

Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
January 20, 2025
Meeting Minutes

Attending:

Joseph Meehan, Chairperson
Todd Fisher
Michon Blake
Dr. Richard Costlow
Robert DeHaven
Dan Vaitis
Katie Cleary, Township Special Events Coordinator

Not attending:

Nancy Becker, Vice Chairperson
Joe Rumsey
Dave Sponseller
Laura Smith, BOS Liaison to the OSPAC

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Meehan at 7:05 PM
All present participated in the pledge of allegiance.

OPENING COMMENTS

Mr. Meehan noted that the Township Supervisor Liaison, Ms. Smith, was not present at the meeting and the Supervisor Liaison leads the re-organization. The Committee discussed this, and the re-organization will be postponed until the next meeting with the meeting for tonight being conducted with the same leadership as 2024.

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 Manager on January 17th and Mr. Kraynik provided an update on items of interest to the Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee (OSPAC) which Mr. Meehan said he will note as the items are discussed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES – Meeting of December 9, 2024

Mr. Meehan asked for comments or corrections, if any, to the draft minutes of the December 9, 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. Mr. Vaitis seconded the motion. All committee members voted in favor of the motion.

OLD BUSINESS – Updates

Grist Mill Park Improvements

Mr. Meehan noted the Grist Mill Park improvement project has progressed with a contract awarded and a notice to proceed issued by DCNR to the contractor, LP Construction. An inquiry with Rob Gladfelter, the Project Coordinator with Simone-Collins, confirmed that a pre-construction meeting, initially unscheduled, was expected to be held on January 30th. The contractor's work schedule is expected to be available at that time. In the meantime, behind the scenes planning and management of the project by the contractor is underway. Additionally, it was reported that the playground equipment is scheduled to ship in February,

with installation planned for mid-March. If all proceeds without delay, the new park amenities are anticipated to be completed by May or June 2025.

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 noted that Mr. Kraynik has requested CKS, The Township Engineer, to begin research into preparing specifications for a durable top-soil surface layer suitable for sports play for installation at the new Green Lane soccer field. The authorization for this engineering proposal is expected to be on the February 12th, Board of Supervisor's meeting with BOS approval on the bidding on the actual work to follow.

The committee discussed the importance of getting the "right" material for this surface layer so the problems which have come over time with heavy use of other soccer fields by the youth athletic association, TYA, can be avoided.

Mr. Meehan said he had passed on the name of an individual who is a volunteer in the TYA soccer program and is an athletic facility manager at the University of Pennsylvania. His name is Dan Bangert. Committee members also suggested other expertise that could be considered such as Penn State Extension Service. They discussed the importance of testing the soils and adding amendments as necessary to make the soil a healthy base for the growth of a durable sport turf.

Mr. Vaitis mentioned that Penn State University is in the process of creating a new, grass soccer field on its campus. He suggested we might be able to learn what they are planning and get an idea of what they plan to do to make their new facility a quality university level sport field. Dr. Costlow said he thought this turf is known as Big 10 Turf and is also used by other universities. Not that we would be building to the same specification as a top-level university turf field, but there might be information about soil composition and seed that would help guide any decisions the Township makes on its new field. Mr. Meehan said he will pass the information we discussed on to Mary Stover at CKS.

Pickleball Courts at Butch Clemens Field

Mr. Meehan reported good news from Mr. Kraynik who said he had had a discussion with the Clemens Food Group (CFG), the owner of the property from which access to pickleball courts at this site would come. CFG indicated they are good with access to the courts proposed by the Township at Butch Clemens Park as shown on the concept plan. They are willing to go forward with this access. The access would come from the common parking lot at the back of the parking areas behind the Wawa and Freddy's burgers.

Mr. Kraynik said he sees this as a full speed ahead signal. The next step is preparing an agreement that formalizes this understanding followed by the engineering work to develop a construction ready plan and estimate.

The Committee discussed concerns about the project costs for the future construction of the pickleball project. The estimated cost of over a million dollars, which includes six courts, parking, the access road, stormwater a management and amenities common to pickleball courts, is higher than expected. The committee discussed the costs. Over the past few years, since Covid, all construction costs have skyrocketed and maybe this cost estimate for the courts at Butch Clemens Field is just a reflection of the current cost of everything.

In general, the committee is very supportive of the idea of pickleball but are concerned about how to fund it. There was concern about where this project fits within the list of Township priorities. The Committee discussed constructing projects like this in stages and through grants to ease the financial burden. But

doing so greatly stretches out the timeline for completing the project likely will cost more, and in the interim residents don't have the benefit of this popular recreation activity in the township.

Now that there is agreement on a site for the pickleball courts, and engineering plans can begin, the general concern focuses on the costs. Grants will be pursued to offset some costs and while the engineering plans are being completed options will be considered for incremental implementation of the full court package.

Another option discussed is raising taxes to keep up with inflation and fund planned projects. An incremental increase could fund not only this project but also others like it that have languished for years because of the lack of sufficient funds. There was a discussion on how some big properties in Towamencin get off the hook when taxes are not raised.

For 2025, the budget includes funding for the engineering for the court project. We are glad about that. The 2025 budget is set including \$55,000 for Engineering the Court Project. Dr. Costlow said he is Ok having that this year. We can look at other construction funding in 2026.

Connector Path from Spring Valley Road to the TA Trail and a Connector Path from Grist Mill Drive to Grist Mill Park

Mr. Meehan said CKS has said previously that they are working on the rehabilitation of one of Grist Mill Park's detention basin and in doing this they have gathered survey information in the basin area where the new trail might go, so this gathered information would be useful in engineering for a new trail in that area. Other than this, there is nothing new on the trail connectors.

Planting Trees 2024

Mr. Meehan reminded the committee that in 2024 we planted trees in the spring and also the fall. The trees in the fall took advantage of funds in the amount of \$6,500 from the PECO Green Region Grant the Township was awarded. Fifteen trees were planted in the spring and twenty trees were planted in the fall.

For 2025, \$25,00 has been budgeted for more. This is in keeping with the OSPAC goal to continue to add trees throughout the Township.

Mr. Meehan said his thoughts on where to plant in 2025 included the area along both the north and South side of Kriebel Road between Green Lane Road and the entrance to the Sewer treatment plant. Planting there will go well with the new soccer field to be constructed and over time will provide shade and a visual improvement to this location. The ones on the south side will be planted in consideration of the trees planted by the Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy several years ago which are further from the road. The trees will be planted in the fall and by that time, the grading of the soccer field should be completed.

He said it seems we have concentrated where so many ash trees had been removed along Kriebel with recent plantings and asked if the committee had thoughts on where else we should plant some trees. Ms. Blake noted that many ash trees had been removed from Firehouse Park and there are areas in that park where trees are sparse. She also mentioned around the parking area at Kibler Meadows Park, again to start adding some here each year and provide some shade along the edge of this meadow/parking lot interface.

Ms. Cleary asked if there were trees around the playground at Drinnon Road Park. Mr. Meehan said there are a few smaller trees near the playground but not close enough to shade the play equipment so more would be an improvement. Mr. Fisher also mentioned that this park is very wet and could use some trees to absorb some of the water.

Dr. Costlow suggested planting some along some township park property lines where some adjacent property owners take advantage of the property line not being defined and “temporarily utilize” some parkland. Mr. DeHaven said this might disturb some resident’s “invisible fences,” but he liked this idea of defining the park property. Mr. Meehan said as we choose the tree planting locations for 2025, we will consider all these suggestions.

Regarding the property line of residences, for the Committees information Mr. Meehan said that a meeting had been held by the Environmental Advisory Council with the township public works department. The meeting was held to improve communications and co-ordination. Mr. Meehan said one item of interest to the OSPAC was brought up by Mr. Hillmantel who said one of his biggest complaints was about residents who place their unwanted yard waste at the borders of their properties which are in the riparian buffer areas of streams. During storms, when the streams overflowed, the yard waste was carried downstream which PW then had to clean up. Mr. Hillmantel asked that residents be informed about this problem and informed of the proper way to deal with yard waste. The Committee discussed this problem and possible solutions, but no definitive suggestions were made regarding this information. The private trash haulers are supposed to make yard waste pick-up available to their customers but details on the requirements were not well known to committee members. The item remains with the EAC for further suggestions.

Initiative for a multi-year suburban reforestation project to create a tree line boulevard along Forty Foot Road

Dr. Costlow said he had nothing new to report about this initiative and will have more in upcoming meetings.

Potential Grant Opportunities in 2025

Mr. Meehan summarized the grant opportunities related to Open Space and Parks which the township has pursued since 2020. He noted the summary is also on the Township website.

The “lost” grants and why the Township was unsuccessful on them was discussed. Mr. DeHaven said applying for a grant and not getting it is not a failure but not applying for a grant is a failure.

Discussions about grant opportunities were brought up as the Committee looks toward upcoming grants that the Township might apply for to be used to help fund our planned projects. Mr. DeHaven volunteered last month to do some research, and he provided some of his findings to the committee at tonight’s meeting.

Mr. DeHaven said it looked like there are a lot of opportunities for the OSPAC and Environmental Advisory Council working together on grants for water retention and stormwater detention because there is a lot of funding for stormwater control improvement from DCNR.

He said there are other DCNR opportunities for grants toward Recreation and Conservation. He said the application period is currently open and closes on the first Wednesday of April. He understood that trails would qualify for these grants. The committee discussed what trail opportunities there currently are, including the Grist Mill Drive to Grist Mill Park Trail, and trails around the perimeter of other parks such as Butch Clemens Park. The Committee agreed the application for the Grist Mill Park Trail was the one to apply for at the present time if the Township agreed. Mr. Meehan said he will pass this on to Mr. Kraynik

In addition, Mr. DeHaven mentioned Growing Greener Grants from DEP citing the example of Worcester Township being awarded such a grant for a trail and bank stabilization along Zacharias Creek. He said the submission date for these grants is in June 2025 for grants for 2026.

He also mentioned Federal Grants for Water and Land Conservation which he will continue to check on. For trees, he mentioned Tree PA. grants where the submission date is January so that could be looked at for next year. Also, there is another tree grant opportunity called Tree City Grants. The Committee thanked Mr. DeHaven for gathering all this information. The Committee will continue to check for available grants.

Veterans Memorial Park

Mr. Meehan reported that no action has been taken yet regarding the engineering work for the development of the Master plan for Veterans Memorial Park. Agreement on access from Tomlinson Road has not been worked out with Mark Nicoletti who owns the property between the southern park boundary and Tomlinson Road. Mr. Kraynik said that although Mr. Nicoletti has said he wants to help by providing access, he has placed conditions he wants in return for the access that the Township will not agree to. Discussions with Mr. Nicoletti are not going well. Until the access is resolved, the engineering for the Master Plan design is at a standstill.

Mr. Meehan however passed on information that the Veterans Committee is pursuing some work to be done at the Tennis Lukens Cemetery, which is part of Veterans Memorial Park. The Work includes the addition of a sign at the entrance explaining the history of the cemetery, some landscaping in the form of topsoil and some grading and re-seeding to help grow grass in the bare spots throughout the cemetery, and having a company experienced in restoring gravestones, clean and repair the gravestones. The Township has identified a grant and will be applying for the grant to cover these improvements at the cemetery. CKS is preparing the grant application.

Temporary lights at Grist Mill Park for October- November evening soccer play

This was brought up at last month's meeting by a TYA soccer program participant. The TYA representatives on the OSPAC said the soccer committee is still working on this proposal and will be presenting it at a future OSPAC meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Spring 2025 Township Newsletter

Mr. Meehan noted that articles for the Spring 2025 Newsletter have a submission deadline of February 14th. The Committee discussed what the topic should be and settled on an article about "The Benefits of Trees." Dr. Costlow volunteered to author the article if others would give him supporting information. Mr. Meehan said he would send him information on this topic from the "Tree Tenders" online seminar.

Other items for the OSPAC's information

Mr. Meehan provided information on other park-related developments that are of interest to the OSPAC. They are mentioned at this time, only for information.

For Towamencin Day in the spring, some options are being considered to alleviate the shortage of parking for that event. Options include a shuttle or closing Kriebel Road for this event and allowing parking along the road and providing access from the back across the pedestrian bridge.

No news about special celebrations for historic anniversary events in the parks in 2026, 2027 or 2028 that the Committee discussed in previous meetings has been heard.

A draft of the Township Comprehensive Plan is available on the Township website. Committee members, and all Township residents are encouraged to review the draft and comment on it if they choose. The comment period closes on March 12, 2025.

Another proposal from Mr. John French was received today regarding geocaching. Mr. Meehan said he will distribute the revised proposal to the Committee by email for future discussion.

Mr. Meehan asked if there was any additional business. There was none.

Dr. Costlow made a motion to adjourn. Mr. DeHaven seconded the motion. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM.

Respectfully Submitted

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

The next Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting is on February 10, 2025