

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
September 16, 2024
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Todd Fisher
Michon Blake
Dr. Richard Costlow
Dan Vaitis
Robert DeHaven
Dave Sponseller
Laura Smith BOS Liaison to the OSPAC
Mary Stover CKS Engineers

Not attending:

Joe Rumsey
Katie Cleary, Township Special Events Coordinator

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Meehan at 7:00 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 said he met with Mr. Kraynik, the Township Manager, on August 29th to get an update on items of interest to the Committee. Mr. Meehan said he will include the update comments to the Committee as the individual items are discussed in tonight's meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. John French was in attendance. He noted he will be attending the OSPAC meeting in November advocating for geocaching and was attending tonight to see what the meeting process was like.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES – Meeting of August 12, 2024

Mr. Meehan asked for comments or corrections, if any, to the draft minutes of the August 12, 2024, meeting, which he sent to the Committee members prior to tonight's meeting. Dr. Costlow noted a misspelling of Peter Simone 's name in a reference to him. Mr. Meehan said he would correct this. Mr. DeHaven said he thought it was noted during the meeting that the Township had not received the requested GIANT Grocery Store grant for trees, but it was not included in the minutes. Mr. Meehan said he thought that the announcement came after the meeting and would check.

Dr. Costlow made a motion to approve the minutes incorporating the correction he noted; the motion was seconded by Mr. DeHaven and approved by all but Ms. Becker who abstained since she did not attend the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS – Updates

Mr. Meehan noted that while the updates are being presented the Committee should keep in mind the need to establish budget requests for 2025.

Concept Plan For Pickleball Courts at Butch Clemens Park.

On the OSPAC Committee's request, the Township asked CKS engineers to prepare a concept plan for pickleball courts at Butch Clemens Park. Mary Stover of CKS Engineers was present and provided an in-depth presentation on the requested concept plan. The courts are being proposed in the north-east corner of the park, almost directly behind the Wawa on Forty Foot Road near Welsh Road. During the presentation there were discussions of the plan with the committee.

A drawing of the plan was provided for review. The plan includes six pickleball courts with surrounding fencing, a parking lot, and a potential rain garden for stormwater management.

Ms. Stover explained that the Clemens Group had declined to allow the driveway to come off their main driveway, meaning the driveway to the courts would need to be built between a detention basin and a rain garden. This would involve rerouting an existing walking path and relocating a batting cage or pitching cage. The rerouting and shifting would add to the cost of the project, but these elements had not been factored into the original cost estimates. Still an easement will be needed and the intersection of the entrance with the common drive, although not ideal because it does not line up directly across from a shopping center entrance, is more cost effective than trying to relocate the stormwater basin located there.

While two benches were initially included in the design, Dr. Costlow suggested the addition of more seating for people waiting to play, which can be implemented at a later phase.

The possibility of using porous paving for the parking lot was discussed, which could reduce the need for a rain garden and help with stormwater management. Dr. Costlow advocated for porous surfaces wherever possible, in line with Environmental Advisory Council policies. Ms. Stover said that it was looked at and is included as an option. It could allow underground stone stormwater storage and reduce or eliminate the rain garden. Stormwater management needs to be reviewed in more detail and done in a manner that the Soil Conservation District finds acceptable.

Ms. Stover also said she was asked to also look at paving the park's existing parking area adjacent to the Norh Penn Water Authority property. Currently this is a gravel surface and requires frequent maintenance because people do "wheelies" in the stone.

Mr. Meehan noted the project cost estimate prepared by CKS was over one million dollars. Committee members expressed concern about how the Township would handle such a significant expenditure.

Mr. Meehan broke down the costs further:

- Six courts are estimated to cost around **\$330,000**.
- The parking lot and driveway estimated cost is approximately **\$147,000**.
- There would also be additional costs for grading, rain gardens, and stormwater management.
- The engineering costs alone were estimated at **\$120,000**, which covered the planning, permitting, and construction inspections. Of the engineering costs, the design and

permitting is estimated at \$60,000 and the remaining \$60,000 is construction related which would come once construction got underway.

There were suggestions from committee members to find ways to cut costs. Mr. Meehan mentioned that reducing the number of courts down to four from six could save \$110,000 but Dr. Costlow pointed out that reducing two courts would only save around 10% of the project cost and might not be worth compromising the project. Dr. Costlow highlighted that pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in the country and expressed a belief that building fewer courts would be short-sighted, considering the long-term needs of the township. He advocated for taking the time to do it right, even if it took a couple of years to gather the necessary funds. Mr. DeHaven reminded the group that they were already receiving regular questions about why there were no pickleball courts in the township. Dr. Costlow agreed, suggesting that the whole project be considered as a unit and approved as shown in the concept plan to avoid delays or additional costs down the line.

Ms. Blake raised a potential concern about how township residents would react to the idea of spending over one million dollars on pickleball courts, especially if the sport was not as popular as some believed. She suggested that the committee conduct a survey to gauge public interest, using social media and the township website to reach residents. Mr. Meehan echoed this concern, worrying about the perception that the township might be spending money on projects that aren't universally desired.

Ms. Becker supported the survey idea, recommending that it be done quickly to get a better sense of resident interest. Meanwhile, Dr. Costlow shared data about the township's demographics and how many residents over the age of 50, a group typically associated with pickleball interest, made up a significant percentage of the population.

Mr. Sponseller suggested a phased approach, proposing that the courts be built first, while parking could be addressed later. He pointed out that people could temporarily park at nearby businesses like Freddy's or Wawa. Ms. Stover acknowledged this idea but cautioned that people are not supposed to park in private business lots for extended periods. Mr. Meehan also raised the possibility of looking for additional grants to fund the project.

Dr. Costlow reiterated the importance of providing more visible services for seniors, stating that the township's park services were more heavily focused on younger residents. He argued that pickleball was the perfect way to offer recreational options for seniors and suggested that waiting for a grant to materialize could delay the project unnecessarily.

Mr. Meehan concluded that the project was important, but because of its cost it would likely take time. He suggested starting with the engineering in 2025 with construction to follow. The engineering to be done in 2025 is estimated at \$60,000 as previously noted. He agreed with the phased approach and supported the suggestion of using social media to gather feedback from residents. Mr. Meehan emphasized that any plans or concepts presented to the Board of Supervisors should include clear financial details and public support, so that the board could be fully informed when deciding.

The discussions concluded with the committee agreeing to seek funding for construction of this project through grants while at the same time creating a focused community survey to confirm interest in pickleball, and for 2025, request budget funding in the amount of \$60,000 to get started engineering the plans for the project.

Green Lane Road park Soccer Field Development

The committee discussed the development of soccer fields at Green Lane Road Park. Mr. Meehan described the existing stockpile of material that needed to be spread for grading. Ms. Stover confirmed that the township had already obtained the necessary permits, and Public Works would handle the rough grading. Mr. Hillmantel Public Works Director suggested renting a bulldozer for three weeks to a month to complete the rough grading, however, Mr. Meehan explained that Mr. Hillmantel stated PW couldn't handle the landscaping, soil amendments, or other finishing touches due to manpower shortages and no experience in this process.

Dr. Costlow expressed concern about relying solely on Public Works, as there had been previous delays with other projects due to staffing limitations. Meehan noted that Dennis Carney, had spoken to a local farmer who had equipment that could help with soil and amendments blending. The farmer was willing to help for a fee, which could save the township from needing to hire a contractor.

The committee debated whether to request bids for different parts of the project. Because soil amendments would require purchasing amendment materials such as sand or organic material and spreading it so it could be blended, it would be best to have a contractor for this phase of the work. The committee also discussed the need to get the work completed as soon as possible because once seeded the field needed to remain fallow for two seasons to allow the turf to become fully established before being put into active use.

Mr. Meehan asked the committee how much they should budget for the project. Ms. Stover estimated that depending on the complexity of the work, the landscaping and soil amendments could range from \$25,000 to \$50,000. The committee agreed to budget \$35,000 for the landscaping work to be done as soon as possible in 2025.

Kriebel Road Trail Phase 3

The next topic was the Kriebel Road Trail Phase 3, which aimed to extend the trail from Green Lane Road Park past the sewer treatment plant to Fishers. Mr. Meehan explained that the township had applied for a grant in 2023 but had been rejected. However, the township reapplied and was now awaiting a decision on the grant request. If approved, the township would need to contribute 15% of the total project cost, which was estimated at \$280,923. This meant the township would need to allocate \$42,000 to cover their share.

The committee supported setting aside this amount in the budget, with Mr. Meehan stressing that if the grant wasn't approved, the funds could be reallocated to other projects.

Connector Path from Spring Valley Rd. to the Valley View Way/Trumbaure Rd Trail

Mr. Meehan shared the results of his discussions with Dave Hillmantel from Public Works about this connector trail. Mr. Meehan explained that while the path might seem straightforward, Mr. Hillmantel insisted that the steep grade required engineering plans and, more importantly, needed to be ADA-compliant. He was firm on this point, emphasizing that any new public trail or path should meet modern accessibility standards, even if the path itself was intended to be small and relatively simple.

This stance was met with some doubt by committee members, who questioned whether a full-blown engineering plan was necessary for what amounted to a woodland trail. Mr. Meehan argued that the original intent of the connector path was for it to be a simple woodland trail, not a formal paved trail. He suggested that the township could look into options such as laying wood chips or creating a dirt path similar to the trails in Fishers Park that wouldn't require heavy engineering or significant ADA accommodations,

The conversation quickly shifted to the central issue of ADA compliance, with Mr. Hillmantel's position representing a more cautious approach, while Mr. Meehan, Dr. Costlow, and Ms. Stover explored alternative possibilities.

Dr. Costlow countered Mr. Hillmantel's strict interpretation, suggesting that not every path in the township needed to be fully ADA-compliant, especially if the path was intended as a recreational woodland trail rather than a formal public thoroughfare. He pointed out that there are several trails in nearby parks, including Fishers Park, which do not meet ADA standards but still serve their purpose effectively as walking paths.

Dr. Costlow noted that these non-ADA trails often use wood chips or natural materials, which would blend more seamlessly with the natural environment while keeping construction costs low. Mr. Meehan supported this perspective, suggesting that a woodland path would be much less invasive, more cost-effective, and easier to construct than a fully paved, ADA-compliant trail. He emphasized that the goal was not to create a high-traffic pedestrian route but a natural trail that would connect two areas of the township and encourage walking and exploration of the township's green spaces.

Ms. Stover, however, cautioned that even a simple woodland path would still require some engineering and surveying, especially given the grade of the land and the potential for erosion or stormwater runoff issues. She acknowledged that while ADA compliance might not be strictly necessary, it was important to consider the slope and ensure that the path was safe and functional. She suggested that the committee consider alternatives, such as switchbacks or steps, to help mitigate the steep grade without violating ADA guidelines. She noted that some survey and engineering is necessary to understand the topography, property boundaries and natural obstacles in the path's alignment. Ms. Stover pointed out that even woodland paths require thoughtful design to ensure stability and drainage. She explained that while wood chips might work for lighter use, the steep grade could lead to erosion and runoff, potentially causing the path to degrade over time.

Ms. Stover also proposed installing a split-rail fence along the path, particularly in sections where the path would run close to private property. The fence would serve both as a safety feature and a visual barrier, providing privacy for nearby homeowners while guiding pedestrians along the trail. She noted that while fencing would add to the cost, it could be installed cheaply and would enhance the overall safety and aesthetic of the path.

The final part of the discussion centered around the cost and budget allocation for the project. Mr. Meehan proposed allocating \$15,000 for the design and \$20,000 for the construction of the path. This budget would cover basic surveying, site preparation, and the use of natural materials like wood chips or gravel.

Dr. Costlow expressed concerns that the \$15,000 design budget might not be enough, given the potential complexity of the project. Ms. Stover agreed that the surveying and design work would exceed \$15,000, especially if the township wanted to incorporate features like fencing, plantings, and drainage control. She suggested that the committee prepare for the possibility that the design costs could run higher and recommended adding a small contingency to the budget to cover any unforeseen issues. Mr. Meehan then suggested the committee set aside \$15,000 for design and \$20,000 for construction, with the understanding that they might need to adjust the budget based on the final design. He emphasized that this was just a starting point, and they could revisit the budget once they had more detailed estimates.

Grist Mill Drive Trail

Mr. Meehan introduced this similar connector path topic by noting that with Grist Mill Park coming online soon, there would be a need for better pedestrian access between the park and the surrounding neighborhoods. He suggested that creating a connector trail from Grist Mill Drive to Grist Mill Park would enhance the usability of the park and improve the overall walkability of the area, making it easier for residents to access the park without needing to drive.

The committee discussed some of the challenges that the proposed Grist Mill Park Connector Trail might face, particularly with regard to topography and potential easements. Unlike some of the other connector trails, this path would have to navigate more open space, particularly around detention basins and stormwater management infrastructure that had already been developed near the park.

As with the discussion on the Spring Valley to Valley View Connector Path, environmental impact was a major concern for the committee when considering the Grist Mill Park Connector Trail. Several members emphasized the need to ensure that the trail blended into the natural environment of the park, rather than standing out as a purely functional, man-made pathway.

Dr. Costlow advocated an approach that would preserve as much of the park's natural aesthetics as possible. He argued that the connector trail should feel like an extension of the park's natural environment, rather than a separate, constructed pathway. He suggested that the trail be designed with natural materials, such as wood chips or gravel, similar to the approach being considered for the Spring Valley path.

One of the more technical discussions revolved around the issue of easements and crossing rights, particularly where the trail might come close to private property or cross over utility easements. Ms. Stover explained that certain portions of the proposed path might run close to or over existing utility lines or municipal easements, which would require careful planning and potentially negotiating access with utility companies or private landowners.

There were discussion regarding the alignment and width of the connector with the conclusion that this will depend on the preliminary engineering recommendations. Ms. Stover noted that CKS with its current work on the detention basin near this path, some of the survey data has already been gathered, saving some cost and time.

When the discussion turned to the budget for the Grist Mill Park Connector Trail, there was general agreement that the project would need to be cost-effective. There was also a discussion about the possibility of combining the budget for the Grist Mill Connector Trail with the budget for other trail projects, such as the Spring Valley to Valley View connector. Mr. Meehan suggested that by creating a general fund for trail development, the township could spread out the costs over multiple projects and ensure that all of the trails were designed and built cost effectively and in a timely manner.

Tree Planting

Mr. Meehan said for 2025 he suggests we again request funds be set aside in the 2025 budget to plant trees much like what we have done successfully in the past few years. He suggests \$25,000 for this request. The suggested locations would be along the Kriebel Road Trail adjacent to Green Lane Park, along the recently completed Drinnon Road Park Trail and near the Valley View Way end of the TA trail.

Dr. Costlow mentioned that he completed the “tree tender” course and hopes that others will do the same so the township can take advantage of obtaining trees from organizations like the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

For the Committees information, Mr. Meehan reviewed the status of trees planted over the last few years, noting that most are doing well.

Goals and Objectives

Mr. Meehan said he would like to table this item again. The committee agreed to not discussing this at tonight’s meeting.

Grist Mill Park Facilities Improvements

Mr. Meehan updated the committee on the status of this project stating that although very close to going out for bid, it has not been advertised yet. Advertisement should be happening any day now.

NEW BUSINESS

Restrooms at Fisher’s Park

Mr. Meehan said he spoke to Mr. Hillmantel about the ventilation in the restrooms at Fischer's Park and the feeling that the interiors were "dark". Mr. Hillmantel told him the ventilation fans are being replaced and new better lighting has been installed. He feels this will mitigate any issues with the ventilation and brightness.

Wayfinding Signs in Fischer's Park

Mr. Meehan said he discussed this with Mr. Hillmantel who thought a better solution would be to provide anyone renting a pavilion in the park with a map of the park.

Committee members felt wayfinding signs might be a good eagle scout project.

Removal of Unhealthy Trees along Trails – Mr. Meehan informed the committee that when he spoke with Mr. Kraynik prior to this meeting, he mentioned that there are unhealthy looking trees along the TA trail which should be looked at by an arborist and removed if necessary. Mr. Kraynik asked that the OSPAC provide a list and location of the trees it thought warranted an arborist opinion. Mr. Meehan asked the Committee to provide input on trees which need this attention.

Initial Discussion for a multi-year suburban forestation project to create a tree lined boulevard along Forty Foot Road

Dr Costlow proposed this topic for discussion tonight but withdrew it for discussion at a future meeting.

Next Meeting Date

Ms. Becker proposed that since Mr. Meehan will not be available on October 14th, the Committee's regular meeting date, that we hold the next meeting on October 21st. The committee agreed to have the meeting on October 21st.

Mr. Meehan asked if there was any other new business. There was none.

Ms. Blake made a motion to adjourn. Dr. Costlow seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:48PM

Respectfully Submitted

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

The next OSPAC meeting is on November 11, 2024