

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

Attending:

Joseph Meehan, Chairperson
Dr. Richard Costlow, Vice Chairperson
Todd Fisher
Nancy Becker
Michon Blake
Robert DeHaven
Dan Vaitis
Joe Rumsey
Dave Sponseller

Not attending:

Katie Cleary, Township Special Events Coordinator

Also attending

Towamencin Township Supervisor Kofi Osei

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Meehan at 7:00 PM

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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 Manager on March 7th 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 as the meeting goes forward.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Ben Fiore, Ms. Corina Fiore, Mr. John Richards and Mr. John French, residents of the Township were also present.

Supervisor Kofi Osei

It feels like I might be mistaken on how I'm presenting my feelings on topics to this committee. I want to do a lot of the things that you all want to do. Even pickleball. I've had a lot of fun playing pickleball but also need to point out that Towamencin isn't a very rich Township. A lot of people brought up Whitpain Township to me regarding buying open space with tax dollars, but Whitpain gets \$2,000,000 more a year in the property taxes and \$4 million a year more in earned income taxes than Towamencin and I think they also approved an additional earned income tax for open space. So, they have money and that's why they're able to build what they have been building.

And especially now that the Seipts announced they're retiring and closing down Freddy Hill, there is some opportunity to get more open space in Towamencin. I don't think we should buy it, but I think there's things we could do in our codes to encourage the open space preservation and that you all would be supportive of that. Currently I think, by right, they could build on that entire property and practically leave no open space. And it's been mentioned in the 1989 plan, the 2006 Open Space Plan and was mentioned again in the draft of our current comprehensive plan. I think looking into some conservation, zoning or

something like that would be very appropriate for that property. At the next Board of Supervisors meeting, I'll have more comments.

Dr. Costlow asked Supervisor Osei a question about conservation zoning. What does it do to the value of the property with respect to the current owner? Supervisor Osei responded that we would probably have to zone in a few more units but in a tighter space. If the current owner doesn't like what we propose they could submit under the current zoning. So that's the risk. If we don't get it right, they could just build based on how it is currently zoned. Mr. Meehan asked if the developer's current proposal for the Walton farm property is considered conservation zoning. Ms. Becker said it is not conservation zoning according to the new ordinance that is being proposed. Mr. Meehan said the differences in these ordinances should be made known to the public as we get into these proposed developments.

Ms. Fiore Comments

On the conservation zoning, one thing that should be considered is Pennsylvania Hose Bill 1275 which proposes there be a riparian buffer of at least 100 feet on either side of streams and there are streams running through this property. That bill is currently stalled in the environmental committee, and we don't know when it could go into effect if it does pass. This needs to be considered whenever looking at plans going forward.

APPROVAL OF OSPAC MINUTES – Meeting of February 10, 2025. Mr. Meehan asked for comments or corrections, if any, on the corrected draft minutes he sent to Committee on the March 4. Dr. Costlow asked for a clarification of the correction made to the original draft, also sent earlier on March 4th. Mr. Meehan said the corrected minutes used the original draft but included a strike-through of the incorrect portion of the minutes, with the correction also shown. The draft with the correction was then re-sent later on March 4th to the committee. It is the corrected version that we are now voting on. With that clarification, Dr. Costlow made a motion to approve the minutes with the correction incorporated. Ms. Becker seconded the motion. All committee members voted in favor of the motion. February 10, 2025, meeting minutes are approved.

OLD BUSINESS – Updates provided by Mr. Meehan

Kriebel Road Trail Phase 3.

The Township has submitted an application, prepared by Gilmore and Associates to Montgomery County for a "Montco 40 Grant" to complete this phase of the trail running from the Sewer Treatment Plant westward to the Arneith House in Fischer's Park along Kriebel Road. The Application was submitted on March 3, 2025. The Township is applying for a \$250,000 grant for this phase of the trail.

Grist Mill Park Improvements

Construction started on schedule on February 24th with the installation of Erosion and Sedimentation Controls and setting up construction fencing and construction entrance. The playground equipment has been delivered to the site and is stored in a fenced area adjacent to the restroom building. The contractor excavated for the rain garden and other earthwork but was stopped for several days because of rain. Work is continuing as shown on the schedule and is scheduled to be completed by early June 2025.

Green Lane Road Park Soccer Field

Following last month's meeting, Mr. Meehan said there were back and forth conversations with CKS regarding the information used in its preparation of the specification for the soil supplement work which was to be part of the bid documents. Dr. Costlow had connected with a representative of Penn State which led to some new questions about the specifications used by CKS in their bid documents. Mr. Meehan brought this to the attention of CKS who said they also had connected with Penn State (not the same individual as Dr. Costlow) to prepare the bid information. Further CKS said PSU had tested and analyzed the soils and made recommendations based on the results. CKS based their bid specs and

documents on the recommendations they received from PSU. In addition, CKS said they checked with others who had performed this same kind of field preparation work.

It seems there are different opinions coming from different Penn State people. Mr. Meehan said it shows CKS had done their due diligence and used what it determined to be the best specification for inclusion in the bid package.

Mr. Meehan said this is moot at this point, because the work was advertised for bids and seven bids were received. The bids including the three alternatives, ranged from \$133,000 to \$230,000 for six bids and one "outlier" bid of \$561,000. The low bid was slightly over budget, but the budget was based on the base bids only. The alternate items pushed the bids over the budget and the Township is now comparing the costs of Public Works doing the alternate work versus the bid alternate costs. It will then decide to proceed with the award for only the base bid work and have the alternates work done by public works or the base bid plus the three alternates done by the low bid contractor.

Mr. Meehan said he has a full summary of costs from each of the bidders. Dr. Costlow asked if that summary could be included within the minutes. Mr. Meehan said that information would not be shared until after action was taken by the Township on the contract award.

The committee discussed the sequence of the work for the new soccer field in answer to some committee members' questions. The sequence in general terms is: The contractor will install the erosion and sedimentation controls; the contractor will remove any topsoil from the areas where grading will take place; public works will regrade the stockpiled fill materials on site to the rough grade of the new soccer fields; the contractor will prepare the soccer field footprints, and place the amended topsoil surfacing on the fields; the remaining disturbed areas of Green lane Road Park around the soccer fields will be dressed up and seeded.

Mr. Meehan noted that it was decided that both fields shown on the CKS plan for the soccer field improvements are to be made at this time. He also said the BOS is expected to vote on the award of the soil amendment contract at the next available meeting.

Pickleball Courts At Butch Clemens Park-

At the Board of Supervisors (BOS) meeting on February 12, 2025, the Board considered a proposal from CKS on behalf of the Township to seek a grant for engineering services to prepare detail engineering plans including design plans, construction specifications, regulatory permit applications, bidding documents and bid administrative services for the project including six courts, a parking area and access drive for pickleball courts at Butch Clemens Field. The proposal cost was \$55,000. The BOS voted and the motion failed with a 2-2 vote.

At the BOS meeting of February 25th there was a motion to authorize an application for two grants for this project. One was a DCNR Community Conservation Partnership Program (C2P2) request in the amount of \$500,000, with a 50% match. The second was a DCNR Greenways, Trails and Recreation program request in the amount of \$250,000 which has a 15% match. A motion was made to authorize applying for both grants, but the motion failed 1-2. Mr. Meehan said following the vote, that the BOS chair asked that this be brought up again at the next BOS meeting.

Mr. Meehan and the committee at this point had a conversation with Supervisor Osei about the committee's reasoning for applying for grants as a first step in further consideration of a project. When applying for grants the committee knows that from the time a decision is made to apply for a grant to the time the grant money comes to the township is about two years. It is not a quick process. And that

happens only if you are successful in being awarded one of these very competitive grants. Otherwise, you start over and re-apply.

Supervisor Osei said even if the Township got both grants, it would still be \$200,000 short of the project's estimated cost and as can be seen in the Township's five (5) year look ahead we don't have \$200,000. For such a project. He continued, saying that maybe someday we might get to a situation to build the courts but if we're not looking to build the courts soon, he is not in favor of even applying for the grants right now.

Mr. Meehan said we understand his thinking, but right now the cost for the application is \$6500 and down the road, because the grant process is so lengthy, we can look to match any grant money we are able to be awarded by downsizing the scope of work. Regarding these specific grants for the pickleball courts, the work can be broken into several main items. The courts themselves, and the parking area and driveway access. So, for example, not building the parking area initially and just using the parking that is already available at Butch Clemens Park a short walk from the other end of the park could work to match grant monies available. In other words, if we were awarded \$750,000, we would try to match the scope of work to the funds available.

But until we have a grant in hand, we don't know where we stand with funds, and we can't do anything. So, applying for grants at this time would be a step forward. Dr. Costlow noted the demand for pickleball is shown by information from adjacent townships where the courts are heavily used and more recently at the indoor courts in Lansdale where he said he stopped by on a random Wednesday evening and saw their 12 pickleball courts in use. People there pay \$400 a year plus an hourly charge to play. So, the demand is there. He suggested it might even be possible to charge people for playing on the Towamencin courts to offset some costs.

Supervisor Osei said from what he is hearing here, he could probably agree to applying for the grants at the next BOS meeting.

Mr. Meehan and Ms. Becker and the rest of the committee said his approval for the grant application would be a great first step and thanked him for his reconsideration.

Bocce Courts

Dr. Costlow provided an update on the reopening of the bocce courts in Fischer's Park for this year. He said there was a meeting with the people who maintain the courts and the meeting went well. Public works offered to make a piece of equipment the players can use to drag the courts and make them level. The court users have volunteered to do their part in smoothing the courts and keeping them in good shape. He mentioned one problem which persists. That being the damage to the court surface by individuals who walk across the soft surface after rain, leaving deep footprints. Some individuals doing this also feel the need to "scratch" messages into the bocce court surfacing. The problem was discussed at the meeting, about putting something along the pavilion side of the courts to act as a barrier, but those present didn't come to any agreement. For a start they suggested a sign, but no one committed to that. At least everyone is aware of the severity of the problem based on what happened to the courts over the winter.

Dr. Costlow also mentioned the possibility of the courts being used by the Montgomery County Senior games for their events. This is being discussed with the event coordinator.

Fischer's Park Improvements

Mr. Meehan noted that a new metal roof is currently being installed on the Bull Pen pavilion. Skylights along with better interior light fixtures are also being added to the restrooms at the Meadow View pavilion.

Connector Path from Grist Mill Drive to Grist Mill Park

The Township will be applying for a Community Conservation Partnership (C2P2) Grant to construct this connector path/trail. CKS was authorized to prepare the grant application by the BOS at its February 25th meeting. For this application CKS will be doing preliminary work to determine the trail alignment at the northern end where the trail runs between a detention basin and the residential properties. The committee also discussed the possibility of putting the trail within the utility easement, which for a large part is on almost the same alignment as being looked at for the trail. CKS will also prepare a cost estimate. The Grant application deadline is April 2, 2025.

Mr. Meehan said CKS has asked for letters of support for this Grant request from the OSPAC as well as TYA. Mr. Meehan said he will follow up and get the letters for the application.

Planting Trees – 2025

Mr. Meehan said he visited each of the sites chosen preliminarily for planting trees later this year. The sites were along Kriebel Road adjacent to Green Lane Park, Firehouse Park where many ash trees have been removed, Drinnon Park along the new trail and Kibler Meadow Park. He took photographs of each site but did not mark out actual tree locations because the markings would be quickly lost as the grass started growing. He said he plans to do the layout later in the year.

He summarized his site review by saying that each of the sites could easily accommodate more trees than what we have planned to plant in 2025.

Dr. Costlow mentioned that he had not received the Townships response regarding the accounting of monies received from developers for trees that could not be planted in their development. The OSPAC refers to this as the “tree bank”. Money would then be withdrawn by the Township from this “bank” and used to plant trees where the Township felt they were needed. Supervisor Osei said he would look into this and get back to the Committee. The committee discussed the background leading up to the “tree bank” and the different developers that might have participated in this “bank” and also planning to plant more trees each year using money from the “bank”. Dr. Costlow said he will continue to look at more new tree planting using this money to leverage additional monies from various tree related grant sources.

Veterans Memorial Park Engineering Plans

Mr. Meehan said there has been no progress on Veterans Park engineering plans. Access is still the issue that has everything at a standstill and will remain that way until PSDC (Mark Nicoletti) and the Township come to an agreement on access across its property.

Geocaching

John French, a geocaching advocate and Township resident was present at tonight’s meeting. He has attended recent OSPAC meetings to discuss changing the Township policy which prohibits geocaching in Township. The OSPAC is not opposed to geocaching but wants to be sure it has guidelines and is safe for the Township residents, the geocache players and doesn’t damage park property. The OSPAC looked for it to be self-policing and not be a burden on the Township for enforcement or permitting.

To this end, Mr. French and the OSPAC have collaborated on guidelines acceptable to both the OSPAC and geocache advocates. The Committee reviewed the most recent document presented as an email from Mr. French dated February 27, 2025. Attached to the email were proposed guidelines for geocaching in Towamencin and a Towamencin Township specific permit form. The Committee reviewed these attachments. The consensus of the Committee was that they would be acceptable. Dr. Costlow made a motion on the text of the guidelines and permit form being acceptable to the OSPAC. Ms. Becker seconded the motion. There were no further comments on the motion. A vote was taken and all

Committee Members voted in favor of the motion. The two documents voted on and approved are attached to these minutes.

Mr. Meehan said he would arrange a meeting with Mr. Kraynik and the Chief of Police to discuss administering these guidelines and once that is worked out a joint presentation by the geocaching advocates and the OSPAC will be made to the BOS for its action.

Comments on the Draft Comprehensive Plan

The Committee members provided their initial thoughts on the draft Comprehensive Plan with wide ranging topics including those listed below.

- The volume of the document...almost 350 pages when including the appendix. People don't have the time to completely digest and clearly understand it.
- There are numerous misspellings and inconsistencies throughout that need to be corrected.
- It already seems out of date. It contains references that since the preparation of the Comp Plan are no longer relevant and should be removed.
- There was a discussion about what the Township should be like in the future as a goal of the Comp Plan. What do we think the Township should be like in 2040? What would we like it to be for future residents? That is not clear in the Draft Comp Plan. Isn't that the goal of the Comp Plan?
- We don't want the Township to be just like it is now.
- What improvements has the township seen that are the result of the last Comprehensive Plan? Can they be used as an example going forward?
- The Plan is "plain Jane, apple pie and motherhood" Very generic.
- The Plan talks only briefly about roads and infrastructure. The Comp Plan public presentation included a little about roads and infrastructure, but the presentation concluded there is not really much we can do about it. Roads and infrastructure need to be an important part of the plan.
- The Draft Comp Plan is too "top down" and there was not enough open discussion with Township residents once the analysis results became available.
- Some committee members feel that Comp Plans in general, tend to look at "adding things" rather than making what the Township has become better, thereby saving time energy and money.
- The committee didn't want to see the Township spend large amounts of scarce funds on acquiring and maintaining historic homes. This is expensive and means other higher priority needs are not addressed because too much money is devoted to the historic purchases. Instead, the Plan should address the historic properties while keeping them in private ownership.
- The Market Analysis provided a good executive summary. What connections were used in making the recommendations based on the market analysis.
- Add into the plan, recognition of an "active shooter" situation and the Township's "after event" preparedness.
- The Comp Plan should have done a much better job of condensing the information to share with the greater community to get feedback. People don't have time or desire to review all the presented data and come to their own conclusions.
- Some ideas seem to be too far out of reality. (cricket)
- The plan is oddly out of date. (Freddy Hill being a "dairy farm", Whole foods and Target in a proposed shopping center)
- Continued talk in the plan about things that are on their way out and will not be relevant to the Township in the future. Why even mention them? (Bus route on 63)
- Many items in the Plan are specific to what is happening today. Do we expect this same thing to be relevant in 2040? Such as references to PSDC developments. Do we expect that PSDC will be the only developer in the Township between now and 2040?

- A plan shows you how to go from point A to Point B. In this case point A being 2025 and B being 2040. The plan doesn't clearly establish what 2040 should be like. Some Committee members found it too vague. A plan should show how you get from here (point A) to there (point B) along with reasoning why that path was chosen. This Comp Plan doesn't seem to have a clear definition of what point B is, let alone say that this is a plan from here to there.
- Evansburg Park, which occupies many hundred acres of Towamencin, should play a greater role in the Draft Comp Plan

For the items more directly addressed in the plan relevant to the OSPAC committee, there were only a few exceptions or disagreements to what is proposed in the Comp Plan. The Committee agrees with the recommendations to preserve and maintain open space, to consider adding more open space if it becomes available, to initiate a Township wide tree plan, to initiate a plan to increase tree canopy cover, and to continue to advise the Township on with budget requests for capital projects.

Many of the OSPAC committees' comments were about the approach taken in the Comp Plan. The Draft Plan seemed to be presented as a "top down" document with the recommendations already determined. The Committee felt it was being asked to edit the document when what it seemed to need was more substantiative reasoning behind the established goals and more substantiative explanation how to achieve the goals.

Mr. Meehan said the Committee had so many comments discussed at this meeting and many of them were not related to the Open Space and Parks portions of the Comp Plan that he recommends each committee member send their comments directly to Simone-Collins using the link on the Township website. The deadline for comments is two days away, March 12th. Members said they would do this. They also suggested an extension of this deadline and possibly a meeting with Simone-Collins to get a better understanding of the Plan and importantly the reasoning why or how the data and other input led them to the recommendations they made. Mr. Meehan said he would see if that was possible. Supervisor Osei also said he also has been sending individual comments and that he also had questions on the Plan content. He also said he understands Peter Simone is open to the suggestion to extend the timeline.

Ms. Becker noted that there is a schedule for completion of the plan and its presentation to the Board of Supervisors, so it is important that everyone send their comments soon, so they get incorporated.

The Committees comments are comprised of comments as discussed at the OSPAC meeting, some of which are noted previously, and individual comments, not discussed but submitted directly via the link on the Township website by the committee members.

NEW BUSINESS

On another topic, Mr. Richards, a Township resident, asked where he might find more background information on the items on the agenda. Mr. Meehan said as items/topics are "in process" they are not on the Township website. He said you could reach back in the OSAPAC committee meeting minutes which are on the website and get past information regarding a topic the OSPAC has discussed. Other than that, he doesn't know of any other source that is available to the residents. Included was a discussion of how a "history" of a particular topic might be created so people who don't attend the meetings could be informed. No conclusion was reached.

There was then a discussion about difficulties people have navigating the Township Website until they become familiar with it.

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

Ms. Becker made a motion to adjourn. Dr. Costlow seconded the motion. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted

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

The next Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee Meeting is on April 15, 2025