

**Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
October 21, 2024
Meeting Minutes**

Attending:

Joseph Meehan
Nancy Becker
Todd Fisher
Michon Blake
Dr. Richard Costlow
Dave Sponseller
Laura Smith BOS Liaison to the OSPAC

Not attending:

Dan Vaitis
Robert DeHaven
Joe Rumsey
Katie Cleary, Township Special Events Coordinator

CALL TO ORDER

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.

Mr. Meehan said he did not get an opportunity to meet with Mr. Kraynik, the Township Manager, this month as he usually does and will be providing only information he personally has knowledge of, to the committee at tonight's meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Township residents, Mr. Dennis McGeehan and Ms. Cheryl Portwood, were present at the meeting. Ms. Portwood introduced herself as a neighbor who primarily attended to observe and possibly provide input on certain agenda items and wants to see what has happened in regard to the soccer fields at Green Lane Park and is always interested in trees. Mr. McGeehan mentioned he was interested in hearing about the bocce court opening event he had read about and the trail connector project from Spring Valley Road to the new trail along Kriebel Road. Both were invited to participate in the conversations about those topics as they were being discussed.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES – Meeting of September 16, 2024

Mr. Meehan asked for comments or corrections, if any, to the draft minutes of the September 16, 2024, meeting, which he sent to the Committee members prior to tonight's meeting. There were none. Ms. Becker made a motion to approve the minutes as drafted and distributed. Motion was seconded by Dr. Costlow. All committee members voted in favor of the motion.

OLD BUSINESS – Updates

Summary of the Budget Workshop meeting Presentation to the BOS on October 2, 2024.

Mr. Meehan provided a brief overview of his October 2nd presentation on the Committee's budget requests for 2025. He noted that his presentation reviewed the 2024 achievements, the status of grants through 2024, and outlined key budget requests for the coming year. He shared a printed version of his power point presentation for those who were not able to watch the presentation live on Zoom. Ms. Smith reported that the budget presentation was well received, particularly due to its clarity and not being a huge ask.

Capital Projects Budget requests mentioned in the overview:

- **Kriebel Road Trail:** Setting aside funds to provide a match for a grant to continue this trail from the sewage treatment plant to Fishers Park. (\$42,138)
- **Green Lane Park Soccer Field:** Meehan proposed funds to include a durable seeded turf playing surface at the soccer fields expected to be graded in early 2025 so the field could then have two growing seasons to mature before being used regularly for TYA a soccer games. (\$35,000)
- **Pickleball Courts at Clemens Park:** Meehan emphasized that this request for design and engineering funds was based on an unmet need to provide this recreation activity for Township residents. (\$60,000)
- **Tree Planting along Trails:** Meehan mentioned tree planting along Kriebel Rd. and other trails as a priority, seeking funds to continue with this plan to plant trees every year. initiative. (\$25,000)
- **Additional Trail Connectors:** Funding was requested for paths connecting Grist Mill Drive to Grist Mill Park and from Spring Valley Rd. to existing trail networks. Both connectors are seen as providing more direct links from neighborhoods to recreation facilities. (\$25,000)

Ms. Portwood inquired about who prepares grant applications for the Township. Ms. Smith explained that the Township uses professionals for preparing and submitting grant applications noting the use of the Township engineering firm for some and the Township planning consultant for others, depending on the subject of the grant being requested. Mr. Meehan said he and the township staff collaborate on the less complex grant applications and that it has been successful in the past, for example with the recent PECO Green Region Grant for trees which the Township was awarded.

The topic changed to trees and Ms. Portwood asked if the Township has a garden club which might be able to take care of tree plantings to ensure they survive the planting process. Mr. Meehan and Dr. Costlow said this committee tried to establish one focusing on Fischer's Park, but Covid came along during its startup and the group never got off ground. Ms. Portwood noted that the community is a little more active now regarding the Township, so maybe such an idea would now work.

Mr. Meehan said he was going to jump ahead in the agenda because Mr. Sponseller needed to leave the meeting soon and he played an important role in gathering data which was used in the Budget Workshop presentation.

Request for Engineering for Pickleball Courts

Mr. Meehan said an item presented in the budget workshop for 2025 was to move pickleball courts from a concept plan closer to reality by preparing engineering plans for the courts. He

said his presentation began with providing background information on why the OSPAC feels there is an unmet need for pickleball recreation in Towamencin.

Mr. Meehan noted that in his presentation to the BOS at the Budget Request Workshop meeting he prefaced his request for funding for engineering for pickleball courts with a summary of why the OSPAC feels there is an unmet opportunity based on demand to provide a meaningful recreation activity for residents of Towamencin by constructing pickleball courts. This was based on anecdotal evidence from residents as well as national and local research and the thinking that Towamencin is similar to the other municipalities that have addressed the requests for pickleball as a modern recreation activity.

He credited Dr. Costlow for gathering national statistics and Mr. Sponseller for gathering substantial firsthand local data to support the Committee's position on the unmet opportunity.

Mr. Sponseller said he researched nearby municipalities with existing courts. He reached out to representatives from Upper Gwynedd, Skippack, Horsham, and Whitpain Townships, all of whom confirmed the popularity and success of their courts. These municipalities gave positive feedback noting high usage and resident satisfaction with their courts. These conversations underscored the potential viability and popularity of courts if established in Towamencin Township.

Ms. Portwood asked how municipalities managed court access and whether players had to pay or reserve spots.

Mr. Meehan responded that systems varied. Some have open courts on a first come first served basis while others have "meet-up groups" where you pay to belong and where members get priority court access at specific times.

From his conversations with other municipalities, Mr. Sponseller described the "self-regulating" nature of these pickleball communities, where players generally abide by the rules without needing township oversight. At Skippack, the first-come, first-served system and a culture of shared play have created a social and orderly playing environment. The contacted municipalities indicated that this "self-regulation" fosters a social and cooperative atmosphere, aligning with pickleball's communal spirit.

The Committee discussed how Towamencin's demographics align with pickleball's appeal, especially among seniors. Although the sport is attracting younger players, it remains particularly popular among older adults. Dr. Costlow noted that Towamencin's slightly older population was an ideal fit for pickleball. This demographic match further supports the proposal for Towamencin courts.

The conversation turned to costs. Mr. Meehan estimated that building the courts with all its related infrastructure would cost approximately \$1 million, with \$350,000 allocated directly to court construction and the remainder to infrastructure, like parking and access. He acknowledged that such a high cost will raise some eyebrows and what we should do is gauge how the residents feel. We know the demand for courts is high, but what are residents willing to pay? He suggested we work toward finding out either by having an open township meeting devoted to pickleball or having a survey of residents specifically devoted to pickleball or preparing a feasibility report much like the one done by Whitpain Township.

Whitpain Township's report was discussed. Mr. Meehan felt that the demographics and data as well as the interest and strong sentiments leaning toward pickleball closely matched Towamencin's. Dr. Costlow pointed out we do not need to spend money on a survey when we could gather similar insights through an informal "temperature check" such as a community meeting or a brief focused survey. Dr. Costlow provided some pages taken from the Whitpain Report and summarized data from them, suggesting they aligned well with Towamencin demographics and could be used to validate the Towamencin community's interest.

Ms. Smith confirmed that township policies favor reducing debt, so the board might prefer grants or incremental funding. Mr. Sponseller mentioned the township could consider bonds or short-term loans but noted grants should be prioritized. Ms. Smith emphasized that paying for the project outright would reduce eligibility for grants,

The Committee had conversations about potential funding sources such as grants, donations, sponsorship etc. Grants, however, take time and dependence on grants for funding would mean the courts would be years away in the future yet. Looking into the future, costs continue to increase. The desire for courts is now.

The Committee also had conversations about building a few courts at a time, using the existing parking lot and access, for a time etc. to try to spread the spending over time. Each had its benefits and its drawbacks. Dr. Costlow expressed support for a phased approach but emphasized the urgency of addressing current community demands. He also suggested that some of the benefit of the Pickleball Court Plan could benefit the need for more parking at Butch Clemens Park, so some of the cost should be attributed to improved parking and not just pickleball.

After discussion, the Committee decided to hold off deciding on which course of action to pursue until we got some feedback on the budget request for 2025 to spend money on preparing engineering drawings. The drawings could be used in applying for grants and used to decide on an "incremental" approach over some years to construct the courts.

Mr. Meehan said that at the Budget Request Workshop for the reasons discussed, he requested that the township budget in 2025 for detailed engineering plans for pickleball courts, as this would support grant applications by demonstrating project readiness. Ms. Smith agreed that engineering plans could make the project more grant-ready and, in turn, financially feasible.

Mr. Sponseller left the meeting.

Grist Mill Park Update-

Mr. Meehan said a request for bids for the improvements to Grist Mill Park has been advertised and the bids are due on October 30th. The bid solicitation information can be found online at PennBid.net. The bid results are important since the budget for this project is tight.

Request for Funds to establish a durable turf playing surface at the proposed Green Lane Road Park Soccer Field

Mr. Meehan said he requested \$35,000 be budgeted in 2025 to be used to provide the materials, equipment and labor to establish a top layer of durable, well established turf playing surface at the soccer field at Green Lane Road Park. For the details, he shared the power point

presentation used at the Budget Workshop Meeting. He also summarized the lead up to the choice of Green Lane Road Park for the soccer field.

Ms. Portwood expressed a specific interest in the progress of the soccer field project, hoping for a timeline on when the turf installation might be completed. Mr. Meehan responded that this was one of the priority items for the budget request, as having the seeding done early in 2025 would allow the remainder of the year to grow and count towards the two years of needed growth before being used for soccer activity. If that did not happen in 2025, the field even though appearing to be completed, the newly installed turf would not be able to withstand the soccer use “wear and tear” until 2028. Getting the turf established early in 2025 was critical. Dr. Costlow added that as the soccer program continues to grow, youth engagement through soccer could help make Green Lane Park more active and community-oriented, supporting broader goals for youth recreation.

Mr. Meehan said in his presentation to the Board of Supervisors at the Budget workshop he expressed the need to provide additional soccer ballfields. He repeated the points made to the BOS noting that the Towamencin Youth Association (TYA) has a significant number of young athletes, over 1,100 soccer players across 79 teams. With the loss of a large soccer field due to Grist Mill Park improvements, the demand for playing fields has intensified. TYA utilizes multiple locations across the Township and also school district fields, but still the lack of fields limits the number of practices and games. Soccer fields, unlike baseball fields, require periods of rest to allow the grass to regenerate. As a result, the TYA designates some fields solely for games and others for practice, prioritizing fields based on their condition.

The Green Lane Road Park site was chosen as a solution to the shortage, given it already serves as an athletic venue and is large enough to accommodate one large field and in the future a smaller one. The township has stockpiled needed embankment material at the site and has had the Township Engineer prepare engineering plans to level the field. This has been ongoing in discussions and planning for over a year. Several committee members emphasized the importance of providing safe, structured activities for the township's youth. Given the limited recreational options, expanding field availability was seen as essential for youth engagement. They noted the community growth since the initial development of Green Lane, and a demand for baseball and soccer to be year-round sports. Yet fewer free spaces are available for this increased activity. “Wear and tear” on soccer fields is a particular concern because of the concentrated play in certain areas of the fields. These factors made Green Lane Road Park the best choice when reviewing the viable options.

The timeline discussed suggested that, following field preparation in 2025, and not using the field that year or 2026, soccer might be played at Green Lane by 2027 or 2028, depending on the success of the growing seasons.

Mr. Meehan said the funds requested for this project for 2025 are to establish a durable, maintainable playing surface on the playing field footprint of the large soccer field next year including adding supplements to the top layers of the playing field soils, blending them, seeding and fertilizing. Initial construction is the time to take these measures and not put it off and try to correct the conditions once the field conditions become a problem when play gets underway.

Ms. Portwood, a nearby resident, shared a historical perspective on the park, recalling its initial development for short-term baseball use. Over time, the park has expanded to include amenities like bathrooms, raising her concerns about overuse and noise in a previously unused area. She expressed concerns about further intensifying the field's use with a soccer field,

fearing a detrimental impact on the neighborhood's noise level. She mentioned that sounds from baseball games are already clearly heard on nearby Pheasant Hill Road.

Mr. Meehan emphasized their intent to address environmental and noise concerns. The soccer fields are further from the residences and appropriate trees could be planted along Green Lane Road to create a natural noise buffer to minimize community noise impacts.

Ms. Portwood raised concerns about the community's awareness of these developments of the soccer fields. While discussions and planning had been ongoing for over a year, limited media coverage and public announcements led to some residents feeling uninformed. Committee members noted that the OSPAC meetings included this topic and were available on the Township website and likely because there was more interest being shown to other township news during this period, this was not the highest priority for media attention and resident's interest but on a regular basis during this time the work was being discussed at public meetings. The Committee encouraged residents to follow updates through public meeting minutes, newsletters, and recordings of board meetings, which are accessible online.

Connector Paths

Mr. Meehan summarized his presentation regarding connector trails made at the Budget Request Workshop. The Budget request was for \$25,000 for engineering work needed to move these connector trails to the next step. It combined connector paths from Spring Valley Road to the Kriebel Road Trail and from Grist Mill Drive to Grist Mill Park into one request.

Even though the first connector mentioned previously was considered a "simple" connection because it was short, the topography it traversed was sloped and needed a formal engineering plan for accurate grading, and to evaluate ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance.

The committee had conversations about ADA compliance, water runoff, the materials preferred for the walking surface and residents' privacy, all pointing to the need for an engineering plan.

A related trail connecting Grist Mill Drive to Grist Mill Park, allowing residents of the Grist Mill neighborhood to walk to the park without driving was also included in this request. The Township Engineer, while working on a Grist Mill detention basin project, has already gathered survey information that can be used for this trail. An alignment needs to be determined that would consider the basin as well as privacy for the residents opposite the basin. This trail might be able to be constructed by the Public Works Department, but engineering plans showing details are needed. If this engineering work is accepted for 2025, the OSPAC can go back to the residents along Spring Valley Road with details of the connector path in their neighborhood and also advance the development of the Grist Mill Connector path.

Planting Trees in 2025

Mr. Meehan, again referring to the Budget Request Workshop, noted that for 2025 in line with the OSPAC thinking that the Township plant trees each year in order to replace the many unhealthy ash trees and others removed over the years. He noted that the request again in 2025 is for \$25,000 with trees planned to be planted along Kriebel Road where the new trail abuts Green Lane Road Park, along the Drinnon Park Trail and playground, and along the Trumbauer Road to Valley View Way Trail focusing on the easternmost segment of that trail.

2024 Fall tree Planting

Mr. Meehan noted that Mr. Dennis Carney has been in contact with David Brothers Landscaping and is coordinating the planting of trees this fall. The BOS approved the quote from David

Brothers at its October 9th meeting. The tree locations are staked out and the planting date will now be coordinated by Mr. Carney with David Brothers.

OSPAC Goals and Objectives

The Committee agreed to table this item and discuss it further at a future meeting. This is not a pressing topic at the present time.

Initial discussion for a multi-year forestation project

Dr. Costlow proposed an initiative to create a tree-lined street along Forty-Foot Road from Sumneytown Pike all the way to Welsh Road. He said the initiative is inspired by research from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) showing that tree-lined streets reduce speeding, lower crime rates, and increase pedestrian traffic. The initiative, which he said he would lead, aims to use trees recommended by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to beautify the area and provide various community benefits. The project, though long term, would ideally transform Kulpsville's appearance over time and have a positive impact on drivers exiting the turnpike and driving through this main artery of Towamencin.

He emphasized the importance of taking advantage of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society "Tree Tenders" program and form a "tree tenders group" which would qualify for planting subsidies. Tree planting events could be organized by this group to encourage community participation not only in the planting but also caring for the trees.

Dr. Costlow discussed the specific aspects of his vision along Forty-Foot Road such as overhead and underground utilities, sidewalk widths, etc. when considering planting in suburban landscapes such as Towamencin's.

The Committee showed support for his vision and the benefits it could bring to the Township. Dr. Costlow encouraged the Committee to encourage others to take the PHS Tree Tender Course. He said we need to get the word out. (Another Tree Tender Webinar course is offered by Penn State from January 8th through February 19th (12:00PM to 1:00 PM)).

As another initial step, Mr. Meehan said he would try to get an aerial view of the Forty-Foot Road corridor so the committee could begin looking further at this proposal.

Veterans Committee

Mr. Meehan shared the Veterans Committees request to the Board of Supervisors for assistance in planning the development of Veterans Memorial Park. Initially, this project would require grant writing, potentially with assistance from a professional consultant, to develop the necessary engineering plans. The Veterans Committee requested funds be budgeted in 2025 to start work on grants and other fundraising. The OSPAC considered a suggestion from Ms. Portwood that an academic partnership, using graduate students to prepare the engineering plans for the park, could provide a cost-effective solution. After conversations on this suggestion, the OSPAC ultimately recommended the Veterans Committee engage a professional engineering firm.

Mr. Meehan noted that if anyone has any leads on Veteran related grants, to let the Veterans Committee know.

Bocce Court Community Events

Mr. McGeehan said he heard the OSPAC was organizing a bocce tournament now that work on the bocce courts is completed. Dr. Costlow said due to timing and the onset of cooler weather, this was postponed to spring.

Dr. Costlow suggested adding a sign at the bocce courts informing users about the rules of bocce, as it's a popular question among users. The Committee agreed this is a good suggestion and recommended he do it.

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

Ms. Becker made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Blake seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55PM

Respectfully Submitted

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

The next OSPAC meeting is on November 11, 2024