

**Towamencin Township**  
**Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**March 11, 2024**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Attending:**

Joseph Meehan  
Nancy Becker  
Robert DeHaven  
Michon Blake  
Dr. Richard Costlow  
Todd Fisher

Dan Vaitis  
Dave Sponseller  
Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to OSPAC  
Committee  
Katie Cleary, Special Events Coordinator  
Peter Simone of Simone-Collins

**Not attending:**

Joe Rumsey

The meeting was attended by a large group of residents from the Brookside Farm Neighborhood. Some, but not all, signed the sign-in sheet as attending.

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. He also noted he had a phone conversation with Mr. Kraynik, the Township Manager on March 7, 2024, 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 related to the connector trail will be heard during the discussion of the specific topic as it comes up on the agenda. Mr. Meehan asked if there were any public comments on any other topic.

A resident who said he visits Fischer's Park almost every day, noted that cars entering the park from Bustard Road seem to enter at an excessive speed putting those people crossing the entranceway on the marked footpath in jeopardy. He asked that the Township look at this crossing and provide some warning to motorists of the crossing and the need to reduce speed. Mr. Meehan said he will pass this concern on to the Township staff.

There were no other public comments.

**APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES** – Meeting of February 12, 2024

Mr. Meehan asked for comments or corrections, if any, to the draft minutes of the February 12, 2024 meeting which he sent to the Committee members prior to tonight's meeting. There were no comments. Ms. Becker made a motion to approve the minutes as drafted and distributed. Dr. Costlow seconded the motion. All members voted to approve the minutes as written and distributed.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Connector Path from Spring Valley Road to the Valley View/Trumbauer Road Trail**

Mr. Meehan gave a summary of the location and description of a connector trail allowing direct access to the recently constructed Township trail connecting Trumbauer Road and Valley View Way from Spring Valley Road. This connector is included in the Township's recent Connectivity Study, prepared by Simone-Collins and Peter Simone is present to provide his input on the study and this connector trail now being considered.

Mr. Meehan said with the connector being shown on the Connectivity Study, the Township was asked by a few residents to consider its construction and eliminate having to take the long way around, partially walking along Morris Rd. to be able to use the new trail. As this request became known, other residents expressed concern about a connector and were not in favor of it. He said tonight's meeting was to have a conversation with all residents and get their opinions and concerns in a forum where everyone could listen to those in favor as well as those opposed to the connector trail.

He then asked Peter Simone to provide information about the Connectivity study and about his experience related to establishing connector trails in similar situations as a trail planner.

Mr. Simone provided information about his firm's years of experience in planning parks and trails and the many projects it has designed for Towamencin Township. He said trails and connectivity have been a big part of his practice since they developed their first trail plan in 1993.

He outlined the process his firm used in developing Towamencin's Connectivity Plan including public meetings, a public opinion survey and other input which was used to develop a plan to match the resident's input. Connections from neighborhoods to parks were among the items residents wanted to see improved. He focused on the Township owned corridor shown on the 1978 subdivision plan. The Connector would utilize this corridor which ran between the 2050 and 2052 Spring Valley Road properties into the larger Township property beyond. He showed some simulations of what a connector trail could look like between the properties and provide some details for the use of fencing, plantings and other landscaping concepts to provide some privacy and make the connector attractive to match the aesthetics of the neighborhood. (The simulations are attached to the minutes)

The residents were asked to provide their thoughts and begin the conversation about constructing such a connector.

The residents immediately adjacent to the 20-foot-wide Township property where the connector trail would be located said they were concerned about their loss of privacy, lowering of property values and people driving to the Spring Valley connector to walk and taking up parking on their street. Each of these concerns were discussed and options to remedy the concerns were offered by Simone-Collins and the Committee.

One of the residents said his property at 2052 Spring Valley Road and his immediate neighbor's properties are the closest to the Kriebel Road trail and have already lost privacy in their backyards and patios with the removal of many trees to construct that trail and feared more would be taken for the connector trail. The committee said further tree removal would be only if absolutely necessary and would be avoided by "weaving" the connector between existing trees. In addition, it anticipates that new trees will be planted along the trail to increase the woodland feel of the trail and this would also restore some privacy. Some trees are being planned for 2024 in this area with a plan to plant even more in subsequent years.

Another resident voiced his concerns of the loss of property value by having this connector adjacent to his property. Mr. Simone said some counties have done "Return on Environment Studies" which show that being next to trails is something not everybody, but most people, like, and it doesn't negatively affect property values and can actually enhance them.

Mr. Simone said that from his experience most people using the connector would be from the neighborhood and yes maybe some people would drive to the corridor and park to use this connector, but they would be only a few. He said his experience doesn't show these types of trails drawing lots of people from far away.

The residents who did not live adjacent to the proposed connector wanted to be respectful of the neighbors who were, and their concerns. They were open to adding a connector if consideration is given to the concerns of the residents directly impacted by the connector and they were addressed and agreeable to those residents.

Dr. Costlow said he understands the resident's concerns about privacy and asked the residents for suggestions of what levels of privacy might be acceptable rather than just dismissing having the connection trail. There was a discussion of fencing and residents said there are no fences separating properties in the front of their homes. They also said it depends on what kind of fences and were not in favor of high solid fencing. It was suggested that plants could be used to create privacy. Mr. Simone said on other projects, as part of the process of working with the residents most impacted, they have had site walks along a proposed trail with the residents and look at privacy concerns at specific locations and what could be done to address them with things like a concentration of evergreens or plants. This coordination with the residents along Spring Valley Rd. would be part of the process.

Mr. Simone noted that constructing this connector is not in the Township's current budget. We are just at the beginning of the process. A process where you collaborate with the impacted property owners to make sure that they have a level of comfort with whatever is planned.

There was a discussion about the number of access points along the Kriebel Road trail and how that might attract people to drive and park at those locations. Mr. Simone said this goes back to the connectivity study where the thinking is that neighborhoods be connected to trails that provide greater access to Township parks without driving.

Residents asked when the Kriebel Road trail might be completed. Mr. Meehan said setting a completion date is difficult because trail construction is dependent on grant funding which is not

easily predictable. He said they are currently waiting for an announcement of a grant that would help fund a portion of the trail from the sewer plant to Fischer's' park.

Mr. Meehan noted that the connector trail itself is not in the 2024 budget so it would be at least 2025 before being budgeted for construction and prior to that some engineering work would need to be done to determine what work was involved and an estimate of costs prepared.

A resident noted that he understood a water line was underground within the connector corridor. Mr. Meehan said the plans show a water line on the other side of the trail that is marked abandoned, and none is shown in the corridor.

Another resident expressed concern about the width being twenty feet saying it looks like a "highway" rather than a path. Mr. Simone said it could be narrower and what is shown is for the purpose of showing the concept only. Another resident was concerned about the wildlife in the wooded area being impacted.

Residents liked the opportunity to have a direct connection to the trail system without walking on roadways to get to the trails. Some felt such a direct connection would enhance the desirability to live in the neighborhood which would be a plus for the property values. Mr. Simone again added that evidence from real estate studies supported this.

One resident said that to him the Brookside Farms neighborhood is "magical", and he wants it to stay that way. Others echoed this comment.

The general feeling of the meeting as interpreted by Mr. Meehan was that the residents were not opposed to the connector based on the options to address the neighbors' concerns, but they wanted the OSPAC and Township to have more detailed on site discussions with the adjacent property owners so there is a clear understanding and acceptance of expectations to address privacy and other resident specific concerns.

The OSPAC said such onsite meetings would be the next step after the outcome of this meeting was discussed further with the OSPAC and Township staff. Only after agreement on measures that were acceptable to the residents would the OSPAC act on a decision to present to the Board of Supervisors.

A resident asked about the minutes of the meeting and was told they would be posted on the Township website once they are approved at the April meeting.

At this point, many of the residents who came for this specific issue left the meeting.

### **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 original plan had an implementation cost of \$445,000. Even with the downsizing, the implementation cost is now estimated at \$531,000.

Copies of the plans are attached.

Peter Simone presented a summary of the original plan. He noted that because the estimated cost of the original plan is about \$531,000 which exceeds the budget by \$86,000 S-C also prepared an alternate plan because their charge was also to work within the budget if possible. He continued, so most of the elements in the plan are unchanged in the two plans presented but, in the alternative, the playground size is reduced, and the playground surfacing is changed from rubberized surfacing to a product called Fibar which is not considered as desirable. It is ADA compliant; placement is less expensive; it wears out quicker and you've got to replace it when it does wear out. It meets the spec for safety but when considering that it is difficult to maintain exactly the way you are supposed to, in the final analysis, at times, it might not be as safe as planned.

Mr. Meehan said these two alternatives are going to be presented by S-C to the BOS at its next meeting and the BOS will be asking for the OSPAC's recommendation.

The Committee discussed the plans and the options being presented in them.

Ms. Smith didn't believe the Committee should skimp by not including the rubberized surfacing and we should try to find funds to make that possible. The Committee discussed the pros and cons of the two plans including finding more money for the rubberized surfacing, the high cost of maintenance of the Fibar, possibly getting sponsors or finding a generous donor for the higher cost plan and eliminating or reducing amenities such as trash cans which are already in this park.

The Committee also discussed postponing some elements such as the game tables, corn hole games, and the ping pong table and adding them later.

Mr. Simone emphasized the importance of approving the design because the Township wants to get this out for bid this summer, so the work is completed this year.

Mr. Vaitis then made a motion to recommend Plan A (the larger playground with the rubberized surfacing) to the BOS as the plan to be developed for the Grist Mill Park Improvements. The Motion was seconded by Ms. Becker and all Committee members voted in favor of the motion. The recommendation will be forwarded to the Township staff and Simone-Collins will make a presentation to the Board at its next meeting.

The Committee briefly discussed access to the park from the nearby neighborhoods and how this is addressed. Mr. Simone also noted the need for a crossing to the Walton School property on the other side of Allentown Road which was included in S-C recommendations for this park. Mr. Meehan noted such a crossing was being is being looked at by the Township Traffic Engineer.

**Concept plan for pickleball at Butch Clemens Park,**

Mr. Meehan provided an update to the Committee on the preparation of a concept plan for constructing pickleball courts at Butch Clemens Park in the corner of the park directly behind the WAWA at Forty Foot Rd. and Route 63. This is to be a concept plan like what was prepared for Fischer's Park.

As a first step, the Township asked CKS to provide a cost proposal for preparing this concept plan which is to include investigating access to this corner of the park through/over lands owned by others. He said CKS responded and has already submitted a cost estimate, which will be going to the Public Works Committee first and then BOS for approval at the Board's second meeting in March.

### **Soccer Fields at Green Lane Road Park**

Mr. Meehan updated the Committee on progress on the development of new soccer fields at Green Lane Road Park.

He said a meeting was held this morning (March 11, 2024) and attended by the stakeholders, TYA, the OSPAC, CKS, Public Works Department and the Township manager. Mr. Meehan said at that meeting, he provided comments raised by the committee about fencing heights, the need for more parking and possibly increasing the distance from the edge of the pitch to the fence line to allow a little more room for players and spectators. Ms. Stover noted those comments.

He said the stakeholders agreed on approving the proposed plan to the extent it has been developed and reviewed.

Currently, CKS is waiting for a permit to be issued by Montgomery County Soil Conservation Services to allow earth disturbance to proceed. Public works will be performing the grading work. Ms. Stover at this morning's meeting said CKS feels there is enough material stockpiled at the site to complete the grading as proposed.

M. Meehan said the bad news is that after considering the construction time, seeding and "fallow time", the fields are likely not to be available for play until 2027. In the meantime, playing on the fields once the grading is completed will not be permitted.

### **Bocce Courts**

Dr. Costlow noted the bocce court surfacing has been completed. No pooled water on the courts has been seen since the surfacing was placed. He said it needs to be rolled to compress the surfacing which is a little soft. He also noted that PW also installed a small shed near the courts to store tools used for the upkeep of the courts. He did not know if the tools had been purchased and placed in the shed yet.

There was discussion about who would have access to the shed (keys to the lock) and the Committee felt this should be worked out between Dr. Costlow and PW. Dr. Costlow suggested a multi-combination lock which could be used by different groups so you could know who opened it when it was accessed.

Dr. Costlow proposed having an “opening ceremony” for the courts once the weather gets warmer. Mr. Meehan said he brought this up with Mr. Kraynik who recommended this be something endorsed by the OSPAC Committee first and then be coordinated with the Township Special Events Coordinator. The details will be worked on and when ready, the OSPAC will vote on it and then make a recommendation to the BOS.

### **TA Trail Costs**

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

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **2024 Tree Planting Plans**

Mr. Meehan said he is arranging to meet with Dennis Carney to discuss planting trees for 2024. One area to be given priority is the area along the TA trail on the east side of the new pedestrian bridge where the houses along Spring Valley Rd. are closest to the trail. This is an area where some evergreens would be appropriate to provide privacy for those homes. Last year Mr. Carney recommended some hemlock trees along the trail here.

Dr. Costlow also said he would like to pursue developing a plan for tree planting along Forty Foot Road through Kulpville. He said trees have been shown to have a calming effect on traffic and add to the overall improvement of commercial zones such as this. This would be a long-term planting project.

### **Other new Items**

Mr. Meehan brought up three Items for the Committee to think about for future meetings.

- OSPAC Goals and Objectives
- Veterans Committee suggesting needed work at Tennis Luken cemetery.
- Small wildflower gardens or perennial gardens along the edges of township woodlands and parks.

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

Respectfully Submitted

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

**The next OSPAC meeting is on April 8, 2024**