

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

**Attending:**

Joseph Meehan  
Nancy Becker  
Todd Fisher  
Michon Blake  
Dr. Richard Costlow  
Robert DeHaven  
Dan Vaitis  
Joe Rumsey  
Police Chief Troxel

**Not attending:**

Dave Sponseller  
Katie Cleary, Township Special Events Coordinator  
Laura Smith BOS Liaison to the OSPAC

**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. He also said he met with David Kraynik, the Township Manger on November 7<sup>th</sup> who provided an update on items of interest to the Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee (OSPAC).

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Township residents, John French, Bob DeMarco, and Bruce Bailey were present. Mr. Bailey said he had no comments to make. Mr. DeMarco said he is here to participate in the discussions regarding the Township's policy on geocaching and would make his comments during that discussion. Mr. French said he also is attending to ask for a change to the geocaching policy and would comment during that discussion. In addition, on another topic he asked if the township has made any plans for charging electric vehicles. Mr. Meehan responded that the Township has worked on developing an ordinance regarding charging stations in the township, but he does not know the status of it. In addition, he said, to his knowledge, the township does not have any plans in the works for adding charging stations in the Township's parks.

**APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES** – Meeting of October 21, 2024

Mr. Meehan asked for comments or corrections, if any, to the draft minutes of the October 21, 2024, meeting, which he sent to the Committee members prior to tonight's meeting. There were none. Dr. Costlow made a motion to approve the minutes as drafted and distributed. Ms. Becker seconded the motion. All committee members voted in favor of the motion.

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION – Geocaching**

Mr. Meehan said Mr. French has requested the township revisit its policy regarding its prohibition of geocaching in township parks and open space. The BOS has asked the OSPAC to review the policy and provide advice on it.

Mr. French and Mr. DeMarco as well as Chief Troxel are here to participate in conversations regarding the policy.

Mr. Meehan provided a brief historical context for the policy. From what he was able to glean from old records, he said geocaching faced challenges after an incident in 2009, which led to discussions in 2011 about prohibiting it in Township parks. He noted that the incident involved a geocache being mistaken for a dangerous device which contributed to a negative perception. In response to the incident the township acted out of caution, and prohibited geocaching.

Mr. French and Mr. DeMarco explained that geocaching involves hiding containers (“caches”) in public or private spaces, which participants locate using GPS coordinates. Caches vary in size, shape, and complexity, with some including logs for participants to sign, and others offering themed elements or small trinkets. Some containers used in the past have been “ammo boxes” which was the cause for concern in the 2009 incident in Towamencin. Geocaching has come a long way since then.

Mr. French and DeMarco pointed out that geocaching is widely accepted in many other municipalities as an outdoor recreation activity and Towamencin is a rare instance of it being prohibited. Mr. French pointed out that geocaching is listed as prohibited on the Township website, but no formal ordinance banning it could be found. Mr. Meehan and Chief Troxel said a cursory review of ordinances did not find an ordinance specifically addressing geocaching. Chief Troxel said he would dig deeper into it being covered in other ordinances.

Dr. Costlow raised questions about the enforceability of this prohibition and the legal status of the restriction. He also raised concerns about the potential for caches being misused by malicious individuals and containing dangerous objects. Mr. French said the geocacher groups have rules and guidelines in place which most geocachers abide by and the groups try to police the rules and guidelines as best they can internally. Looking beyond those controls, he said his preference would be a formal review process that geocaches would go through. Placement would go through a community reviewer who knows all the rules and guidelines specific to Towamencin for approval.

There was a discussion regarding approval processes elsewhere; the time it took; the administrative burden; and if there were any costs. There was a discussion regarding who would be responsible for the review with Mr. French and DeMarco saying any geocache placement would first be reviewed by the geocache organization before approaching the Township for approval.

Chief Troxel highlighted potential safety and liability issues, including participants venturing into unsafe areas or adjoining private properties, and the possibility of injuries leading to lawsuits against the Township. Others noted the boundaries of Township owned properties are not fenced or clearly defined, which could lead to unintentional trespassing onto private property. It was also noted that some of Towamencin parkland is not even in Towamencin Township and that would be another complication.

Chief Troxel also emphasized the lack of legal enforceability of geocaching platform rules and the administrative burden of monitoring compliance. He emphasized the importance of integrating geocaching rules with existing park regulations and ensuring enforcement capabilities are addressed.

Mr. French and Mr. DeMarco suggested collaboration between a geocaching reviewer and local authorities to formalize the cache placement process and introducing a trial period after the collaboration with specific measures and guidelines to address safety and any other concerns.

The conversations also considered the large areas of Towamencin where this activity might take place and the number of individuals who might be participating. Dr. Costlow recommended rather than allowing geocaching in all township parks and open space, that geocaching enthusiasts identify pre-approved areas within the Township to streamline discussions and approvals. Mr. Meehan supported this approach noting that mapping out acceptable locations should focus geocaching activities and mitigate Township concerns.

Within the committee there was broad support for the activity to promote outdoor activity and community interest. The committee recognized the potential benefits of geocaching but stressed the need for clear boundaries and safety measures. Chief Troxel also appreciated geocaching's outdoor appeal but expressed concerns about enforcement and liability.

The Committee suggested that Mr. French and Mr. DeMarco prepare a proposal outlining specific locations the group would like to see deemed acceptable to geocaching along with a comprehensive set of rules for geocachers to follow in Towamencin and submit it to the Township for review.

Mr. French and Mr. DeMarco said they will create a formal proposal with maps and guidelines which they will then submit to the Committee through the Township. Further discussion will then follow with the OSPAC but also knowing a decision on final approval will be determined by the Board of Supervisors.

## **OLD BUSINESS – Updates**

### **Grist Mill Park Improvements**

Mr. Meehan said bids were received on October 30, 2024, for the park improvements at Grist Mill Park. Fourteen bids were received, which was good news indicating contractors are looking for work. The unwelcome news was that the lowest bid was far above the estimated cost of the work and what had been budgeted. The lowest base bid including all five (5) of the add on items was \$452,100 and when the non-bid Costars portion (playground equipment and rubberized surfacing) at \$334,921 and Engineering and Design costs at \$55,000 are added, the total cost becomes \$842,021. The budget for the project was \$675,000. Mr. Meehan expressed disappointment that the bids were so high and that the estimates being used to advance the plans for construction, even knowing current construction costs are high, were so much lower than the bids.

He said a choice must be made now to enable the improvements to go to construction. One way to lower the total cost is to eliminate several of the add on items, number 5 (concrete plaza) and number 4 (pavilion) saving \$175,000 but this would mean those two items would be deferred to the future and the park would not be "finished". Another is to find funds elsewhere in the budget to cover the funding gap.

Dr. Costlow and other committee members commented that not having a pavilion in the playground was something that the residents/parents using the park and playground would not favor. The committee during early discussions of these improvements previously said that a pavilion is a high priority for this park.

Mr. Meehan said he spoke to Peter Simone, Mr. Kraynik, and Supervisor Smith about his concerns of coming back in the future to work on the deferred items in a playground area that at that time would be in use. In addition, there would be costs for rebidding, cost increases caused by inflation and costs for working in a confined area adjacent to the already completed work. They understood the concerns and agreed but noted the money is not in the budget. They said they would investigate different ways to see what could be done to adjust budget items so the construction of the entire package could be done at this time.

The Committee discussed raising taxes so this improvement, like what has happened to some others, doesn't get "kicked down the road". It was acknowledged that such a consideration is beyond the OSPAC.

The budget for 2025 is not yet agreed upon and will be discussed again at the upcoming BOS meeting on November 13, 2025.

Mr. Meehan noted that the Co-stars price quote for the Grist Mill Park playground improvements is only valid until November 30, 2024 and no matter what the outcome on the total project, this portion of the construction work will be performed. The Township is expected to accept this quote before then.

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

Mr. Meehan said that from what he has seen in the draft 2025 Budget, the funds requested to be budgeted in 2025 for the enhancement of the top-soil layer to be installed for the playing surface at the large field at this site will be approved. The grading work is expected to be done at this field in early 2025 and the enhancement of the top layer will be part of that work.

### **Engineering for Pickleball Courts at Butch Clemens Park**

Mr. Meehan said that from what he has seen in the draft budget presented to the supervisors, this funding will be approved. The amount shown in the draft budget is \$55,000 for this engineering.

One thing that needs to be addressed before engineering can begin is getting an agreement with the Clemens Food Group (CFG) to access the pickleball courts across the Clemens property from the adjoining shopping center. There have been informal discussions with CFG and they have indicated willingness to provide this access but there is not yet a formal acceptance and written agreement. Mr. Meehan said Mr. Kraynik indicated he will be reaching out to them to arrange a meeting to further discuss the access.

In view of the news about the bids far exceeding the cost estimate for the Grist Mill Park work, Mr. DeHaven noted the estimate of the pickleball courts package of projects (6 courts, parking, stormwater management, access etc.) might also be underestimated and we should be cautious using this going forward. The current estimate based on the concept plan is over \$1 million.

Mr. Meehan noted that the estimate given by CKS is based on the concept plan and as the engineering plans are developed, we should have a better estimate of the scope of the work involved and be able to predict the cost more accurately. The estimated cost we are using at

this point might be too low or it might be too high. The current economic conditions and instability of material and construction costs make estimating future construction costs more difficult. As a first step, we need engineering plans to refine the scope of work and better determine the costs. Further, he said hopefully construction costs will stabilize soon. In the meantime, we will be mindful of variable construction costs as we move forward.

### **Other Items Requested in the 2025 Budget**

Mr. Meehan said that based on the draft 2025 budget, funds have been also budgeted for planting additional trees in 2025 (\$25,000), and for preparing engineering plans for connector paths from Spring Valley Road to the Kriebel Road Trail and a connector from Grist Mill Drive to the Grist Mill Park playground area (\$30,000). Once engineering plans are completed, they will be used to determine the scope of the work involved and whether the scope is within the capability of the Public Works department for construction.

Regarding the tree planting scheduled for 2024 Mr. Meehan said David Brother landscaping will be planting twenty (20) trees of various species along the Kriebel Road trail to the east of Trumbauer Road beginning November 18, 2024. The planting is expected to take three or four days. The locations of the trees are staked out, flagged and the species marked on the stakes. A portion of the planting costs for these trees will be covered by a 2024 PECO Green Region grant in the amount of \$6,500.

### **Multi-year project to create a continuous tree canopy along Forty Foot Road**

Dr. Costlow has been looking into this initiative for a suburban multi-year urban forestry project focused on increasing tree coverage along Forty Foot Road and funded through grants. He noted funding resources are available through entities like the U.S. Forest Service, which allocates \$1.5 billion annually for such projects. Examples of recent grants awarded to cities like Philadelphia (\$12 million) and Pittsburgh (\$9 million) and McConnellsburg (\$400,000) were mentioned as benchmarks for what might be achievable. If these municipalities can get grants of those amounts, Towamencin should also tap into those sources.

Mr. Meehan emphasized the importance of creating a well-defined plan or concept for the forestry project. Having a "shovel-ready" proposal would increase the likelihood of securing grant approval. Suggestions included mapping the locations of existing trees and street features and then mapping areas suitable for tree planting, with a particular focus on locations where shade and curbside improvements are needed. Mr. Meehan showed a high-level aerial view along Forty-Foot Road from Sumneytown Pike to Welsh Road as an example of what he thinks would be a starting point.

Dr. Costlow noted that although we have some resources and preliminary ideas, the process will require expertise in grant writing specific to forestry initiatives. Collaboration with experts and leveraging existing planning frameworks were mentioned as necessary in the process. His research finds funds available in grants for tree planting and he feels confident that if we develop a good plan, we could capitalize on the grant funding available. He said he has some information about how to apply and will continue to pursue more so that this initiative will continue moving forward.

### **Veterans Park Development**

Mr. Meehan noted that the Board of Supervisors has shown interest in moving forward with development plans for Veterans Memorial Park. For 2025, they budgeted funds (\$100,000) to begin engineering work for the park's development. The development plan is driven by the

intent is to have something at the park for the celebrations of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US in 2026, the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Continental Army encampment in Towamencin in 2027 and the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Towamencin Township in 2028. To have something in place for those anniversaries, engineering needs to begin as soon as possible.

### **Tree Tender Course**

Mr. Meehan noted for anyone who is interested in becoming a tree tender, a Penn State on-line course is being offered January 8<sup>th</sup> through February 19<sup>th</sup> over seven Wednesdays from noon to 1:00 PM. Registration is required and there is a \$40.00 cost. Just google "Penn State Tree Tender Webinar" for more details.

Dr. Costlow noted there is a seminar in the Township meeting hall in conjunction with the Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy sponsored by the Environment Advisory Council on Thursday evening. The Topic is "Lawn to Garden Conversion."

### **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.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

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 8:37PM

Respectfully Submitted

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

**The next OSPAC meeting is on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024.**