

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
January 15, 2023
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

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

Not attending:

Todd Fisher
Dan Vaitis

Also attending was Mary Stover, P.E. from CKS Engineers

The meeting was attended by eight residents.

The meeting was called to order by Supervisor Smith at 7:04 PM
All present participated in the pledge of allegiance.

COMMITTEE REORGANIZATION FOR 2024

Supervisor Smith asked for nominations for Committee Chairperson for 2024. Ms. Becker nominated Joseph Meehan. Ms. Blake seconded the motion. There were no other nominations. All Committee members voted in favor of the motion. Mr. Meehan is the Committee Chairperson for 2024.

Ms. Smith turned the meeting over to Mr. Meehan who asked for nominations for the vice-chairperson. Mr. Meehan nominated Ms. Becker. Mr. Sponseller seconded the motion. There were no other nominations. All Committee members voted in favor of the motion. Ms. Becker is the vice-chairperson for 2024.

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, the Township Manager, on January 11th. 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.

Mr. Meehan provided the Committee with a list of scheduled dates for the Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee (OSPAC) meetings for 2024.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Gallagher, a township resident, spoke. She said she read all the OSPAC meeting minutes for last year. She noted the thoughtful consideration of the option for pickleball court sites in the

township. She spoke about the consideration of noise decibel levels and the informal analysis by the committee on possible sites which led to a conclusion that that Butch Clemens Park was a good site and was the preferred site. From the subsequent OSPAC meeting minutes, she provided a history of the events noting that Mr. Meehan had conversations with Mr. Kraynik and Mr. Carney which he carried back to the OSPAC. They said they were looking into addressing the need for additional parking at Fischer's and considering including pickleball courts in the same project. Continuing with the history, she said the Committee discussed this new consideration and also the passive environment of Fischer's being impacted. She said the minutes reflected that the committee was swayed by the input from the township staff and raised Fischer's Park to the position of "most favorable" and recommended 6 courts be at Fischer's and 4 courts at Butch Clemens Park. The Township then asked the engineers to present a concept and some engineering options. By October, a concept was being passed around internally but coming in at over \$2,000,000 was deemed too expensive.

She said she felt it was important to share the history because it demonstrates the Committees' thoughtfulness over time in developing plans and uses of the parks. She acknowledged the Committee's time spent considering pickleball sites and said she wants to learn more.

She noted one item that she felt was overlooked is the environmental impact of pickleball. She said she is not against pickleball but totally against the location at Fischer's and this decision will impact this park forever. She posed the question, is the Township trying to solve a parking problem or is it trying to solve the problem of where to locate pickleball courts? She said she would like the Committee and Township staff to work together and agree to an outcome that works for the Township, the Committee, and residents.

She also said that Fischer's Park is a fragile park, highly stressed by terrible increasing weather events and it floods.

She noted that she sees that the Township, Committee members and residents have worked on this for over a year and she thanks them all for that. She wants to know how we are at the point we are now, where we are going with plans as well as budget concerns, but she is more concerned about environmental impact and how this will affect Fischer's Park.

Paul Andrews, a township resident spoke. He said he is concerned about pickleball as well but from a different perspective. He and his family enjoy the park. Walking, seeing the ducks, enjoying concerts. It is a quiet park. Introducing pickleball will have a big noise impact. He said researching about pickleball often turns up articles related to Townships dealing with noise complaints or lawsuits from residents or organizations about noise. He said he is an audio engineer. He presented many facts about the decibel levels and frequencies and noted that pickleball is in an annoying range because human hearing is more sensitive at the pickleball frequencies. He said by adding courts and pavilions you are drastically changing the character of noise at the park from natural to whack, whack, whack.

Tim Gallagher, a township resident spoke. He recounted taking a walk in a natural setting somewhere and then heard an annoying whack whack noise. It was pickleball. It doesn't belong here. It reminds him of the Joni Mitchell song, "Paved over paradise to put up a parking lot". This is a natural area, and it doesn't belong here.

Tom Rogers a township resident. He said he is a new guy here and walks the park daily but doesn't know where in the park we are talking about. The location was pointed out to him as being the ballfield area. He said he hasn't seen anyone using the ballfields except dogs who seem to enjoy it. He noted the field is needed for parking for concerts.

Bruce Baily a township resident. He said he is totally against the concept. It's a beautiful park, one of the few in the township and it is irreplaceable. The parking lot he doesn't agree with at all. He said the venue for the concerts should be relocated to somewhere else in the Township. There are other places in the Township for it. Leave the park alone. Keep the park open.

Gisela Koch a township resident. She said her comments are on the events they have there. They don't have enough parking. Pickleball is going to take a big chunk of it. The other part is the noise level when you are walking there and enjoying the park. It's such a peaceful, beautiful relaxing place. This is going to destroy that environment. It doesn't belong there. It should go to Butch Clemens. If Fischer's was favored over Clemens because of the lack of restrooms at Clemens, put bathrooms at Clemens. Have sports related activities in one location. At Fischer's you ruin a beautiful space.

Mr. Meehan thanked residents. He then noted he had forgotten to introduce the Committee to the residents attending. He went around the table and introduced each Committee member, the BOS Liaison Laura Smith, Katie Cleary the Township Event Coordinator and Mary Stover, who was representing CKS Engineers who had been given the task of developing the concept sketch being discussed tonight.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES – Meeting of December 11, 2023

At this point Ms. Becker noted the agenda item for action on the draft minutes which had been sent by e-mail to the committee members for review had been passed over. Mr. Meehan now asked if there were any comments on the minutes as drafted. There were none. Ms. Becker made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Mr. Rumsey seconded the motion. All members voted to approve the minutes as written and distributed.

OLD BUSINESS

CKS Concept Plan – Additional parking, pickleball and pavilion at Fischer's Park.

In the public comments at the beginning of the meeting, Township residents expressed their opposition to the concept plan for Fischer's Park, particularly the pickleball courts. During the OSPAC committee discussions, the residents also participated.

The Committee then began discussing the Fischer's Park Parking, Pickleball, pavilion (PPP) concept plan. Ms. Stover was asked to present background and the sketch plan that CKS prepared and sent to the township. He noted that the rendering was a concept sketch which is used by the committee as something to work from in discussing an item being considered.

Ms. Stover said CKS had been tasked with looking at parking, pickleball and a pavilion at Fischer's Park. Four pickleball courts were to be considered initially but also the possibility of going to eight. That is shown on the sketch with dashed lines. Obviously, parking is an important part of the concept and for parking she said the additional parking was done in a way that its similar to the parking that is already there with green islands in the center of rows. She said maximizing what could be fitted into that location was important. Also, there were some minor pathways included. The long driveway is necessary because there is a drainage swale that crosses in the area between the existing parking and the additional parking areas. She said all of this is up for discussion. The Committee discussed with Ms. Stover various aspects of the concept including stormwater management, what is proposed for crossing the swale. Ms. Stover said they hadn't been tasked with looking at stormwater management at this early point in the engineering.

A resident Trudy Phillips asked if concept plans had been looked at for other parks. Ms. Stover said they had not been tasked with any other concepts. Ms. Phillips asked how did the committee end up looking at a concept at Fischer's?

The Committee and residents began a conversation about how Fischer's evolved as the choice. Mr. Meehan provided some background of the committee's work. He explained that Pickleball at Butch Clemens Park was a very desirable site but lacked restrooms, close parking and access that needed to cross private property. To make it fully suitable would cost a lot. Fischer's Park on the other hand, had restrooms, and parking and no restrictions on access. Because of the higher costs involved, Butch Clemens Park dropped down below Fischer's in preference.

Ms. Phillips suggested Firehouse Park as an alternative. She said noise should not be a problem because it already has the noise of the turnpike, it has parking but admitted there are no restrooms.

Mr. Meehan said he would discuss those items but wanted first to let the residents in attendance know that the Committee after its initial review at its last meeting in December was not thrilled with this concept. He said at that meeting, the committee was not in favor of turning the park into a parking lot and also had similar concerns about the change of the character of Fischer's if pickleball is located as shown in the concept. Adding only one hundred sixty one parking spaces fell short of the number of spaces needed and in fact made parking availability during high attendance events worse.

The Committee knows Fischer's Park is unique, special, a "gem" and the Committee wants to preserve that "specialness". Eliminating it as an option for pickleball means we need to work hard, together, to find solutions for the many issues that we are facing to provide all the recreational opportunities the residents of Towamencin ask for and expect.

The Committee and residents got into a lengthy discussion about the concept being considered.

(During the discussions, Dr. Costlow, a committee member, entered the meeting and Mr. Sponseller, a committee member left the meeting.)

Some of the topics included in the discussions were the following:

- Evolution of the concept plan
- Pickleball noise (Acoustics, decibel and frequency levels, distance the annoying sound travels)
- The natural environment of Fischer's Park
- Noise complaints, lawsuits
- Parking needs at Fischer's to accommodate large crowds at popular events
- The number of such events each year
- Concept plan does not solve parking problem
- Parking, pickleball, pavilion being "packaged" together
- What is budgeted for pickleball courts
- Accommodating needs at other parks for sports activities
- Alternative sites for pickleball such as Firehouse Park, Butch Clemens Park, Fischer's Park north of Kriebel Rd
- Positive and negative factors at sites (Costs, parking, restroom facilities, noise impacts, stormwater management)
- Distance of courts from restroom facilities
- Minimum distance to residences criteria used by OSPAC in site evaluations
- Expectations of pickleball court usage.

- Shuttling from remote parking lots
- Fischer's Park Master plans over the years
- Bird habitat in Fischer's north of Kriebel road
- Potential for pickleball courts on private property owned by developers
- Recognizing that pickleball is not ideal for Fischer's

This was a lengthy discussion, with the residents and Committee members having similar concerns. Mr. Meehan said decisions on parking and pickleball and to a lesser extent a pavilion are critical for Fischer's Park. He wants the committee to be confident it is making the correct concept plan decision and at this time he sees the Committee is having serious concerns about the concept.

Before doing anything more on this concept he feels alternatives should be studied further at a level similar to the concept plan proposed for Fischer's Park. He said he will communicate with Mr. Kraynik and ask that the Township have CKS evaluate other sites with emphasis on Butch Clemens Park for the pickleball courts. He will also let Mr. Kraynik know that the committee does not want to see the ballfield area paved.

At this point many of the residents left the meeting.

Green Lane Park Draft plan for Soccer Fields

The CKS preliminary plan for two soccer fields at Green Lane Road Park was laid out for the Committee in both a full-size drawing and on the digital monitor. The plan was the same as was reviewed by the committee at last month's meeting. Mary Stover was present to answer any questions. She said at this point the plan only addresses grading the site to create the soccer fields and no other improvements.

There were two Committee comments that came out of the Committee's previous review that were repeated for Ms. Stover. One that the plan does not address the need for more parking and the other that the fencing around the large soccer field should be higher than five feet. Ms. Stover noted that if you put up a fence at your residence, you are limited to five feet in height, and she would have to check to see if a higher fence would be allowable in this situation. Committee members expressed concern about a kicked ball going over the low fence and rolling down the slope onto Kriebel Road. The fencing would not need to be cyclone fencing but could be a plastic net mesh fencing much lower but similar to what is at Butch Clemens Park. Concerns were also passed on from the TYA soccer group that there be sufficient distance between the edge of the pitch and the surrounding fence. They did not provide a suggestion on what the distance should be. Ms. Stover noted that the trail along Kriebel Road and the floodplain restrict how much the distance could be increased.

Regarding the smaller field, Ms. Stover said the only thing that makes it a "future" field is the availability of fill material coming from a local developer. Until enough fill is available, it cannot be graded.

CKS will work with Montgomery County Soil Conservation and apply for a permit for the Green Lane Park grading. Once that is obtained, and grading plans finalized, Township Public works can begin with the grading work.

Adding additional parking would require stormwater management and that will increase the cost. This will be addressed in the future and in the meantime, it is expected TYA will juggle its scheduling to minimize overlapping sports events and keep the need for parking manageable.

A meeting with all the stakeholders will be set up to confirm everyone is on board with the plan CKS has developed and provide comments if they have any.

2024 Spring Newsletter Article

Dr. Costlow noted past newsletter articles over the years have been prepared by the same Committee members and suggested that someone else draft an article giving a new perspective. Once there was a draft, others would help with editing if needed. Ms. Smith said she would draft an article.

Trail Updates

The final costs of TA trail are still being compiled by the Township staff. The Finance Director provided an overview combining the cost from both trails which was reviewed in the meeting with Mr. Kraynik. More details of the costs, broken down by trail, are being sought from Gilmore & Associates and that detail will be brought to a future meeting.

Bocce Courts at Fischer's Park

Top-A-Court is waiting for warmer weather to work on the court surfacing. No date is set to start, it is weather dependent. Mr. Meehan said his estimate is that nothing will take place before the end of March.

OSPAC Associate Members

Mr. Kraynik noted that if the Committee wants to add "Associate Members", this should be brought to the Board of Supervisors since this would be their decision to make. He put it on the BOS meeting agenda for January 24th. Mr. Meehan said he will make a presentation to the Board at that meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Comprehensive Plan Update

Mr. Meehan asked the Committee to be prepared to discuss the update of the Township Comprehensive Plan at the February meeting. At that meeting, Simone-Collins will be making a presentation about the plan and asking for the committee's input regarding Open Space and Parks. In the meantime, Mr. Meehan suggested everyone fill out and submit the on-line Comprehensive Plan Survey on the Township website. The survey gives an idea of the topics and input that the consultant is gathering.

Veterans Park Entrance

Mr. Meehan noted that there has been some inquiry from a property owner along Tomlinson Road regarding an entrance to Veterans Park. This will be looked into further.

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 Mr. DeHaven and seconded by Ms. Becker, with all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 PM.

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

The next OSPAC meeting is on February 12, 2024

(This Meeting will be preceded by a presentation and discussion with Simone-Collins providing input on the update to the Township Comprehensive Plan)