Mr. Meehan pointed out that youth athletic activities are organized and managed by the Towamencin Youth Association (TYA) which is a separate organization from the Township. TYA and the Township work closely in coordinating the programs and TYA uses the Township athletic fields for its baseball, softball and soccer activities. The other activities closely linked to the Township but separate are the activities at the Township swimming pool.

Mr. Costlow commented that he feels the Township, through TYA is doing great job with youth activities but not a great job for seniors. Ms. Smith noted that we are moving in that direction but the pace is not great.

As an example, for background information for Mr. Kraynik, Mr. Costlow used an illustration of bocce court improvements saying this has been discussed and various solutions made spanning years, but the courts are still not useable. He blamed the "process." A committee discussion followed pointing out the frustration and failure of the "process." Different people and different committees have opinions on the solutions at various stages and as these go back and forth, the project spins in place and doesn't get done.

Mr. Vaitis repeated his theory expressed last year, based on his experience, that the committee has too many balls in the air at any one time and so there are projects in process but not complete. He suggested we are biting off more than we can chew. He suggested raising two or three items to the top of the list and prioritize them.

Mr. Meehan said he sees the need to have several "priority projects" which we push and devote the most time to, but we should also be able to handle some other smaller recommendations that pop up that might be handled easily. He said the Committee is capable of reviewing items and making recommendation, however the process leading to their implementation gets them bogged down.

The committee, for Mr. Kraynik's benefit, discussed concerns about funding and communication aspects between all involved in implementation. Ms. Smith said there needs to be better facilitation between the OSPAC Committee, the Public Works Committee and the Finance Committee. Mr. Costlow suggested perhaps we are not providing enough information or are guessing that the others are thinking the same as us.

Mr. Kraynik said that is the reason he is here tonight. He wants to hear these concerns. The committee gave several examples of processes that stopped, likely due to poor communications either before our recommendation was made or after when the other committees had to act on them. The Committee recognizes the fiscal constraints and recognizes that the PW Department has other priorities and both of these are major contributors to the process stalling. Mr. Kraynik asked if the OSPAC meets regularly with PW. Mr. Meehan said we had met at least once a year but that stopped during the pandemic. He said he meets occasionally on site with Mr. Hillmantel to discuss specific projects and gave several examples. He said he values the practical input the Mr. Hillmantel provides.

Mr. Kraynik says he is a member of both the Finance Committee and the Public Works Committees and he will work towards having the process work as it should. He also meets with Mr. Meehan on at least a monthly basis to provide and get input from the OSPAC. He also mentioned that Mr. Carney will be on the PW Committee and will be helping.

Mr. Costlow said the work done on OSPAC projects by PW is well done and he understands the decision makers sometime lean toward having PW do them because of lower cost but then find out PW has higher priorities so our recommendations don't get done. Ms. Becker also pointed out that there have been instances where budgeted funding falls short on an item and within that same budget another OSPAC item is being withdrawn yet we don't have the ability to have the money allocated to the withdrawn item transferred to cover the shortfall on the other. Mr. Kraynik said that if both items were in the approved budget, he has no problem looking at such transfers. He said when this happens, he will look at the specifics and if its reasonable, advocate to fill the gap for the project needing additional funding.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Meehan said he wanted to mention several items before getting into the old business project updates.

The first was that Simone-Collins, (S-C) was authorized by the BOS to prepare a grant application to Montgomery County seeking \$200,000 to be used in combination with DCED grant the Township received toward the improvements at Grist Mill Park. If the application is awarded, the total available for this high priority improvement which includes basketball and pickleball courts, a pavilion a playground and other miscellaneous work will amount to \$450,000. The application wis due March 1<sup>st</sup> and the committee has been asked to provide a letter of support for the project. Mr. Meehan said this letter will be very similar to the letter we all signed for the DCED grant application and since the timeline is tight, rather than circulating it for everyone's signature, he will be signing it as Chairman of the Committee. Mr. Kraynik noted the BOS will be taking action on a resolution approving this grant application request at their next meeting.

Secondly, Mr. Meehan asked Mr. Kraynik for confirmation that the swimming pool is on track for a good start of the 2023 season. Mr. Kraynik said he is in monthly communication with Standguard, and has communicated the desire passed to him by the OSPAC that Standguard bring back last years pool managers who got excellent reviews on the pool operation for 2022 but he has not gotten a commitment yet. He said Stanguard has submitted its budget for 2023 and in it expressed concerns that with rising costs, especially for the managers, they are under a financial hardship. He said the staff is looking at this.

Mr. Sponseller asked about involving the StandGuard's pool mangers in filling the pool initially. The committee discussed the initial filling of the pool which in 2022 was suspected as contributing to the loss of water in the H pool and shutting it down for weeks. The committee suggested the StandGuard's pool managers who have years of experience with pool operations be involved in the filling to head off a repeat of the problems. Mr. Kraynik noted that this comes with a cost and would be another cost added to an already high budget.

Mr. Meehan noted the original lease with StandGuard for managing the pool is more than five years old and it might be a good time to revisit it. There might be ways for both StandGuard and the Township to agree on ways to manage the increasing costs.

Ms. Smith said the Township absolutely cannot lose the pool and provided background about the Towamencin swim team pool feeding the High School swim team, making the pool and its membership an asset for the entire North Penn area. Ms. Becker said the YMCA is looking at the possibility of have a swim camp at the Towamencin pool. Mr. Kraynik said they should discuss this with StandGuard first.

### **OLD BUSINESS – 2023 Budgeted Projects Updates**

#### **TA Trail - Valley View Way To Trumbauer Road**

Mr. Meehan updated the committee on the construction status for the trail. Work is on hold right now due to weather restrictions on the paving operation which is not complete and the only major work remaining to be done. In addition, there are other minor items and a final cleanup still remaining to be done. He also noted that he met with Mr. Carlin, Gilmore's design engineer and looked at several items that might need to be addressed., Examples given were a small amount of fencing, and some erosion control "armoring" at a pipe crossing. Mr. Kraynik asked Mr. Carlin to look at the budget and see if we could afford these items and if we can, plan to do them. Mr. Carlin will look at the costs to date and report this back to Mr. Kraynik. Once weather warms up we expect the contractor will come back and finish all the work and then after a final inspection the trail will be turned over to the Township.

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

Mr. Kraynik said this project was advertised for bids on January 27th. Bids are due February 28. Knowing this, Mr. Meehan added we hope to be able to complete this section of trail this summer.

### **Nash School Soccer Field**

Mr. Kraynik provided this update. He said Mr. Carney started work last week to help in a consulting capacity with specific projects including a soccer field. Nash school is no longer being considered. Instead CKS has been asked to survey Green Lane Park adjacent to the treatment plant as the site for the soccer field. Mr. Carney will use the survey information plus the utility locations and then report on his findings for the suitability of a field there. This is just preliminary site work. Mr. Vaitis asked about the size of a field at this location and noted that pickleball was also be considered somewhere at this park. Mr. Kraynik said what is being done now is just preliminary location feasibility work. The review of the survey will determine where and how large a soccer field would work at this location. He said he will continue to meet on a monthly basis with Mr. Meehan and provide updates as this feasibility work continues. Mr. Meehan added that with all the engineering and construction work that needs to be done at this site, we should not expect that this field will be useable for soccer in the near future.

### **Drinnon Park Access Path**

Mr. Meehan showed the plan he was given by CKS with his proposed path added. His proposed path was adjusted based on a meeting on site with Mr. Hillmantel. Mr. Hillmantel also felt that since he would need to rent some equipment for the work, once you have the equipment on site for the path coming from Tennis Circle why not continue it to the Drinnon Way cul-de-sac. He felt it would not cost much more to continue to this point than what was originally budgeted and it would take advantage of the on-site equipment. He was going to look more closely at the costs to do the path the entire length and compare it to the budgeted costs.

Mr. Fisher asked if the path would infringe on the open lawn area of the park which neighborhood kids might use for play. Mr. Meehan said this was a good point and it was not looked at as part of the plan but will be added to the considerations. Mr. Meehan also said we also need to meet with the neighbors and let them know what we are planning, and this will also be an opportunity to see if the open field is used for other activities. We will wait for an alignment revision and Mr. Hillmantel's review of costs before moving forward.

### **Butch Clemens Field - Engineering for Pavilions/restroom**

Mr. Meehan reported that the first step in the engineering for a restroom/pavilions facility is to determine a preferred location in the park of the facility. He said he sent a request to TYA asking them to respond with their site preference. He asked for their response in time for our March 2023 meeting. Mr. Kraynik asked that when we get the response, we pass it to him and Mr. Carney because this is one of the projects that he will be helping to move along, and he has already started looking at utility locations. It was noted that the budget for 2023 is only for the engineering work for the facilities in the amount of \$28,000.

### **Bocce Courts Repair and Improvements**

Mr. Kraynik updated the committee on progress. He said the work has been advertised for bids. Bids are due on February 28<sup>th</sup>. He said he included in the bid request an “add-on” item for the contractor to rebuild the courts after the drainage improvements are made. CKS has spec’d out the court work separately and the Township will then compare this cost to the budget to decide whether to do the work with in-house forces or with a contractor..

Mr. Costlow asked if the contractors had experience in the court rebuild work. Mr. Kraynik said this is specialty work and could be performed by the contractor or be subbed out to a specialty contractor. This will be part of the due diligence review of the bids and the add-on will depend on the bids when compared to the budget.

### **Tree Planting for 2023**

At Green Lane Park . TYA has provided their input on tree locations along the first bas line behind the stands in the park. Mr. Hillmantel reviewed the locations and accepts their suggested locations. He passed his concurrence to Mr. Kraynik who then gave the go ahead to purchase and plant these five trees. They will be purchased with the budgeted funds for tree planting and Public Works will plant them. Mr. Hillmantel said he will look to plant them as soon as the weather gets warmer and soil conditions in the park allow.

Along Kriebel Road Trails. Trees are also planned along the new TA trail as well as the existing Trail along Kriebel Road. Mr. Meehan noted since the TA trail will not be completed until the weather warms up, these trees will not be expected to be planted until the fall planting season. He also noted that Mr. Carlin, the design engineer for the trail, mentioned there are wetlands along the new trail that must be considered when planting in or disturbing the area.

Mr. Costlow said he has been in contact with Penn State extension service and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society regarding planting these trees. He said they recommended preparing a Tree Planting Plan and then planting trees not all at once but in stages of about 30% every 5 years. They also made recommendations for placement and spacing and noted that watering for the first two years on weekly or biweekly schedule is very important along with providing regular nutrition. He said he will continue getting more information.

### **OTHER OLD BUSINESS**

#### **Other Possible Turf Field at Grist Mill Park**

Mr. Vaitis said he had no update on the idea of installing a turf soccer field at Grist Mill Park. He said he is not familiar enough with the details and he would like to have the investor who is interested in proposing this to come to an OSPAC meeting and present his ideas. He said this is just a preliminary consideration of this idea and we should have an accurate input of the details before continuing with it.

Mr. Meehan asked the committee on their thoughts of investing in a turf field, investor or not. Is there a sufficient benefit in investing in a turf field? Mr. Vaitis said from his experience with travel teams going to other municipalities, all of youth soccer is moving toward turf fields. They are not at the mercy of weather, require far less maintenance, support greater community activity and are showcases in the other municipalities. The Committee understands that funding of a turf field or things like it will be difficult in Towamencin given that Towamencin lacks the tax base of pharmaceutical companies, shopping centers and office parks that other townships have, but we should look for other workable alternatives.

The committee discussed comments made at a previous meeting by a resident who said she would not support a turf field or any other Township expenditures that she as a senior resident would not use. The Committee understands that all residents are entitled to their opinions and

should be free to express them, but the committee is here to serve the entire community and must not deny service to others based on individual agendas. The Committee reaffirmed that we take a completely objective view in our discussions and recommendations and avoid selfish interests.

### **Pickleball Courts**

Mr. Meehan said we will be focusing on reviewing potential pickleball sites in more detail at the March OSPAC meeting. In the meantime he urged the committee members to continue with their individual reviews of potential court sites in the township parks and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting.

Committee members noted their recent findings about increasing pickleball popularity. Mr. Vaitis said he has seen it getting increasingly popular with kids, and with teens playing with or against their parents. Ms. Becker noted she has heard that more kids show up in Montgomery Township to play pickleball than the traditional kid sports of baseball or football. Ms. Smith noted Horsham is building an addition pickleball facility because of the demand for more play opportunities. Mr. Costlow said he finds all statistics support continued growth.

Mr. Meehan said he would like the committee to have a goal of having a location chosen and a plan in place by the end of 2023.

### **Articles for the Spring 2023 Township Newsletter**

Ms. Smith is preparing the OSPAC article for the spring 2023 Township newsletter. She said has been in contact with Township newsletter coordinator and is working on the article.

### **More Parking for Events at Fischer's Park**

Mr. Meehan noted the committee discussed parking for major events when weather makes the use of the grass overflow parking field not useable. Last month the committee concluded the best solution was to advertise in advance that parking would not be available in Fischer's but would be available at other sites like the Firehouse and then bus the people from there to Fischer's. The Special Events Coordinator said she had set up a bus for such a shuttle for the November 2022 Turkey Trot Event but dropped the idea when Mr. Hillmantel said it probably wouldn't work because the buses would get stuck in traffic caused by cars coming to the park and being turned away. This had happened when a shuttle was tried years ago.

Mr. Kraynik jumped in and said he and Mr. Carney are working on a long-term plan. For the long term he said you need additional onsite parking and they are looking into providing this near the entrance to Fisher's Park near the Arneth House on Kriebel Road. They are looking at a gravel lot for about 100 cars. Mr. Meehan said he has compile a folder with information about the number of vehicles at a Towamencin Day event from several years ago. His recollection was that at that event 280 vehicles parked in the field and another 160 in the core parking area of Fischer's Park. He said he will pass that information to Mr. Kraynik.

### **Insect Hotel to be installed in Fischer's Park**

Mr. Meehan said the student completed the insect hotel and gave it to Public Works for installation in Fischer's. He checked with Mr. Hillmantel who said they are working on the post mounting and is should be installed any day. It will be installed on the path between the rain garden and the stable pavilion.

### **Arneth House Access**

Mr. Meehan spoke to Mr. Hillmantel about the Committee getting access to the Arneth house to assess its condition. Mr. Hillmantel said he will provide a key whenever the Committee is ready. This is something that will be scheduled for warmer weather.

### **Memorials in Fischer's Park**

Mr. Meehan again reviewed the memorials in Fischer's Park paying close attention to the ones that have attracted mementos.

He saw obvious recent and ongoing mementos at one in particular where fresh flowers were left on the ground at the memorial. Another daily "walker" who happened by, mentioned that very often he observes individuals standing at this memorial to a young local woman.

The committee discussed the current guidelines which allow a memorial bench or a tree and suggested these guidelines might need to be more clearly detailed and strengthened. The Committee acknowledges this is a sensitive issue and needs to be handled as such. The Committee wondered what measures or policies other memorial sites such as cemeteries might have. Mr. Rumsey said he will call around and see what they have as their policy and report back.

### **Long Range Planning**

Mr. Meehan asked the committee about thoughts regarding a long range park improvement plan schedule showing a plan to set priorities for improvements. The Committee responded that there is already too much on the Committee plate and we should not do this at this time. Mr. Meehan said he will table this for now.

The Committee again thanked Mr. Kraynik for attending and providing his input.

With there being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:21 PM.

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

**The next OSPAC meeting is on March 13, 2023**