

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
December 11, 2023
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Dr. Richard Costlow
Robert DeHaven
Michon Blake
Dan Vaitis
Joe Rumsey
Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to OSPAC Committee

Not attending:

Todd Fisher
Dave Sponseller

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 Dave Kraynik on Thursday December 7th. Dave provided the Township's update on items the OSPAC has been following. The update comments will be passed on to the Committee as the individual items are discussed in tonight's meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Nick Hulik, a Township resident who operates a small fencing company and whose kids play for TYA made a presentation regarding fencing at the Township ballfields. (A copy of his written proposal given to the committee is attached to the minutes).

He said he sees that there are some needs for fencing improvements and as a small fencing contractor he feels he can provide a service to TYA and the Township and do it at a lower cost than larger contractors. He said he met with TYA to discuss fencing at some of the baseball fields. and now wanted to present his ideas to this committee.

He said TYA has told him they want to add 4 batting cages at the Green Lane Park ballfields. He sees an opportunity to take down and reuse some unused fence piping at other fields and use that material to construct these cages. He said there would be a savings of about \$2,500 if this were done. He said TYA has gotten estimates ranging from \$20,500 to \$28,000 and he feels he can do it for less by refurbishing and reusing existing piping.

He also said he has thought about a dog park somewhere in the Township and mentioned Firehouse Park as a possibility. He said he could provide fencing for one at a good price also by reusing materials from the unused backstop at Fischer's Park. The Committee and he discussed past plans for a dog park in the Township and how they never advanced because of resident's opposition. It was noted that that was a while ago and things change, people change, and this might again be a possibility in the future. There are no immediate plans for a dog park. He said his proposal of dog park fencing was also included in his written presentation.

Mr. Hulik asked about the process of getting approval with the TYA plan for batting cages. The Committee told him TYA needs to work through their representative to this Committee, Mr. Fisher, to carry the message to us as an official notification or request from TYA. It was also noted however that the OSPAC decided several months ago, as the 2024 OSPAC budget request was being prepared, that maintenance and improvements to fencing and other such maintenance items at the athletic fields would

be the responsibility of TYA and funding etc. of these items would fall into TYA's Township budget request.

The Committee discussed with him the process for funding, bidding, and constructing fencing as he proposes. The Committee said they are in favor of reusing refurbished, good condition materials to save money.

Mr. Meehan noted that there are guidelines on procuring services for any Township-funded work which need to be followed. Such as a cost threshold above which an RFP needs to be prepared and then put out to bid. Mr. Hulik said TYA would be funding the work. Mr. Meehan said in this case he did not know if the guidelines applied.

Mr. Hulik said he would be in touch with Mr. Fisher to discuss the TYA proposal further.

Mr. Kofi Osei Township Resident, and Supervisor elect. He said he came to the meeting to take notes and relay things he heard as he was campaigning.

He said he had heard a lot about dog parks. He said he feels Firehouse Park is currently underutilized, having only a trail and considering a dog park there would be nice. He also suggests benches and a small playground as improvements there.

He said he also heard a lot about not liking pickleball at Fischer's Park and realizes there are not a lot of good locations for it.

Mr. Costlow asked if he hears where people might accept pickleball. Mr. Osei said he does not have a recommendation but said he hears that some people are not in favor of it at any location. He continued saying that those favoring pickleball seem to be more organized than those favoring Fischer's remaining passive.

Mr. Costlow mentioned that a lot of people would like to have that kind of activity. He said the Montgomery County Senior Games include thirteen different "sports" activities for seniors and noted that not one facility in Towamencin could host any of the senior games' activities. He said this is a disservice to a sizable segment of the population. He noted that this Committee reviewed five different sites for pickleball, evaluating different factors, and the site that was least objectionable was Fischer's Park.

Nancy DeHaven, a Township resident, said she spends many hours in the Township's Parks, and they are fantastic. Fischer's is her favorite because you can have a noisy celebration for a gathering in one area and also go on the trails and find a quiet spot as you walk through the woods. She complimented the OSPAC on the job they had done with the parks.

She said she came tonight because she heard there were to be discussions about improvements to Grist Mill Park, which is close to her home, and she wanted to hear about them.

Katie Cleary, a Township resident attended. She said she had no comment, just wanted to listen to the discussions.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES – Meeting of November 13, 2023

Mr. Meehan noted that the minutes of November 13, 2023, had been distributed to the Committee by email prior to tonight's meeting. Mr. Meehan also noted that Mr. DeHaven noted some "typo errors that needed attention. Mr. Meehan said the extra words were his mistake when typing the minutes and they will be removed. The date for the next meeting was also shown incorrectly. He said these corrections will be made on the minutes and asked for a motion to approve the corrected minutes. Ms. Becker made a motion which was seconded by Mr. Costlow. All Committee members voted in favor of approving the corrected 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

The 2024 Budget

Mr. Meehan said the full, proposed 2024 Township budget is now on the Township website and referred anyone interested in the details to look at the website. He also offered that for a summary of items of Capital Projects related to Parks and Open Space you can go to the Capital Plan items which are between pages 40 and 43. He then reviewed those items and provided a brief commentary on each. He said the Proposed Budget is on the BOS agenda to be approved at the next BOS meeting on December 13th.

Dr. Costlow asked about the item in the budget shown for the demolition of the Arneith house in Fischer's Park and asked if there was any historical significance to the house that we should be aware of. Mr. Meehan said he did not know of any but would check to see if he had anything from Dr. Hollenbeck, who years ago was the Committee Liaison, and was the one who was most closely associated with the history of the house.

Committee members expressed interest in walking through the house before demolition when the weather gets warmer.

Trail Updates

The final costs of TA trail are still being compiled by the Township staff and when completed the information will be passed to the OSPAC.

Regarding the connector from the TA Trail to Spring Valley Road, Mr. Meehan said a meeting with the residents is planned. With other items of higher urgency already taking time on the agenda for January and February, the earliest the meeting with neighbors could happen is the March OSPAC meeting. In the meantime, the Township staff is compiling a list of the names and addresses of almost 100 residents of the neighborhood. The Township will send a letter to these residents informing them the connector will be discussed at that meeting and the OSPAC will be looking for their input at that time.

Bocce Courts at Fischer's Park

The Public Works Phase of the reconstruction is completed and the only work remaining is the court surface replacement, which is to be done by a contractor, Top-A-Court. The court work is planned for the spring when the weather becomes favorable. Mr. Kraynik told Mr. Meehan the funds for this work are already encumbered in the 2023 budget so it will be available when Top-A-Court gets the work done.

Tree Trail Along Kriebel Road

Mr. Meehan said the 22 trees of various species, budgeted for 2023 have been planted. Thanks go to Dr. Costlow, the Township staff and David Brother's Landscaping for coordinating their efforts to get this done.

Dr. Costlow mentioned that now that the trees are planted, for the longer-term educational aspect of the tree plantings, the Township should consider placing identification markers at each tree so trail users will get to recognize the different species. The markers can be something simple with some basic information about the species. He said there are templates for tree identification that have a picture of the leaf, a picture of the nut and a picture of the bark. Maybe costing about \$10 to \$20 each. He said he will put something together as a sample for the next meeting.

Farming on Township Property

Mr. Meehan said he and Mr. Kraynik talked again about this topic. In the conversation Mr. Kraynik noted that an important point mentioned in the November Meeting Minutes was incorrect. He said the minutes stated that the farmer had not responded to the Township's outreach to him. He said the farmer had responded to him and they have had discussions on the matter and this communication will be continuing.

Mr. Kraynik said the farmer has a lease from the Township to use the property and the fact that he has a lease is a statement of the Township's position.

Mr. Kraynik said he also communicated with Mr. Ginther and told him the same thing.

Mr. Meehan said in his discussions with Mr. Kraynik, that Mr. Kraynik presented his thoughts on possible options to allay concerns about the lease being at no cost, if that is a concern. The Township could request proposals from farmers who might want to farm the property and include an amount the farmer will pay for the use. The Committee discussed options such as this but recognized that there are very few farmers in the Township and only one has an interest in this property.

During the discussions, a question was raised about the Township's position on maintaining the existing habitat on the farmed property. Mr. Meehan reminded the Committee that the OSPAC presented its recommendation to the Board about two years ago. He added that he feels the Township recognizes farming as part of the Township's heritage and the BOS is not opposed to farming. The Board's position is demonstrated by the lease to allow farming on a portion of Fischer's Park.

Mr. Meehan said Mr. Kraynik said the farmer has a lease on the use of the property, this is where things stand at the present time, and if they change, he will let the Committee know.

Mr. Meehan said until such time as he hears of changes on this topic, he will no longer keep it as an ongoing agenda item.

Grist Mill Park LSA Grant –

Mr. Meehan noted the Township applied for Local Share Account (LSA) Grant for Grist Mill Park on November 28, 2023. The grant request was for \$250,000 to match the DCNR grant already received. He said the application was prepared by Simone-Collins and he has a copy of it if anyone wants to see the details of the application.

PECO Green Region Grant

Mr. Meehan also noted the Township applied for a PECO Green Region Grant for planting more trees in 2024. The grant application was submitted for funds to plant more trees of various species and mirrored the planting plan recently completed on the Kriebel Road Tree Trail. Project costs on PECO grants are split 50/50 with the Township.

NEW BUSINESS

OSPAC Associate Members

At last month's meeting, Mr. Sponseller mentioned that he no longer has the close connection to the Swim Team that he has had in the past. His kids have now grown and no longer participate. The Swim Team would like to have someone on the Committee who is a Swim Team Parent but those who are interested would like the OSPAC commitment to be limited since their interest is narrowly focused on the swim team and the swim season and they have many other things going on in their lives.

Mr. Meehan said he was initially approached about having a "part time" Swim Team Parent member on the Committee and said he responded that maybe it would be better to have an "associate member" who could participate as a member only when the swim team and pool came more into focus. An "associate member" would not have voting rights as a full committee member. He discussed this possibility with Mr. Kraynik who asked for the Committee's recommendation.

Mr. Meehan opened this to discussion. The Committee had a good discussion during which consideration was given to:

- The idea of having associates with distinct purposes such as serving as liaisons to specific groups like the swim team.
- Continuing with a meaningful and productive dialogue with the Towamencin Swim Team parents.
- Differences in roles between an associate and a full OSPAC member.
- The need for clear and effective communication between the committee and associate members and vice versa.
- Expectations for associate members.

- Whether having associate members might open the door for other organizations in the Township to seek similar representation.
- Allowing residents with a larger interest in all OSPAC matters to be appointed rather than limiting an open position to only someone with a direct connection to the swim team and pool.
- Adding associate members with an understanding that after review of the action, it could be reassessed in the future.

In conclusion, a motion was offered by Ms. Blake and seconded by Ms. Becker to recommend the addition of two associate members to the OPSAC, one being a representative of the Towamencin Swim Team and the second being a representative of the Special Events Committee. All committee members voted in favor of this motion.

Mr. Meehan said he will pass this along to the Township staff.

Grist Mill Park Design Elements

Mr. Meehan said he passed on to the Township Staff and Peter Simone the elements the Committee at its December Meeting recommended be incorporated in the engineering design of Grist Mill Park.

He first provided a summary of proposed changes that have evolved over the years in various OSPAC discussions since the concept plan was first developed years ago. The changes, with some commentaries were:

- Remove the pickleball courts (too close to the Jacobs Woods Apartments/Townhouses)
- Remove the sand volleyball court (not high demand and a maintenance headache)
- Enlarge the pavilion (from 720 sf to more like 1200 sf)
- Enlarge the playground to allow for some shade and contain “inclusive” activities
- Keep the two basketball courts even if only one is constructed in the first phase
- If there is any remaining room add some activity that appeals to seniors.

The Committee reviewed the concept plan for Grist Mill, keeping in mind the proposed changes and discussing in detail the remaining elements and some new ones. Some other thoughts that were discussed included a walking trail, a pedestrian crossing at Allentown Road and Forty Foot Road, a playground castle ala U.G. Park Place, and porous asphalt surfacing. In conclusion, these thoughts were deemed to be beyond the scope of this DCNR grant project at this time but could be considered in a future phase of improvements at Grist Mill Park.

As a conclusion of these discussions the Committee on a motion by Mr. Meehan, seconded by Ms. Becker and approved by all Committee members recommends the engineering design for Grist Mill Park incorporate the following elements:

- 2 basketball courts
- A larger pavilion than originally planned
- A larger playground with shade (trees preferred)
- Activities for seniors (ping pong tables (2): exercise stations)
- More benches throughout
- Make as much hard surfacing as possible be permeable
- Keep the earth disturbance below one (1) acre

Green Lane Park Soccer Field

A preliminary engineering plan was prepared by CKS and passed to the OSPAC for its review and comments. Mr. Meehan noted that the Committee’s review was at this point to just get the Committee’s preliminary/first comments. A more detailed review with other stakeholders such as TYA and Public Works present will be held in the near future.

Copies of CKS’s preliminary plan were provided to each Committee member and a full-sized plan was used at the meeting in the discussion.

The Committee discussed the soccer field layout showing one large soccer field and a second smaller soccer field which is shown as a future field. Mr. Meehan stated that it is his understanding that the larger field would have priority and a second smaller field would be graded as fill material became available and completed in the future. He said he sees the larger field requiring significant grading with embankment materials of almost five foot depth and some excavation of as much as about six (6) feet deep to bring the elevation of the planned field to a flat playing area. Needed embankment material is being stockpiled at the site and more will continue to be sought by the Township from any suitable source.

A unanimous comment from the Committee during its review was that the site needs additional parking, and none is shown on the plan. Mr. Meehan noted the scope of work for the engineering of the soccer fields did not include engineering for parking areas so the Township will need to get a separate new agreement for engineering the parking areas. He added that completion of the fields is not in the immediate future and there is time to engineer and construct additional parking.

Another comment mentioned by Mr. Hulik was about fencing. He said from his experience soccer fields without large out of bounds areas need higher fencing. The fencing shown on the plan is five (5) feet high and the Committee members agreed that fencing around this larger field should be higher, especially with its proximity to Kriebel Rd.

These Committee comments will be passed on to the Township staff and also be brought up when the plans are reviewed again in the near future with the other stakeholders having an interest in planning these soccer fields.

Parking, Pickleball and a pavilion 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. Meehan presented this concept plan drawing to the Committee and asked for comments. The concept plan included a large, paved parking area for 161 vehicles, a pavilion and 4 pickleball courts.

The Committee members made comments including the concern for loss of a significant number of parking spots, lack of shade around the pickleball courts, and "turning the park into a parking lot".

One of the goals of this plan was to increase the available parking for large events at Fischer's Park and the Committee does not feel this has been achieved. Public works have estimated they presently park about 250 cars at this site. Mr. Meehan said he counted park cars at a Towamencin Day event and found the number to be closer to 350 likely because the vehicles are parked closely together and without traffic islands between. With only 161 parking spaces being provide, Committee members expressed concern that this proposed concept was not fully meeting the intended objective of solving parking concerns.

Mr. Meehan said after seeing this concept plan, he is not in favor of turning such a large space in the park into a parking lot for only ten or so events annually. He proposed that the Committee ask the Township to revisit the idea of utilizing the portion of Fischer's Park on the north side of Kriebel Road and taking the Simone-Collins suggestion to realign Kriebel Road toward a new juncture with Springer Road. This would stitch together the two portions of Fisher's Park and eliminate the hazard of crossing Kriebel Road to utilize that northern portion and provide for additional parking as well as recreational activities away from the core of Fischer's passive areas.

Mr. Meehan suggested as an interim solution, some limited parking be constructed close to the west end of the existing Fisher's parking lot, a portion of which would be used for three pickleball courts while plan development and engineering was being looked at for the development of the north side of Kriebel Road. At some time in the future when the "north park" was developed, the "temporary" pickleball courts would become additional parking adjacent to the existing parking areas.

Mr. Meehan suggested it is worth taking a little time to look at alternatives to the proposed concept plan. He said he wants to feel confident the proposed concept plan is best for Fischer's Park because once it is implemented, the park will be greatly changed.

Mr. Meehan said he talked to Mr. Kraynik about this thought, and he said this would be a complete philosophical change in the plans for Fischer's Park. The Committee agrees but so will the conversion of the ballfield area to parking.

Mr. Meehan said the discussion of the concept plan will continue. He said Mary Stover of CKS Engineers will attend the January OSPAC meeting to participate in the discussions.

Mr. Meehan asked the Committee if anyone had any other new business. There was none.

With there being no additional business, on a motion by Ms. Becker, seconded by Ms. Blake with all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

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

The next OSPAC meeting is on January 15, 2024
(Meeting will be held in the classroom)