

GREEN RIDGEWOOD Minutes

January 9, 2025, 7:30-9:30 PM

RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE

Attendees: Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair, Beth Gould Creller – Vice Chair, Joan Hubertus, Justin Manger, Bill Armbruster, Peter Jerdee, Justin Jonsson, Pam Perron (Village Council Liaison), Saurabh Dani (Board of Education Representative), Jill Fasano (Village Staff Member); **Green Team:** Mike Faherty, Manpreet Tyagi, Mark Kaplan; **Guests:** Carolyn Jacoby, George Wolfson, Joe Ferrante, Yuna Kim (Green Team RHS)

Administration

1. Welcome and Attendee Introductions
2. December 5, 2024, meeting minutes were unanimously approved

Updates/Discussion/Strategy

3. Chair Report, Green Ridgewood highlights & membership update (David)
 - There is one opening on Green Ridgewood and one opening on Green Team. The Clerk's Office has received several applications, and the Village Council will make appointments made soon.
4. Village Council Liaison Report (Pam)
 - The Village Council's reorganization meeting took place on Monday. Frank Mortimer was seated as new council member, Paul Vagianos was reelected Mayor and Pam as Deputy Mayor. Evan Weitz was elected President pro tempore.
 - Frank is stepping down as Parks and Recreation Board Representative on Green Ridgewood and will become Village Council liaison to the Open Space committee. The Council has asked Parks and Recreation to designate another liaison to Green Ridgewood.
 - Reappointments to Green Ridgewood and Green Team liaisons were announced.
 - The Council will introduce the revised tree ordinance at the January 15 Council meeting, and the second hearing will be in February. The ordinance would take effect in March. Among other changes, the revised ordinance now lists invasive trees that can be cut down without a permit, adds the requirement that the arborist's certification for removing a tree from property must be verified by Ridgewood's arborist, and increases replacement tree requirements. Replacement trees must be non-invasive but native trees are not required. The Council intends to take up the subject of fines next.
 - The Town Garage has been taken down. Soil cleanup will be done in the coming weeks. Groundwater cleanup takes longer and will include longer term monitoring. The remedial investigative report submitted to DEP by seller's LSRP delineates the

contamination but not how to remediate it. Seller has 2 years to accomplish the cleanup to DEP's satisfaction. Suggested that for the next 2 years, the Village plant Pearl grass and install a rain garden.

5. Green Ridgewood voted unanimously to reappoint David Refkin as Chair and Beth Gould Creller as Vice Chair.
6. Leaf Blowers – Goals, strategy, next steps (Pam, Mike, Joan, David)
 - Sustainable Jersey issued a very helpful framework document last fall. It suggests a key element is transitioning the municipal equipment to electric leaf blowers in whole or in part.
 - Discussed the subject of a registry for landscapers and the experience of other NJ municipalities.
 - Joan and Mike have prepared a postcard from Green Ridgewood to landscapers on expanding their business by learning to design, build and maintain rain gardens. There is already a Rutgers course and manual on rain gardens and there are local experts who could conduct classes.
 - The American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA) can give our parks department training on rain gardens as well as how to transition its fleet of equipment to electric leaf blowers. Other NJ towns have worked with AGZA.
 - Discussed other aspects including the experience of other NJ municipalities with funding rebates for electric leaf blower purchases.
 - Lois Kraus of Advocates for Transforming Landscaping will speak at the January 28 Bergen Hub meeting.
7. Army Corps of Engineer Announcement (Pam, David, Joan)
 - Congressional funding for the ACoE study related to flooding in Ridgewood, covering both the HoHoKus Brook and the Saddle River, came through in December. We do not know yet when the study begins or how long it will take.
8. Measurement
 - a. Sustainable Jersey Grant and Discussions (Energy) (Beth, Mike)
 - We need to brainstorm as many ideas as possible and take them back to Village Council, so that the municipality can then present to the State. The energy use data is needed for this.
 - We have until October to present a plan and have it approved by the Village Council.
 - The State has also given us access to the data they have.
 - Sustainable Jersey may be able to help with data gathering and evaluation, possibly in lieu of a consultant.
 - b. Meeting with Village Manager and follow-up (Energy) (David)

- We need to accelerate efforts to get the data on the Village's energy use, starting with municipal buildings.
 - c. PSE&G Program (Saurabh)
 - PSE&G started an updated version of its Direct Install program January 1 that allows small businesses, organizations, municipalities, schools and houses of worship to replace gas-powered heating equipment with heat pumps, for facilities with average peak demand usage of less than 200 kW. PSE&G will pay for up to 80% of the upgrade, conditioned upon payment of the prevailing wage. Ridgewood school district has already replaced several units.
 - d. Solutions for measuring river/brook flow, stormwater – (Joan)
 - We will start talking to our contacts at ACoE to understand what data they will collect. We expect that they will have a lot of data on the Brook and River, but not on the runoff.
- 9. Ridgewood Water Communications (Jill, Manpreet, David)
 - Discussed the state of RW's PR work and the need to increase the public's understanding of RW's efforts and successes.
 - In 2025, RW will budget more for PR. Jill noted that RW is already very vocal on social media and sends its weekly newsletter to the towns' managers, posts on social media, and on the RW website.
 - Could the Village add the RW newsletter to its weekly news blast?
 - Rich Calbi and Mike Cohrs will speak at the January 28 Bergen Hub meeting in Ridgewood, where we expect around fifteen other Bergen County communities to attend.
 - An important message is that at least two hundred million Americans have a PFAS problem and RW is solving it ahead of most.
 - GR can promote the message on water conservation, including that less consumption, especially during peak periods, improves the water quality. GR can also help with posts about PFAS and other water issues. This is also a planned focus for Earth Day (see below).
 - Discussed potential modification of the ordinance on watering with smart sprinklers as a way to address the problem of overconsumption.
- 10. Columbia Student Recommendations Implementation – next steps
 - a. Rain Barrels (Joan)
 - Backyard Living says purchases have been ok, but they do not expect further movement until spring.
 - Discussed whether he subject of the sale of Rain Barrels by Backyard Living at Earth Day (with the \$25 GR discount).

- Restart advertising the program in March.
- b. Moving towards EVs (David)
 - The Village manager and the mayor are open to the idea of replacing fleet vehicles with EVs when they come up for replacement.
- c. The food scrap grant application is still pending.

11. County/State Outreach/New Columbia Project (David/Joan)

- a. Status of Columbia Application (David)
 - The Columbia School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) did not accept the Saddle River Park project.
 - Alina has made a few adjustments to the application and submitted it to the Columbia Sustainability School, which hopefully will take it on as a project over the summer.
- b. Activities of “Good Trouble Group” (Ridgewood, Saddle Brook, Rochelle Park) (Joan)
 - The Saddle River Park brainstorming session with experts previously discussed with Assemblywoman Lisa Swain has not yet materialized.
 - The Group met yesterday and discussed four objectives for the next 90-120 days: (1) effectiveness – drafted up letter to Bergen County legislators and candidates to start communication to get discipline around the issue; (2) ACoE; (3) position inland flooding as governor’s campaign issue; (4) brainstorming – get Bergen County Parks Commissioner on board & stakeholder management.
- c. County/State Interaction (Joan)
 - Ridgewood is the first community statewide to work closely with the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program on MS4 stormwater issues. The Rutgers Cooperative prepared a letter for us that we have narrowed down to two priority items – (1) coordinate affordable housing requirements with MS4 stormwater requirements through development of a flow chart; (2) provide simple instructions on how to test the effectiveness of installed rain gardens (nothing exists for this now). There is no cost to us.

12. Ridgewood Schools

- a. Students Update (Yuna Kim)
 - RHS Green Team has contacted Parks & Recreation about the sign design for their wildflower meadow and are awaiting a response on available dimensions and cost.
 - They are making progress on the stations/tables for Super Science Saturday. Tentative topics include waste audits, making seed bombs, urban runoff demonstrations, hydroponic gardening, recycling and

composting quizzes, sustainable diet alternatives, fast fashion, Ridgewood water quality, and benefits of biking and carpooling.

- They plan to apply for the Trees for Schools grant, which awards up to \$250,000 for trees and labor. They are mapping out around two hundred potential trees and shrub locations.
- Miles and the RHS Green Team are in discussions with PSE&G to plant non-woody (herbaceous) vegetation along the Brook. All necessary approvals are in place. PSE&G recommended that Miles talk to Lisa Summers regarding what to plant.
- They have completed the application for EDGRS, the federal Education Department Green Ribbons Schools program.

13. Daffodil Festival/Earth Day Fair (April 27, 2025) (All)

- Signup sheets to be prepared for two shifts.
- Themes under consideration are water issues – tying together water conservation, flooding, rain gardens, rain barrels, and PFAS; and leaf blowers – reduce, replace, relax, including the idea of a Quiet June, July and/or August initiative.

14. Resident “Training” Program (Mark)

- Library event space books 4-6 months in advance. The first event will probably be May at the earliest. We will reach out to Sean Hamlin about an event on food scraps.

15. Grant Opportunities (George, Joan)

- The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program is a potential source of funds we have not utilized in the past. We have to submit only one grant application; thereafter, the various participating organizations will review it. The application, however, should still target particular grants, in consultation with our grant writers. The RFS subcommittee will discuss it further.

16. Communication Newsletter (Justin)

- We are aiming for a short newsletter at the end of January and another one in early April before Earth Day. The subcommittee will discuss ideas.

Future Events

17. Future Meeting Dates 2025: January 28th Bergen Hub Meeting (Youth Lounge), February 6, March 6, April 3, Daffodil Festival/Earth Day Fair – April 27th, May 1

18. The meeting ended at 9:40 PM.

Submitted by Peter Jerdee, GR member.