

Towamencin Township
Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting
February 10, 2025
Meeting Minutes

Attending:

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

Not attending:

Joe Rumsey
Dave Sponseller

Also attending

Township Supervisor Kristin Warner
Township Supervisor Joyce Snyder
Township Supervisor Chuck Wilson

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Supervisor Kristin Warner at 7:05 PM

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All present participated in the pledge of allegiance.

COMMITTEE REORGANIZATION FOR 2025

The reorganization had been postponed to the February meeting because a Township Supervisor was not present at the January meeting to lead the reorganization.

Ms. Warner asked for nominations for the chairperson position for 2025. Ms. Becker nominated Mr. Meehan for Chairperson, Mr. Vaitis seconded the nomination. Mr. Meehan accepted the nomination. Ms. Warner asked for any other nominations and there were none. Ms. Warner asked for a vote of the committee for Mr. Meehan to be the Chairperson of the OSPAC for 2025. All voted in favor. The motion carried 7-0. Ms. Warner then turned the meeting over to Mr. Meehan.

Mr. Meehan asked for nominations for the position of Vice Chairperson for 2025. Ms. Becker nominated Dr. Costlow. Mr. Meehan and Mr. DeHaven simultaneously seconded the nomination of Dr. Costlow. Dr. Costlow accepted the nomination. Mr. Meehan asked if there were any other nominations. There were none. Mr. Meehan asked for a vote of the committee for Dr. Costlow to be the Vice Chairperson of the OSPAC for 2025. All voted in favor. The motion carried 7-0.

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 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

Bruce Bailey and John French, both are Township residents who were attending the meeting. Each said they had no public comments.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES – Meeting of January 20th, 2025

Mr. Meehan asked for comments or corrections, if any, to the draft minutes of the January 2025 meeting which he sent to the Committee members on February 4, 2025. 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. January 20, 2025, minutes are approved.

OLD BUSINESS – Updates

The Kriebel Road Trail - Phase Three

Phase three of the Kriebel Road Rd. trail extends from the existing trail on the east side of the sewer treatment plant to Fisher's Park by the Arneith house. The Township applied for a DCED grant to fund this portion of the trail and the Township was recently notified it did not get awarded this grant.

After reviewing the grant awards website, Mr. Meehan said he saw that the grant requests for this cycle far exceeded the funds available for the grant awards. Because this Committee at last month's meeting had wondered if we could learn from feedback on successful grants how Towamencin's applications might be improved, he said he looked at the successful grant awards in this cycle and saw that they were varied in their purpose and amount. He gave some examples. Based on the data about the awards on the DCED website it comes down that some would be winners and others would not be. Towamencin fell into the latter category.

Mr. Meehan said in view of not being awarded the DCED grant, Mr. Kraynik instructed Gilmore and Associates to immediately apply for a Montgomery County Montco40 grant. In 2020 Towamencin was awarded about \$190,000 from a previous cycle of the Montco40 grant program for a section of the same trail. At that time, we were told Montgomery County looked very favorably on closing the gaps in this trail as part of a larger network of trails throughout the county. Hopefully they will still feel the same about this next section of the trail.

Mr. Meehan continued, saying the BOS will consider authorizing \$1600 for Gillmore and Associates to prepare and submit the Montco40 Grant Application at its meeting on February 12, 2025. A resolution regarding this grant will follow at the BOS February 25, 2025, meeting.

Dr. Costlow suggested that we should consider proceeding with the engineering phase using Township funds while pursuing additional grants for construction costs. This approach ensures continuous progress on the trail, despite not receiving the DCED grant. Mr. Meehan said that each granting agency has different guidelines and in some instances any work included in the grant application cannot proceed before the grant is awarded. Doing so could result in forfeiting the award. He did not have information if this applied to the DCED grant.

For now, the Committee agreed that the Township should go forward with applying for the Montco40 grant.

The estimated cost for the Phase 3 trail section is nearly \$400,000, with the grant application requesting \$250,000. The remaining \$150,000 would need to be matched by the Township. The match might be able to be covered with another grant. This will be considered but this Montco40 grant has an upcoming deadline, and the Township must apply now or miss this year's cycle.

Grist Mill Park Improvements

Mr. Meehan reported that a preconstruction meeting for the Grist Mill Park improvement project took place on January 30, 2025. Attendees included representatives from the Township, CKS, Simone-Collins, the contractor LP Construction, as well as various sub-contractors and suppliers. Contact information was exchanged and subsequently disseminated by Rob Gladfelter of Simone-Collins, the Project Coordinator. The contractor provided a schedule outlining the project's work activities, a copy of which is attached to

these minutes. The project's commencement is scheduled for February 24th with an anticipated completion in early June.

The contractor requested that the soccer goals be relocated from the construction area prior to the start of work. Mr. Meehan conveyed this request to TYA following the preconstruction meeting. Mr. Vaitis, a TYA representative on the committee, confirmed that the goals have already been moved out of the construction area; however, they may not yet be in their final positions as the boundaries of the construction activities have not been delineated.

Additionally, Mr. Meehan mentioned that the design engineers are reviewing the "construction entrance" as indicated in the project plans. Initially, the entrance was planned to coincide with the existing parking lot entrance. This entrance is intended for use by heavy trucks and equipment throughout the project's duration and consists of large aggregate material. Such an entrance may prove inconvenient for regular parking lot users due to its rough nature. The engineers are currently exploring alternative solutions.

Green Lane Road Park Soccer Field

Mr. Meehan provided a update of the Green Lane Soccer fields project and the upcoming request for bids to provide a top soil layer making up a durable playing surface. **The** discussions centered on the specifications for the topsoil layer and the overall turf establishment process which had been recently shared with the OSPAC..

Mr. Meehan began by mentioning that the specifications for the topsoil layer have been prepared by CKS and is scheduled for authorization to go to bid at the Board of Supervisors meeting on February 12th. He had received the specifications from CKS and shared them with the Committee. From his review he expressed concern that the proposed plan did not align with the recommendations received from experts, including Dan Bangert, who is involved with TYA and a horticulturist working on athletic fields for the University of Pennsylvania.

Mr. Meehan noted that the proposed topsoil layer consisted of three inches of topsoil with one inch of compost tilled in, but previous experience with other Township fields used by TYA suggested that this depth was insufficient for healthy grass growth.

Dr. Costlow supported this concern, emphasizing that grass roots typically run deeper than an inch and that a thicker layer of soil was necessary to ensure adequate hydration. He pointed out that a deeper soil layer would promote better root growth and prevent issues during dry periods. Additionally, he suggested adjusting the fertilizer mix to enhance the potash level for better turf establishment.

Mr. Meehan acknowledged Costlow's research and knowledge on this matter and encouraged him to suggest his concerns in a memo to CKS. He also noted that looking at the email thread, the original recommendation came from within the CKS team, but he was unsure of CKS's background in athletic field construction and horticulture. Ms. Blake then raised the question of whether CKS had shared the expert information provided by the OSPAC with their team, as there was no indication of this in the email chain. This led to further discussions about whether Penn State's extensive expertise in turf management had been consulted, as their agricultural department specializes in athletic field construction.

Dr. Costlow strongly advocated obtaining Penn State's recommendations to ensure a high-quality playing surface, arguing that relying on their knowledge would be more beneficial than generic solutions.

Mr. Meehan noted that he received a response from CKS about the specification and forwarded the response to all the Committee members just prior to this meeting. The response provided more details about the soil mix, He said he would follow up on whether CKS had consulted Penn State experts.

He also provided an update on the grading work, indicating that while no specific start date had been given, it was expected to begin soon, contingent on weather conditions. He emphasized the importance of timing the topsoil installation and seeding appropriately, so that the field would get a season of growth

in 2025 before its “coming online” in subsequent years. The discussion related to this item concluded with a consensus that further discussions and possible revisions were needed to refine the turf establishment plan.

Butch Clemens Park Pickleball Court Engineering

Mr. Meehan noted that Dave Kraynik said that he had conversations with Clemens Food Group (CFG) and they indicated they would accept an entrance to the pickle ball court area coming across CFG property into Butch Clemens Park via the driveway at the rear of the Wawa, Freddy’s Burgers and Firestone Tires. This is good news. The Township is looking at grants that could fund the construction of these pickleball courts. Two have been identified as potential grants and preliminary research work is underway by township staff to gather data for applications for them. The Identified grants are a DCED Greenways, Trails and Recreation program grant and the other is under the DCNR C2P2 Grant program. The DCED Grant application Deadline is May 31, 2025. The DCNR application Deadline is April 2, 2025.

Mr. Meehan continued with information about the grants. He said the grants are competitive, so you’ve really got to sell your grant through the application. What has worked for past grant applications is to apply with a project that has necessary engineering to make it known that the project has been well planned and supported with engineering showing it is viable. In addition, cost plays an important part of the application, and having an engineering plan is the basis for an accurate cost estimate which must be prepared by an engineer or other qualified professional.

So that’s where things now stand. Authorizing CKS to begin the engineering is on the agenda for Wednesday evening February 12, 2025, to prepare the engineering plans for the pickleball courts and then the next thing that has to happen once CKS has been given the go ahead is to finalize a formal agreement with CFG before beginning planning an entrance across their property. Dr. Costlow raised a question whether preparing the legal agreement with CFG was included in the cost of the engineering by CKS. Mr. Wilson mentioned that an understanding on an agreement with CFG has been discussed with them and they are agreeable, and formalizing an agreement should be a formality worked on directly by the Township solicitor and CFG general counsel and not something that CKS needs to be involved with.

The next step will be the Board of Supervisors acting on moving forward with the agreement with CKS to do the engineering work.

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

Mr. Meehan reported that after last month’s OSPAC meeting, he informed Mr. Kraynik of a potential opportunity to obtain a grant for creating a trail from the Grist Mill Dive neighborhoods to the new facilities under construction at Grist Mill Park. This trail, with the anticipated completion of the new playground area at Grist Mill Park, was one of OSPAC’s requested 2025 Capital Projects. To apply, CKS, the township engineer, would need to determine an alignment of the trail considering residential property lines and the limits of a detention basin along which the trail would pass. It would also need to prepare a cost estimate. CKS has been working on engineering for improvements to this same detention basin and has already performed survey work which would be available for a portion of the trail project.

Mr. Kraynik then asked CKS to prepare a proposal to prepare a grant application for this work. The application would require some preliminary engineering including among other details, alignment sketches, and a profile of the trail and the cost estimate. An item for trail engineering was included in the approved 2025 budget. The deadline for applications for these DCNR grants is April 3, 2025.

Planting Trees 2025

Mr. Meehan updated the Committee reminding them the OSPAC discussed planting trees for 2025 and came up with some suggested locations. They were: along Kriebel Road between Green Lane Road and

the sewer plant; Firehouse Park to fill in some bare spaces where ash trees have been removed; at Kibler Meadow along the parking area fence line; along the new path and around the playground at Drinnon Way Park, and along some park edges where the park abuts private properties.

He said as a next step he will lay out some tree locations at these sites for the Committee to visit, and review on site and make suggestions. He said \$25,000 is budgeted for tree planting in 2025 and that amounts to about planting of 30 specific species of tree. Planting will be done in the fall at some if not all these locations. The action at this point is for Mr. Meehan to layout approximate tree locations of proposed trees for the Committee's review at upcoming meetings.

Dr. Costlow asked if the Township had an accounting of funds set aside as a tree fund for continued planting of trees and what has been spent to date. Mr. Meehan said there was money set aside from the Core 5 Warehouse development years ago, but he didn't know its current status or where in the Township budget it was held. Ms. Becker confirmed that when the Core 5 Warehouses were built several years ago, money was set aside equivalent to approximately 200 trees. Mr. Meehan said when he last asked about the Core 5 warehouse "money in lieu of trees" several years ago, the Township Finance Director Mr. Szumski referred him to the budget document under miscellaneous revenue. Since then, he has not checked with the new finance director or gotten an update. Dr. Costlow said he will follow up and investigate the current account for the tree fund.

Comments on the Draft 2025 Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Meehan said the Township's Draft Comprehensive Plan (DCP) is available for comment. He encouraged everyone to review the document and submit their comments using the link shown on the Township website. He said he would also like to submit comments from the OSPAC committee in addition to any individual comments. To help with this he had prepared a summary of the DCP which he shared with the committee members. He emphasized this was a summary of key elements taken directly from the full three hundred fifty-one-page document. He said he put this together to keep the Committee's analysis more focused on items of interest related to Open Space and Parks.

Meehan opened the discussion of the DCP. He emphasized the importance of using this opportunity to provide comments and suggestions for future improvements. He said he felt the draft plan in general lacked a strong enough, forward thinking perspective related to how we get to the goals we set. Dr. Costlow commented that it sounded like "motherhood and apple pie" to him noting the Township has a Parks and Trails Evaluation Report prepared in 2020 with improvements amounting to over \$7 million which although referenced in the DCP, there is no analysis of the report in the DCP showing what has been accomplished since then and what are the plans and goals to accomplish those remaining. He noted the absence of financial considerations regarding funding for open space and parks. There was Committee consensus that this Parks and Open Space Evaluation report be incorporated into the DCP plan with updates on completed and pending projects.

The discussion also got into historic preservation as presented in the DCP. Ms. Blake and others questioned the feasibility and costly implications of acquiring and maintaining historic properties. Ms. Becker noted that while some properties were eligible for historic designation, the township might not want to take on the responsibility of ownership and maintenance. How can the Township consider this when it has so many other unfunded priorities? As an alternative, there were suggestions about other preservation methods, such as implementing ordinances to support private owners.

Ms. Becker noted that there are at least two one-room schoolhouses in the township which are not included in the preservation section in the DCP.

Another major topic was land conservation, with members discussing grants available for purchasing and preserving wooded areas. While the township has some protected forested land, there was concern about potential deforestation due to development. The possibility of using federal grants to acquire land for conservation was raised, though there were concerns about the impact on the township's tax base.

Mr. Meehan pointed to the last few pages of the summary he prepared which shows a table for implementation of the Comprehensive Plan recommendations. Dr. Costlow noted that the three highest priorities have to do with parks and trees.

Overall, the discussions underscored the need for a more visionary approach, clearer financial planning, and a balanced strategy for land preservation and historic property management. The Committee aimed to refine their recommendations before the upcoming deadline for comments.

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. An 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. The engineering plans are at a standstill until access is worked out.

Meanwhile an application is to be submitted by the Township to secure an America250 Grant for improvements at the Tennis-Lukens Cemetery for gravestone restoration, historical signage, and landscaping.

Geocaching

At this meeting there was a detailed discussion on geocaching and the concerns associated with its implementation in Towamencin. John French, a geocaching advocate, who has been involved in several meetings is present at this meeting and has previously provided extensive background information and suggestions on the matter.

There is an ongoing concern in the Committee about how to establish a process that ensures compliance with geocaching rules while minimizing administrative burdens on the township. The discussion focused on the need for a structured approach favored by the Committee, emphasizing that geocachers should self-regulate and ensure that caches adhere to established geocaching guidelines and Township rules and regulations. For example, not burying caches or using inappropriate containers which could be mistaken for nefarious purposes.

Although, in general, not being opposed to geocaching, the OSPAC committee aims to avoid excessive township involvement in approving or monitoring geocaches while feeling comfortable that it will be a safe enjoyable "activity" not only for the geocaching community but also for all who use and enjoy Township parks and open spaces. The conversation with Mr. French included questions and answers regarding how other townships handle geocaching, him saying some require permits while others do not regulate geocaching at all. Mr. French highlighted Upper Dublin's approach, which involves a simple form submission to parks and recreation officials, enabling easy verification in case of concerns.

Instead, the OSPAC proposed a system where geocachers submit a form confirming adherence to the guidelines, with occasional checks by the geocaching community to ensure compliance.

Further, the conversations touched upon potential challenges, such as unregistered coaches raising public concern or triggering law enforcement intervention. While some committee members favored minimal township involvement, others emphasized the need to have a record of geocaches within the township for safety and accountability. The committee acknowledged that we are not going to be able to deal with all the “what ifs” and the probability of anything happening is low and the positives are that people can have an outdoor healthy, enjoyable activity.

The committee ultimately leaned toward implementing an electronic form submission process to document geocache placements without imposing a burdensome approval process on the Township. Mr. French said he has a background in “creating forms” so he will look into the forms on the Township website and see if something could be adapted for geocaching and mock-up such a form. The discussion of geocaching concludes with an agreement to refine the documentation process with Mr. French working on a form for managing geocaching in Towamencin.

Spring 2025 Township Newsletter

Mr. Meehan thanked Dr. Costlow for the great OSPAC article he authored for the Township’s 2025 Spring Newsletter. The article is titled “The Benefits of Trees in Towamencin.” He will forward a copy of the article to the Committee members. A copy is attached with these minutes.

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Becker noticed that another person came into the meeting as it got underway and asked him to introduce himself. He said he is Todd Montgomery, a township resident interested in the OSPAC Committee. He said because he teaches, he was late arriving but was present for some of the meetings. He said he is interested in the topics the committee discusses and would like to be considered for joining the Committee. The Committee welcomed him saying it would be good to have someone with a landscape architecture background involved with and based on our latest information there are openings, and he should apply. Mr. Meehan said the Board of Supervisors review applications and appoint committee members so we will check his application with the Township staff.

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

Dr. Costlow made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Vaitis seconded the motion. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM.

Respectfully Submitted

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

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