

**Towamencin Township  
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting  
October 9, 2023  
Meeting Minutes**

**Attending:**

Joseph Meehan  
Nancy Becker  
Dr. Richard Costlow  
Robert DeHaven  
Joe Rumsey  
Michon Blake  
Dan Vaitis

**Not attending**

Dave Sponseller  
Todd Fischer  
Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to OSPAC Committee

Chairperson Meehan called the meeting to order at 7:02 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 prior to tonight's meeting, and he provided a verbal update on items the OSPAC has been following. Their update comments will be passed on to the Committee as the individual items are discussed in tonight's meeting.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no members of the public present for tonight's meeting therefore there were no public comments.

**APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES** – Meeting of September 18, 2023

The minutes of the September 18<sup>th</sup> meeting had been distributed to the Committee by email prior to tonight's meeting. Mr. Meehan asked if there were any comments on the minutes as written and distributed. There were none. Dr. Costlow made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Becker seconded the motion. All Committee members then voted in favor of the motion to approve the minutes. None were opposed and none abstained. The minutes were approved. Mr. Meehan said he will forward them to the Township staff to be posted on the Township website.

**OLD BUSINESS** – Updates

Mr. Meehan provided the Committee with a summary of his Budget Workshop on October 4, 2023, where he presented the Committee's request to the Township Supervisors and staff. He noted for the OSPAC 's information some questions and comments that were made at the Budget Workshop Meeting. They were:

- Is there a real desire to have pickleball courts in Towamencin.? How do we know this? Might it just be a fad? The questions were not presented as opposing pickleball just being asked for background information.
- Fischer's Park has been designated as a "passive" park. Isn't placing pickleball courts there in conflict with this?
- Why is the budget request for Veterans Memorial Park not given a higher priority in the Parks Capital Project Requests for 2024?

Mr. Meehan summarized his responses to these questions. Regarding the pickleball courts, he said the designation as a passive park was a self-imposed concept used in planning park usage years ago. Times have now changed and if we want to make pickleball activities available in the near future, Fischer's is

considered the best site. Other changes to add parking and another pavilion are being considered in Fischer's and combining pickleball courts with these additions is prudent if we want to construct them in Towamencin.

Regarding the "desire" for pickleball courts, Mr. Meehan noted at the Budget Presentation Workshop that residents ask for this more than anything else. The requests are anecdotal, and we have not collected hard data. This growing sport is very popular and neighboring townships have added courts which are having waiting lines to use the courts. At the Budget Presentation meeting, Supervisor Wilson mentioned that he had gone to the courts at Parkside Place in Upper Gwynedd just to observe the use of the courts and in the more than an hour or so that he was observing, there was always a waiting line and even as players were coming and going, the wait lines were always present.

We also know from many media outlets that this is a very popular recreation activity, and many municipalities are building new courts and adding courts to their existing pickleball courts to satisfy the demand. Mr. Meehan said he understands Towamencin residents are going to other townships to play, and they ask why Towamencin has not made them available here.

Mr. DeHaven mentioned that he learned from a Towamencin resident who went to Upper Gwynedd Township to play, that because she was not a UG resident she was to be charged \$40 to play.

The Committee discussed charging for the use of facilities and the possibility these collected funds could offset the construction and maintenance costs. The downside of this, however, is that it puts people of lower income who also want to play at a disadvantage and for that reason the courts should be open to all residents without charge. Mr. Meehan noted the OSPAC did not look into charging for court use time, for residents or nonresidents, so this was not a part of the decision to request pickleball courts be added to the 2024 budget request.

Ms. Blake said having the question come up about researching and documenting the demand seems not out of the ordinary considering the community's expressed interest in providing input to capital projects. Mr. DeHaven added that his feedback from the community was that resident's conversations related to the budget are about how much the fire department gets versus how much would go for pickleball. Committee members agreed that the township needs fire equipment. Mr. Meehan said this is what makes decisions on capital project funding so difficult.

Mr. Kraynik said that CKS has looked at putting a parking lot, a pavilion and pickle ball courts at Fischer's Park and they have a preliminary concept plan that they are passing that around internally for review and tweaking and when they are finished, he will send it to the OSPAC for its review and comment. Committee members had questions about what the concept plan contained. Mr. Meehan said he hasn't seen it or gotten any hints so he can't answer that question.

Regarding the priority assigned to the engineering work for Veterans Memorial Park, Mr. Meehan said asking for this engineering work was to "get a foot in the door" on beginning the development of this park. He said he mentioned in his presentation that we understood that because of budget constraints the BOS had to select what the budget would bear and all the OSPAC's requests were unlikely to be approved. Having the engineering done for the first phase of work, would provide tangible evidence of a shovel-ready project when applying for construction grants some of which are more receptive to projects that can start quickly.

The committee discussed the recreational aspect of this park noting it was more a "memorial" than an active park. The memorial can wait a little longer when the Township has a greater need for other park projects. Mr. Meehan gave the analogy of providing a tangible park improvement versus this engineering work which would result only in a roll of construction drawings and specifications which are needed but hold less importance with residents at the present time. This led to a conversation about grants for projects like this.

Mr. Meehan passed on information provided by Mr. Kraynik about Local Share Account Grants being requested by the Township. Towamencin will be applying for three (3) grants under this program. The Township is considering "setting aside" in the 2024 budget \$250,000 to provide a match for the \$250,000 DCNR grant the Township has obtained and at the same time request a \$250,000 LSA grant for the same match. If the LSA grant is approved the funds "set aside" will be replaced in the budget by the grant funds

and the “set aside” funds moved to other needs in the budget. Mr. Kraynik noted that the Township is looking at ways to keep the DCNR grant from being jeopardized because of the lack of matching funds.

The Committee discussed this further and would like to see work get started on the final engineering work for Grist Mill Park so construction can begin as soon as possible. Mr. Meehan said he understood there is a possibility a portion of the DCNR grant, along with a matching amount from the Township, could be taken and used for the engineering work. Mr. Kraynik said once the Township has an approved budget for 2024, it could consider this. That would likely be in the beginning of 2024.

### **Trails Updates**

- **TA trail** – Mr. Meehan said he had requested a summary of final costs for projects recently completed, from Mr. Kraynik. Mr. Kraynik provided him with a summary of costs for the TA trail project. Mr. Meehan said in his opinion the total costs at 17.5% over bid costs were very high and out of line with what he expected them to be. This resulted in the Township likely being responsible for the additional costs over the grant amounts. He said this needs to be discussed with the Township to see what the process for reviewing overruns is, and what approvals and what controls are in place. With the large overruns, it seems the funds to pay for them come out of the Parks Capital Budget and with the limited funds available, the available money for other projects is reduced to pay for the extras and overruns. The committee discussed some of the additional costs in the summary, like the need for additional topsoil and the large quantity overruns. The Committee discussed other options that might have been available so they could be considered for future projects.

Mr. Meehan said he felt the engineering on unique design of the trail pulled together using plans from a previous project could also be a contributing factor.

Mr. Meehan also noted that perhaps these project additions to the TA trail are reimbursable under the grant and he will check with Mr. Kraynik to see if reimbursement has been pursued.

Ms. Becker noted that during the period of time from when the TA Trail grant was obtained, through the design and construction, there were four different township managers, and three different finance directors. These multiple changes might have been a contributing factor. The committee agreed with her assessment but felt that we are correct in asking questions about the process and how high-cost changes like these are reviewed and approved.

Mr. Meehan said he will be following up with Mr. Kraynik to look at the costs and the process for dealing with extra work in greater detail. He said there might be reasons and full justification for these costs, but we would like to know what they were in this instance, so that they could be addressed in advance, to control costs on future projects.

- **KRII Trail** – This trail is now complete, likely only the paperwork remains to be finalized. Once the paperwork is completed Mr. Meehan said he will request a final cost summary for it.

### **Other Updates**

- **Green Lane Park Soccer Field** – CKS has been preparing a concept/preliminary plan to construct two, (one large and one smaller), tiered soccer fields at this site. Mr. Kraynik said they have offered a plan which is now being “tweaked” and when the plans are more advanced, they will be forwarded to the OSPAC and P.W. Committees for comment.

Ms. Becker suggested looking for grants for this project. Once we have a plan this will be considered. The Committee also discussed the review process of CKSs’ concept plans. All agreed that the meeting held with all parties reviewing the plan all together was very productive and time saving. Mr. Meehan said he will talk to Mr. Kraynik and push for another single meeting with all parties to review CKSs’ concept plan together.

Dr. Costlow and Mr. Vaitis suggested notifying the TYA Board of Directors about the parents’ concerns expressed at the OSPAC’s October meeting regarding the need for baseball fields instead of soccer fields. Although, the parents were told that this is an issue they need to bring up with TYA,

Dr. Costlow and Mr. Vaitis suggested a letter, so it was clear that the OSPAC was not just brushing aside their concerns. After further discussion, the Committee consensus was that such a letter should come from the parents who came to the OSPAC and expressed their concerns and they should send their concerns to their organization, TYA, and work the issues up through their organization before raising it to anyone else. Otherwise, the OSPAC would open itself to entertaining requests from individuals before they addressed their concerns through proper channels. It was pointed out to the parents at the last meeting that Mr. Fischer was the TYA representative on the OSPAC, and he would then bring official positions from TYA Board of Directors to the OSPAC.

- **Bocce Courts at Fischer's Park** – PW completed its portion of the re-building work including construction of the retaining/sitting walls, pavers, plantings and regrading of areas above the walls. Dr. Costlow said he thought PW did a fabulous, first-class job. Mr. Meehan said he agreed with Dr. Costlow and said it was a high-quality job and he was stunned by how great the final project looked with the new grass and plantings all along the wall. All that remains is the court surfacing which will be done by Top-a-Court, possibly yet this year.
- **Drinnon Park Path** – Mr. Meehan said he went to Drinnon Park earlier today just to check on any progress so he could report at tonight's meeting. He said he was surprised to find that PW had completed the excavation and placement of the stone base the entire length of the trail. He said as he looked at it, kids were already using it to walk home from the school bus stop.

Ms. Blake asked if he measured the width. He said that although he didn't have a measuring tape, based on his "shoe length", it is eight feet in width.

It appears that all that remains is the asphalt paving, dressing up the edges where the path meets the grass and cleanup. Again, Mr. Meehan congratulated PW on a top-quality job for the work they have done on this path to date.

- **Tree planting along the Kriebel Road Trails** – Mr. Meehan said we will be pursuing approval from the BOS to plant trees, yet this year. He said he talked to Mr. Kraynik about getting on a BOS meeting agenda and the next available agenda spot is the second meeting of the month on October 25<sup>th</sup>.

Before that meeting, the OSPAC has to get more information on costs and tree availability. Mr. Meehan said he will talk to Mr. Carney of the Township staff, who is very knowledgeable of trees and nurserymen and ask him to gather this information.

- **Additional Parking at Fischer's Park** – CKS has come up with a first draft of a plan which includes additional parking, a pavilion and pickleball courts. Mr. Kraynik indicated this draft is being passed around internally with the Township staff looking for review comments and then it will be passed on to the OSPAC for its comments.
- **Pool Update** – The pool is being winterized. All reports on this past summer's swim season are that all went well. We do not yet have numbers on pool membership for 2023. Mr. Meehan said he heard that daily visits had increased.

With the season being a success, the hope is that word will spread and in each future year, memberships and participation will grow.

- **Farming on Township Property** – There has been no change on this issue. Mr. Kraynik has said the farmer has not responded to communications sent by the Township.

Based on observations from Committee members, the farmer used the field in Fischer's Park again this growing season.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**PECO Green Region Grant** - PECO is again offering Green Region Grants. Mr. Meehan asked the Committee if with the Committees support, Towamencin should pursue a grant for planting more trees along

the Kriebel Road Trails. The Committee consensus was that the Township should apply. Mr. Meehan said he will notify the Township staff and he will help with the preparation of the application. The application is due November 10, 2023.

**Connection between Green Lane Ballfields and Fischer's Park Ballfields** – Mr. Meehan noted that an item brought up by the TYA parents at last month's meeting was one that the Committee looked at over twenty years ago but it never got traction. They questioned why there is not a walking connection between the ballfields at Bustard Road Pak and Green Lane Park. He said it might be worth looking at it again since the ballfields have changed greatly since that time, yet the concern of parents that if they have kids playing ball at both fields at the same time, you have to drive from one field to the other while there might be a possibility of a walking connection between them. The back ends of both fields are separated only by woodlands owned by the Township.

My Meehan provided a little history. Around 2002, the Township considered a connection, even to the point of "saving and storing" the truss bridge carrying Metz Road over the Towamencin Creek to be used at the connector trail's crossing of a tributary of Towamencin Creek. The project was a very low priority and never got funding and eventually the steel truss bridge deteriorated to the point it was not safe and was scrapped.

He suggested the Committee look at some options because he feels the parent's suggestion has merit. Mr. DeHaven asked if this could be part of the Connectivity throughout the Township as proposed by Simone-Collins. Mr. Meehan said a connecting trail between the two is shown on the Connectivity Study Plan with switchbacks and a structure. Mr. DeHaven said he had walked in this area about a year ago. The slopes from both ballfields are steep and prevented him from walking the lengths of any connection. The steep slopes are likely the reason for the switchbacks on the plan.

Mr. Meehan suggested, on our own, the Committee members just take a look at the possibilities for a connection.

**Fischer's Park North of Kriebel Road** – Mr. Meehan suggested the Committee also look further at the portion of Fischer's Park north of Kriebel Road. The area where the meadow and bird habitat are located. He said he has a plan created years ago by Simone-Collins as part of the early Fischer's Park master Plans that shows Kriebel Road relocated and making a new connection with Springer Road. This relocated alignment makes a good separation of this area into two parts, one which could be for active use and one for passive use. He said he doesn't want to muddy the waters for the parking, pavilion and pickleball currently being considered for Fischer's but maybe this realignment could be a long-range solution that would provide an area in the park that could be suitable for more recreation activities which didn't have an impact on the main portion of the park's passive aspect.

He said for information and future discussions, he would contact Andre Dolan to find out what makes the area a great bird habitat and how it might differ from other spaces in Fischer's Park.

He also said he has a large plan from years ago showing the realignment of Kriebel Road and he will bring it to the next meeting.

**NEW BUSINESS** - Mr. Meehan asked the Committee if anyone had any new business. There was none.

With there being no additional business the meeting on a motion by Ms. Becker, seconded by Dr. Costlow with all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM.

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

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