

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
February 12, 2024
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Robert DeHaven
Michon Blake
Joe Rumsey
Dr. Richard Costlow
Todd Fisher
Dan Vaitis
Katie Cleary, Special Events Coordinator

Not attending:

Dave Sponseller
Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to OSPAC Committee

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Meehan at 7:00 PM

All present participated in the pledge of allegiance.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DISCUSSION

Preceding the beginning of the Open Space and Park Advisory Committee meeting, Peter Simone was present to listen to the Committee's input for the Township Comprehensive Plan being prepared by his firm, Simone- Collins. The notes from the discussion were taken by Mr. Simone to be posted on the Comprehensive Plan site. They are not included in the minutes of the Open Space and Parks Committee meeting shown below.

OPEN SPACE AND PARKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan noted that he records the audio of the meeting for his convenience in preparing the minutes. He also noted he had a phone conversation with Mr. Kraynik, the Township Manager on February 7th to get an update on items of interest to the Committee. Mr. Meehan said he will note the update comments to the Committee as the individual items are discussed in tonight's meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

At this meeting, Public Comments will be heard during the discussion of the specific topics as they come up on the agenda.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES – Meeting of December 11, 2023

Mr. Meehan asked for comments or corrections, if any, to the draft minutes of the January meeting which had been sent to the Committee members prior to tonight's meeting. There were no comments. Mr. Rumsey made a motion to approve the minutes as drafted and distributed. Ms. Becker seconded the motion. All members voted to approve the minutes as written and distributed.

OLD BUSINESS

Associate Members

At its January 25, 2024, meeting, the BOS did not want to add Associate members to the Committee. The board rejected the request based on the thinking that the established communication channel between the township, StandGuard and the swim team is working well and is to be maintained and a link to the OSPAC is not necessary or desired. Therefore, there is no need to have someone who is on the OSPAC committee linked to the pool or the swim team as an associate member.

They said they wanted to maintain the communication structure that is currently in place at the pool, with everything from both StandGuard and the Swim Team going through the Township Staff.

Also, they felt the Township Events Coordinator should attend the OSPAC meetings and they will make attendance part of the coordinator's duties and there is no need for the coordinator to be an associate member of the Committee.

Fischer's Park parking, pickle ball and pavilion concept plan

Mr. Meehan informed the Committee of developments regarding the concept plan following the Committee's last meeting. He said after last month's meeting, he informed Mr. Kraynik that the Committee was not in favor of considering any further, the concept plan showing pickleball courts in Fischer's Park as well as paving a portion of the park for additional parking.

Mr. Meehan passed on to him, the committee recommendation is to not go any further with those additions in Fischer's Park as shown in the concept plan.

Instead, for the pickleball courts, the Committee recommends preparation of a similar concept plan for Butch Clemens Park (BCP) in the corner directly behind the Wawa site. Mr. Meehan said he met with Mr. Kraynik and Mr. Carney on January 30th and presented them with a location in BCP to be considered for the courts and some nearby parking.

At that meeting, Mr. Kraynik said he heard of residents' concerns regarding the courts and parking in Fischer's Park and acknowledges the OSPAC's concerns. With that he said will go to the Public Works Committee to get approval to have the township Engineer, CKS, look at a concept plan for pickleball courts and parking at the BCP site.

Regarding eliminating the concept plan for additional parking Mr. Kraynik noted that some events at Fischer's Park may have to be cancelled because of the lack of adequate parking when the fields are not suitable, and people will not be happy with the cancellations. Mr. Meehan said the Committee does not want to pave such a large area of the park and if an event must be cancelled because of the parking conditions, the committee prefers cancellation rather than a large, paved parking lot in the core of the park.

Mr. Meehan noted to the committee that the site at BCP has access issues which need to be investigated. There is a possibility the access issues could be remedied by adding some additional parking to the existing lot at the east end of the park near the North Penn Water Authority property, but it would be very limited and would also mean that pickleball court parking would not be in the immediate area of the courts and require that players walk a short distance to the courts.

There were some comments from residents attending the meeting. A resident Cheryl Portwood asked if indoor courts have been considered and noted that there was a newspaper article

about pickleball court franchises gaining traction in Montgomery County. The committee liked this as an option, but it and indoor courts are options that are beyond the options available for Township courts. Mr. Meehan noted that he recently gave some thought to trying to get PSDC to construct some courts on the “gap” space adjacent to the Planet Fitness location in the Towns Square Shopping center.

A resident, Tina Gallagher, thanked the Committee for moving away from the concept plan at Fischer’s Park. She said she loves Fischer’s Park and could not imagine a plan such as the concept being considered.

In addition, she added that she finally got to walk in the northern portion of Fischer’s Park. She said the area near the cornfield is a gem of a natural area and made a great impression on her. She expressed concerns about the farming in this area by a farmer who although he has a license to farm does not pay the Township for the use of the field. She also noted concerns with past pesticide use problems saying this is Township property. As a Township resident she feels this is her property and all township residents’ property. It’s public land and only the farmer is getting to use it. She said the area should be allowed to go back to being a meadow, a natural area. She added that if things are changed in this natural area of Fischer’s Park, we will never be able to get them back.

Andrew Dolan, a resident, seconded what Ms. Gallagher said and added that these same topics were in conversations of two years ago. He noted that at that time the OSPAC recommended the farmer not be allowed to continue. He said the farmer is using this property at no cost. He said it should remain natural, like what Kibler Meadows Park is and not be farmed.

He added that he talked to the Valley Forge Audubon Society which said they told him they would work with the Township to put in natural plantings, make nice natural habitats and things like that in this area of Fischer’s, but they absolutely won’t do it until there is an agreement that there is no cornfield in there. He said if we can get such an agreement, he would resume those conversations with the Audubon Society. He said his birder group has another bird walk planned for Fischer’s Park on April 20th, and he invites everyone to participate. He said there are a number of bird species only seen on the north side of Kriebel Road. He hopes the area will remain natural.

Paul Andrews, a resident, thanked the Committee for hearing the residents’ concerns. He said he looked on mapping websites to see where there might be space that would make sense for pickleball courts. He said he understands the challenges of the site at Butch Clemens Park and placing them there will cost more, but from a desired building standpoint it makes more sense.

Committee discussions followed regarding noise at the BCP site and whether acoustic barriers might be needed. The Committee will look at whatever makes it work at BCP.

The Committee continued with discussion of the BCP for pickleball. Ms. Cleary said that on fall weekends even without the addition of pickleball, the parking lot at Butch Clemens Park is already full. The Committee discussed some options to provide more parking, including parking on the North Penn Water Authority property, adding spaces between trees or better organizing the parking with painted lines. Discussions about parking will continue as the BCP concept plan is developed.

Grist Mill Park Engineering Plans

Mr. Meehan updated the Committee on Grist Mill Park Plans. There is now a revised preliminary plan prepared by Simone-Collins, which has downsized some elements because of escalating costs. The new preliminary plan, even with the downsizing, has an estimated cost of \$578,000.

The budgeted cost is \$500,000. He said a conference call was initiated by DCED on February 6th, to talk about the change in scope which removed the pickleball courts and volleyball courts from the plan submitted with the DCED grant application. DCED was understanding of the Township's decision to remove these elements and was helpful in providing information to keep the grant moving forward. They offered that if the Township was having problems funding the grant because of inflation and cost escalation they might be able to help with additional funds depending on the funds they might have available. He said, the engineering work is proceeding and there is hope we might see Grist Mill Park improvements built this year. He also noted that a time extension will be needed for completion of the grant work and closeout, and he was optimistic that an extension would be granted.

Soccer Fields at Green Lane Road Park

The Committee discussed the status of the development of soccer fields at Green Lane Park. Mr. Meehan noted that Mr. Kraynik and Ms. Stover were presenting the preliminary plans to the Township Municipal Authority (TMA) on February 12, 2024, for their concurrence on the planned work. The TMA is the owner of the property on which the fields would be constructed. Once the Township has TMA concurrence a meeting will be set up with the stakeholder group, (Representatives from the Township, Public Works, TYA, OSPAC, and CKS) to get everyone's endorsement of the plan before moving forward. Mr. Meehan also noted that there is now sufficient fill material stockpiled at the site to begin grading. Adjustments to the grade elevations can be made to suit the amount of material available so no more needs to be obtained. Once permits are secured and the stakeholders concur, grading should be able to begin.

Bocce Courts

Mr. Kraynik said Mr. Hillmantel (PW) and Mr. Coll (Top-A-Court) met recently to discuss coordination of their work to replace the court surfacing material, which is the final work necessary to complete the rehabilitation of the courts. He said he expects the court surfacing work to get underway as soon as the weather gets favorable.

Mr. Costlow noted that he has done a tremendous amount of legwork for the Bocce Courts' rehabilitation. He feels it is a reasonable expectation that he or the OSPAC be included in communications about the implementation of the improvements and be included in such meetings to ensure that the work is performed as shown in the agreed plan . Mr. Meehan said he would pass this on to Mr. Kraynik.

TA Trail Costs

Mr. Kraynik said the Township Finance Director continues to gather cost data from the TA Trail from Gilmore and Associates, and we can review the costs once the task is complete.

Connector Trail from Spring Valley Road to the TA Trail.

This connector trail will be discussed with the neighbors of the Brookside Farms development at the March 11, 2024, OSPAC meeting. Ninety-Five letters have gone out to the residents notifying them of this topic at the March meeting and inviting them to attend.

Mr. Meehan noted some new information about the connector trail corridor. One neighbor he spoke to said she understood there is a water line running in this corridor and that the corridor is a North Penn Water Authority easement for the water line. The Township is investigating this. Further he said the corridor is twenty feet wide. Portions of the corridor are on a steep slope which makes implementing a "switchback," which would ease the walking trail slope, in a twenty-foot width difficult.

While discussing the TA Trail, Paul Andrews, a resident mentioned that he walks the trail frequently and noted there is some erosion causing slight undermining along one side of the trail

and in this same area a drop-off. Mr. Meehan said he had also noted that, took photos and passed them on to the Township.

Spring 2024 Newsletter

Laura Smith is preparing an article for the spring newsletter. She was unable to attend tonight's meeting. Mr. Meehan said he will check with her about the article.

NEW BUSINESS

2024 Tree Planting Plans

Mr. Meehan said Dennis Carney of the Township staff contacted him asking if there were plans for planting trees this spring. Mr. Meehan said he has no plans yet. For 2024 there is \$25,000 budgeted and for 2024 he would like to plant \$15,000 of trees this spring and hold \$10,000 until the fall in anticipation of a PECO Green Region Grant \$10,000 grant being awarded, which the township would have to match. He noted that he thought the committee should consider planting some trees along the new trail and around the playground in Drinnon Park. The Committee had no objections to this.

Mr. Meehan said the remainder of the \$15,000 would be used for trees along the TA trail, especially from the ped bridge crossing to the Valley View Way end of the trail to fill in gaps in the wooded areas along the trail.

Corn hole Games

A resident, Cheryl Portwood, suggested that if the township was looking for new recreational opportunities, corn hole games have become very popular. It's something that doesn't require a permanent installation, doesn't take up much space and as a sport has gone from "just being born" to now having tournaments on television. She said she has seen the office workers from the building at Sumneytown Pike and Bustard Road bring their portable corn hole game out to the sidewalk and playing during lunch hour.

The Committee thought this was a fantastic suggestion that could appeal to all ages and be added to several of the township parks at a very reasonable cost. Mr. Meehan said he will pass this suggestion along to the Township staff and Simone-Collins for consideration.

With there being no additional business, on a motion by Ms. Becker and seconded by Mr. DeHaven, with all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 PM.

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

The next OSPAC meeting is on March 11, 2024