

**Towamencin Township**  
**Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**April 8, 2024**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Attending:**

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

Dan Vaitis  
Dave Sponseller  
Joe Rumsey  
Katie Cleary, Special Events Coordinator  
Peter Simone of Simone-Collins

**Not attending:**

Todd Fisher  
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.

**OPENING COMMENTS**

Mr. Meehan noted that he records the audio of the meeting for his convenience in preparing the minutes. He also noted he met with Mr. Kraynik, the Township Manager, on April 4, 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.

Mr. Meehan also noted some upcoming events in Fischer's Park for the Committee's information:

- April 13<sup>th</sup> Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy Stream Cleanup along Towamencin Creek and along Kriebel Rd.
- April 17<sup>th</sup> 1:00 PM Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy, Rain Garden Cleanup
- April 20<sup>th</sup> 7:30 AM Valley Forge Audubon Society Bird Walk led by Andrew Dolan
- April 20<sup>th</sup> 9:00 AM Invasive species removal
- May 11<sup>th</sup>, noon to 4 PM Towamencin Day

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

The committee received two letters concerning items to be discussed on tonight's agenda. Mr. Meehan read the letters to the Committee. They are summarized for the minutes as follows:

From Diana Blystone a Township resident.

She wrote that as a mother of three children, one with autism, she is extremely excited to see Towamencin supporting a playground that serves all our community's children. She highly suggests a fence that secures the safety of the children playing at the playground and gives the children a little more freedom to explore without a parent at the child's side the whole time. I hope you decide that a fence is needed.

From Laura Smith, the OSPAC Liaison, and a Township Supervisor

On the evening of the BOS meeting, she sent an email to the parents who expressed their concern about fencing. In it she said she agreed and would like to see the fencing around the

playground as opposed to relying upon the outer fencing of the park itself. She has spoken with Chuck, and he is on board himself and is going to see what can be done to navigate the need for financing. She said the goal is to get this moving this year.

There were public comments made in person.

Ms. Venessa Gaynor, a Township resident commented in favor of a fence around the perimeter of Grist Mill Park playground. She stated that at the BOS meeting, several township residents in both written and in-person comments, expressed the need for fencing enclosing the playground given that some children may have a tendency to “elope” meaning they may wander or run without recognition of safety. But “eloping” is not confined only to autistic children. It can happen in neurotypical children or with other children with disabilities. She said that in speaking with other parents in the community, there is a lack of playgrounds that have fencing immediately around the playground area, or in the playground. Fencing in most cases is fencing at the perimeter of the larger park and doesn’t separate the playground from other park activities, roadways and parking areas.

She stated there are children in the community who are not able to fully participate in community life, they're not able to take advantage of most playgrounds and not able to meet other children. That also means that other children aren't able to meet them. They're segregated. This inclusive playground will help them to enjoy playing with other children. So specifically, when we're looking at something that's to be an inclusive playground, we should expect it will be used by special needs children and it should include fencing around its perimeter that considers these children with special tendencies.

Another comment was made by Mr. Dennis McGeehan, a Township resident. He said he wanted to thank the Committee for last month’s connector path meeting with the Brookside Farm development neighbors. He said he felt the meeting exceeded his expectations and wanted to thank the committee and Peter Simone for his presentation at that meeting. He said he looks forward to a connector coming to fruition in the future.

There were no other public Comments.

#### **APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES** – Meeting of March 11, 2024

Mr. Meehan asked for comments or corrections, if any, to the draft minutes of the March 11, 2024, meeting which he sent to the Committee members prior to tonight’s meeting. Dr. Costlow noted an incomplete/ not clear sentence in the paragraph regarding the bocce courts. Mr. Meehan said he will correct this. Ms. Becker made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Dr. Costlow seconded the motion. All members voted to approve the minutes as corrected.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### **Grist Mill Park Engineering Plans**

Mr. Meehan summarized what has taken place regarding this since the last committee meeting. He said Rob Gladfelter presented two plans offered by Simone-Collins to the BOS at their March 27<sup>th</sup> meeting, one with a reduced scope but a cost near the budget and the other having the full desired scope but a cost greater than the budget. Neither had included a fence around the playground. The Board asked that the OSPAC make a recommendation regarding a fence around the playground and clarify its position on options regarding cost before they act on this item.

Peter Simone was present at tonight's OSPAC meeting and presented his thoughts on the playground costs and the fencing.

He said Simone Collins understands the concerns about budget and that's why they presented two options to the BOS. The options were based on which elements were included in each option.

Regarding fencing he said if the township wants fencing there are various options available. Cyclone fencing could be used but it is unattractive, and it is "institutional," and he felt we should not consider installing it at Grist Mill playground. Another option would be a post and rail fence with a wire mesh grid attached on one side. He also mentioned another type of fence which he has used recently in other parks. It is a heavy gauge, vinyl coated wire fencing product from Omega fencing. He had a sample which he passed around to the committee. The committee commented on this type of fencing and generally agreed it that it could be an alternative. Peter said this fencing is about four feet tall, is very durable and he thinks it's a good product. He estimated the cost at about \$65 a lineal foot so with the size of the playground at Grist Mill Park, this Omega fencing would cost around \$20,000. The committee agreed that details like this can be discussed as the engineering plans are being developed and bid items decided upon. The OSPAC does not need to decide on such fence details tonight. The Committee did agree on including playground perimeter fencing in whatever plan is chosen.

Moving on to the budget, Mr. Simone presented a summary of the park elements that Simone-Collins has been asked to design. The estimated cost without the fence is \$531,000 well above the budget of \$455,000. If S-C stays within the budget, some elements need to be taken out of the final package. We can afford the inclusive playground with poured-in-place, rubberized surfacing, a basketball court, paved connecting walkways and stormwater management. He presented a marked-up cost estimate which he passed around. He noted that with this proposal what we don't get because of cost is the pavilion and the game table area with the games.

Ms. Blake spoke in favor of constructing the playground one hundred percent and not doing it piecemeal and then come back later and add things. This do the entire playground at this time is the approach taken with the phasing alternative presented this evening by Mr. Simone which completes the playground but defers the pavilion and other elements outside the playground for a future phase.

The Committee discussed the options. Mr. Vaitis said he thought having a playground without a pavilion is a horrible idea. He said he is a huge advocate for the basketball court but in this case would opt to have a pavilion and let the basketball court wait. The committee discussed options

of what park elements might be best deferred. Each option seemed to have ideas favoring it and not.

Ideally, constructing the entire plan was preferred but did not work with the budget constraints.

Peter Simone said it would be best if such decisions were deferred until the engineering plans are more advanced and we had a more accurate estimate of costs. He referenced getting costs from “Co-Stars” the statewide cooperative bid system that can provide cost savings for some of the items included in the Grist Mill plans. Getting that information in advance could lock in some costs and refine the estimates. He also noted that the calculations on the stormwater management costs would then also be refined. Having all these more detailed costs would then factor into any decisions on what could or could not be included as bid items. He said at that point, a decision would be needed on what would be included in this phase and bid.

He said it's important to get direction as soon as possible from the BOS that they will be comfortable with and be able to afford. At this point we need the BOS approval to move forward with the full engineering because in terms of timing we can get this bid by the late summer and hopefully get it built this fall. It is best to prepare engineering plans for the entire scope of the improvements planned and not piecemeal since items like the stormwater management need to consider the entire scope of the planned improvements.

So between now and the time the decision needs to be made on what is to be constructed in this phase, Simone-Collins/CKS will prepare the engineering plans, prepare bid documents for all the items, then decide what we want to include in the bid proposal and then ask the contractors to bid only on those items.

If the board decides they want to put a little more money into the park or there is more grant money found, once a full design is available, it is a lot easier to add things if you want.

Ms. Becker made a motion “that the OSPAC recommend that the Board of Supervisors authorize Simone-Collins to proceed with engineering the full plan for the Grist Mill Park improvements as shown and described on the plan “Phase 1 Improvements” dated 4/08/2024 but with a fence added around the playground. When the engineering plans are completed and more precise cost information is available for the individual elements, this cost data will be used to determine which items will be bid to keep the total cost of Phase 1 within the scale of the budget”. The motion was seconded by Dr. Costlow. There were no other comments on the motion from the Committee. All Committee members voted in favor of the motion.

Mr. Meehan said he will present this recommendation to the Township staff and the Board of Supervisors.

### **Towamencin Day May 11, 2024**

Mr. Meehan reminded the Committee of the upcoming event in Fischer’s Park on May 11, 2024, from noon until 4PM. The OSPAC will have a table for meeting and discussing OSPAC Topics with Township residents. Mr. Meehan asked for committee members to help during this event

and several volunteered. He said he would send a sign-up sheet for each member to indicate when they could help.

For display, Mr. Meehan said he will bring some plans of items being developed such as Grist Mill Park and a plan showing the locations of the Township Parks.

He also mentioned that he might have a copy of the Fischer's Park plan from the time it was purchased by the Township. That might make an interesting exhibit.

Dr. Costlow suggested a rolling slideshow of Township parks.

Mr. Meehan said he will work with Ms. Cleary, the Township Events coordinator, to get a sign for the Open Space Committee table, which did not have anything last year.

### **Connector Path from Spring Valley Rd. to the Valley View -Trumbauer Rd. (VV-T) Trail.**

Following last month's very successful meeting with the Brookside Farms residents, Mr. Meehan said he asked the township to help locate the property markers for the two properties adjacent to the connector corridor. They will do this using metal detectors to locate the property corner pins.

Mr. Meehan said he met with Mr. Dennis Carney of the Township staff on site to assess the trees along the VV-T trail where neighbors mentioned they lost privacy when the trail was constructed because trees were cut down for the trail. Mr. Carney suggested three species of trees that might work along this section of trail which is less sparsely wooded than other sections. The species were hemlock, spruce, and pine. He will ask David Brother's Nursery for their suggestions and an idea of costs for supplying and planting trees in this area.

### **Concept Plan for Pickleball at Butch Clemens Park**

Mr. Meehan noted that CKS Engineers submitted a cost proposal to the Township for engineering services to prepare a concept plan for pickleball courts at Butch Clemens Park. At its March 27<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Board of Supervisors approved this proposal and CKS can now proceed with the work.

Mr. Meehan said he sent CKS a preliminary suggestion on a location in the park behind the WAWA on Forty Foot Road that the Committee had considered previously.

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

Mr. Kraynik reported that the Township discussed with the Municipal Authority the work planned for new soccer fields at this location adjacent to the wastewater treatment plant and they are OK with it, but an agreement has not yet been signed.

CKS is waiting for approval of a permit from Montgomery County Soil Conservation Service. Both the signed agreement and the permit are being worked on concurrently and are the next steps before grading can begin.

### **Bocce Courts in Fischer's Park**

Dr. Costlow summarized a meeting held on March 31, 2024 to discuss items regarding the bocce courts. Dr. Costlow, Mr. Meehan, Mr. Kraynik and Mr. Hillmantel attended.

The group complimented the Public Works Department for the work they did at the courts. They were looking very good until the heavy rains came and resulting in ponding of clay colored water on the courts especially the one furthest from the Stable pavilion. Mr. Hillmantel and John Coll of Top-a-court are discussing why this is occurring and looking for a solution.

Providing access to the court grooming tools in the shed near the courts is still a work in progress as the group works on providing access to all who want to use the tools while also preventing the pricey tools from being stolen. The tools are Township property and Mr. Hillmantel is adamant that they be locked up when not being used. Currently there is a keyed lock on the shed but there are discussions on changing to a combination lock with access codes that can be changed.

The courts are now playable and are being used. Public Works will keep an eye on the courts and do some grooming but the players themselves are expected to also groom the courts as they use them and leave them in playable condition for those who follow.

Fencing around the courts to prevent damage to the playing surface was also discussed. Fencing also presents some maintenance issues so for now signs were suggested to be a first step. One sign has already been installed but another is needed facing the Stable Pavilion which is heavily used for group events, and people wander from that direction and cross over the courts rather than walking around them.

Consideration is being given to an official "Opening" of the courts. Mr. Kraynik said such an event needs to be planned with the Township Special Events Coordinator, reviewed by the OSPAC, which will then make a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

### **Tree Planting – 2024**

Mr. Meehan noted he has spoken with Mr. Carney of the township staff about planting trees in 2024, some in the spring and some in the fall. Trees along the VV-T trail east of the ped bridge being one area that could benefit from some evergreens and will be a priority this spring. This is the same area as mentioned above in the section about the connector path from the trail to Spring Valley Road. Discussions and planning with him for the tree locations and species will be continuing.

Mr. Meehan also noted that in a recent discussion with him, Mr. Simone mentioned a great opportunity for Towamencin to leverage its funding for trees through a program of DCNR called

Urban Community Forestry Grants Program. Mr. Simone said this program would be great for Towamencin if it has a “set aside” budget for trees. He said DCNR is looking for municipalities to get involved with Urban Forestry and apply for its grant program. Mr. Meehan noted that the Committee should pursue these grants for future tree planting.

Dr. Costlow said he believes the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society has a similar grant program which promotes tree planting. He said he will do some research on the PHC program and report back.

### **Review of TA & KR II Trail Costs**

Mr. Meehan reported that a meeting with Township staff and Gilmore & Associates is scheduled for May 9, 2024, to review the trail cost data.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Meehan noted that he sent a copy of OSPAC “Goals and Objectives” to the Committee to stir some thinking for an update of these guidelines to be in line with the new Township Comprehensive Plan which is also in the works for an update. He asked the Committee to review the Goals and Objectives, so we are familiar with them and use them as guidelines for an update. We will be discussing them further at future meetings.

Dr. Costlow brought up a point about the delay in the time items are discussed at the OSPAC meeting and when this information is published on the township website, being that the minutes are not published until they are approved at a subsequent meeting.

He suggests publication of “unofficial” meeting minutes in the interim, so residents know what’s coming. Just a summary of what transpired that could be put on the Township website for resident’s information.

Dr. Costlow said he would like to pursue this concept. Mr. Meehan recommended he talk to Mr. Kraynik about this first.

Mr. Meehan asked if there was any other new business. There was none.

Ms. Becker made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. DeHaven. All voted in favor.  
Meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM

Respectfully Submitted

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

**The next OSPAC meeting is on May 13, 2024**