

A SPECIAL PUBLIC BUDGET MEETING OF THE VILLAGE COUNCIL OF THE VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD HELD IN THE SYDNEY V. STOLDT, JR. COURT ROOM OF THE RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, 131 NORTH MAPLE AVENUE, RIDGEWOOD, NEW JERSEY, ON FEBRUARY 19, 2025 AT 5:00 P.M.

1. CALL TO ORDER – OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT – ROLL CALL – FLAG SALUTE

Deputy Mayor Perron called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m. and read the Statement of Compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act. At roll call the following were present: Councilmembers Mortimer, Perron, Weitz, and Winograd. Mayor Vagianos arrived to the meeting at 5:10 p.m. Also present were Keith Kazmark, Village Manager; Heather Mailander, Village Clerk; Robert Rooney, Chief Financial Officer; and Olivia Andreula, Accounting Assistant.

Deputy Mayor Perron led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

2. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Gwen Hauck, a resident of Ridgewood, said that the Community Center is a very important part of the Parks and Recreation Department, serving as a “home base” for the residents of Ridgewood. Residents, including seniors, are able to socialize, enjoy recreational activities, and meet new people. Ms. Hauck said that the Community Center depends upon “municipal dollars” to thrive and grow. She asked the Village Councilmembers to keep this in mind, during the budget meetings. Staff meetings are also held in the Community Center, and children seek shelter there during inclement weather. The Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association (PBA) and the League of Women Voters hold classes and meetings in the Community Center, and union negotiations are held there as well. There is a wide variety of activities held at the Community Center for families, including karate classes, drum classes for blind people, and post-stroke classes. Ms. Hauck spoke about the intergenerational nature of the Community Center, where 25 Ridgewood High School juniors work with seniors on various activities.

Liz Kloak, a resident of Ridgewood, stated that she serves as Vice President of the Community Center Advisory Board. Ms. Kloak echoed the comments of Ms. Hauck. She said that the Community Center acts as a social and cultural resource for Village residents, especially for seniors and middle school-aged children. Ms. Kloak stated that the current staffing model at the Community Center needs to be reassessed, in order to offer weekend and evening programming and larger community-wide events. Its current form does not provide for any expansion or changing demands, specifically the timing of certain events. Ms. Kloak stated that residents sometimes wish to use the Community Center after 5:00 p.m.

Ms. Kloak said that she conducted an informal, non-scientific poll and learned that many neighboring towns have two or more full-time staffers in their Community Center, and most have between six and eight part-time or per diem staffers manning the center. This additional staff keep programs running smoothly, while the full-time staff members work on existing programs and the creation of new programs. In Ridgewood, there is one person running the events in the Community Center, all the time. Ms. Kloak indicated that the Advisory Board is committed to providing additional resources to expand programs and supporting health and social interactions. She stated that the board cannot be expected to fundraise to pay staff members' salaries.

Ms. Kloak asked the Village Councilmembers to consider increasing the monies allocated to the Community Center, so that additional staff members may be hired and programs can be expanded. In addition, she invited the Village Councilmembers to the Community Center's first "Lunch and Learn" program for seniors, which will be held on April 22, 2024. This program is sponsored by the Advisory Board and paid for through fundraising. Ms. Kloak said that it is her hope that these types of programs will always be free. She is looking for local entities to sponsor programs in the future.

Gail McCarthy, a resident of Ridgewood, said that she was speaking this evening in support of the Kasschau Memorial Bandshell. She said that she sent an email to Nancy Bigos, Director of the Parks and Recreation Department, wherein she reviewed the Summer Concert Series budget. Ms. McCarthy said that there were some operational and cost issues which the Kasschau Bandshell Committee wanted to bring to the attention of Ms. Bigos and the Village Council. For 66 years, the Kasschau Memorial Bandshell has presented music under the stars, for the Ridgewood community. Ms. McCarthy has served on the Kasschau Bandshell Committee for the past seven years and has served as the Chairperson of this committee since 2021.

Ms. McCarthy said that the Kasschau Bandshell Committee fundraises the monies needed to provide a well-rounded Summer Concert Series. In 2025, the committee is having difficulty raising the funds needed to pay for the various musical groups who perform at the bandshell every year. While there are loyal sponsors who financially assist every year, these sponsors are also assisting other organizations in Ridgewood. When Ms. McCarthy first began to serve on the committee, the musical programs were geared mostly towards older people, but they have since revived the programming to reach younger audiences as well. She stated that the concert series has greatly expanded, bands are clamoring to perform at the bandshell, and people from all over Bergen County come to enjoy the various shows.

Ms. McCarthy stated that two years ago, the operational costs for putting on these shows became difficult to meet, even with all of the fundraising that is done to pay for the bands. There were two Village staff members who assisted during the shows, with one taking care of the sound and the other performing maintenance on the bandshell to make sure it was clean. One of these staff members no longer works for the Village, so the Kasschau Bandshell Committee now has to pay someone to take care of the sound, which Ms. McCarthy said is quite expensive. There is currently

one employee from the Signal Department at every concert, who is paid the sum of approximately \$6,000.00 for the entire summer, with fundraising monies. Three years ago, a sound company was hired to assist with the sound at each concert, and they are paid between \$6,000.00 and \$8,000.00 per summer.

Ms. McCarthy said that \$9,000.00 is usually appropriated in the budget by the Village Council for the Kasschau Bandshell each year. This year, she is requesting an additional \$6,000.00 to cover their operational costs, for a total of \$15,000.00. This will ensure that the bandshell is kept clean, the acoustics are great, and the high standards set by the Village are upheld, regarding artistic and cultural enrichment. Ms. McCarthy encouraged everyone to attend the shows this summer.

Rich Brooks, a Ridgewood resident, said that he has been the Chair of the Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board for approximately 10 years, and a member of the board for approximately 20 years. He recently read a survey in which 90% of parents said that a solid recreational infrastructure was important when they were deciding on a place to live. Mr. Brooks spoke about the percentages of millennials (also called Gen Y, ages 29 to 44), Gen X (ages 45 to 60), Gen Z (ages 13-28), and the Baby Boomers that comprise the population of Ridgewood. He said that millennials represent the largest population in the United States (137,000,000), and they probably are the largest and most active population segment in Ridgewood as well. Mr. Brooks said that millennials love to exercise and be outdoors playing sports.

Mr. Brooks said that the Village needs to maintain and improve its existing assets. He said that parks and all public spaces need to be kept in as pristine a condition as possible and said that the grounds of Memorial Park at Van Neste Square show wear and tear. Mr. Brooks said that keeping parks and public spaces pristine and clean requires the appropriate machinery and manpower. He stated that the Village needs to plan carefully for the future. He asked that Ms. Bigos be included in any discussions regarding development of the former Town Garage property. Mr. Brooks concluded by asking the Village Councilmembers to satisfy the diversion once and for all, since it has been lingering for over 15 years.

Cynthia Halaby, a resident of Ridgewood, said that she has been working closely with the Parks and Recreation Department for 12 years through the Ridgewood Conservancy for Public Lands, Women Gardeners of Ridgewood, and Project Pride. She said that all of the employees of the Parks and Recreation Department work very hard to keep all of the parks and gardens in Ridgewood in great shape. Ms. Halaby said that maintenance of these parks and gardens is crucial, although time consuming and expensive. In particular, Ms. Halaby said that Memorial Park at Van Neste Square is in dire need of an overhaul or, at the very least, a major maintenance job. This park received an overhaul 25 years ago and the time has come for another overhaul, since the bricks on the pathway are very uneven, the soil has washed away from underneath the benches (revealing the footings), and the plants need to be severely pruned or replaced. Ms. Halaby said that improvements to

Memorial Park at Van Neste Square could be accomplished through increased staffing and funding for the Parks and Recreation Department.

Kristina Milian, a resident of Ridgewood, asked if the Village Councilmembers would consider budgeting, in this year's budget, an appropriation for School Resource Officers (RSOs) for the elementary schools in Ridgewood, since there are none currently in those schools. Ms. Milian said that it was her understanding that payment of salaries for the RSOs is the obligation of the Board of Education (BOE), and the Village is obligated to pay for the remaining costs for the RSOs. She said that the Village's obligation would be approximately \$40,000.00 per RSO per year. She asked the Village Councilmembers to consider allocating funds for at least one RSO in the 2025 budget.

In addition, Ms. Milian asked if the Village Councilmembers would consider funding PFAS filters for all of the water fountains located in Village schools. She said that parents advocated for these filters with the BOE and, last year, one water fountain per school was outfitted with a PFAS filter. She said that this is an inadequate number of PFAS filters for small children in the elementary schools, since teachers would need to escort younger students to the appropriate water fountain with a PFAS filter. She said that Ridgewood Water sends out notices regularly, stating that the elderly and children tend to be the most vulnerable populations when it comes to ingestion of PFAS-contaminated water. Ms. Milian said that the BOE indicated that it was too expensive to install PFAS filters at every water fountain in the schools, and suggested that such filters be paid for through funds raised by the Home and School Association or Dads' Night events.

There were no further public comments.

Mayor Vagianos apologized for arriving late to this evening's meeting, stating that he had to deal with a family emergency. He said that he was pleased at the large turnout this evening for this budget meeting. Mayor Vagianos thanked everyone for speaking this evening, particularly Ms. McCarthy. He stated that the Kasschau Bandshell is a "community gem" loved by all Ridgewood residents. He said that the Village Councilmembers will take each request into consideration.

Addressing Ms. Milian's requests for PFAS filters for water fountains and RSOs for Ridgewood elementary schools, Mayor Vagianos said that these two matters are being looked at by the BOE. He said that the Village Councilmembers have discussed these issues with the BOE, but both matters are completely within the purview of the BOE.

Councilmember Mortimer thanked everyone who spoke in support of the Parks and Recreation Department. He said that this department is the one department in Ridgewood that touches most Ridgewood residents. The amount of support shown this evening validates the tremendous amount of work that is done by the employees of the Parks and Recreation Department throughout the year.

Councilmember Winograd also thanked everyone who spoke this evening in support of budget allocations for the Parks and Recreation Department. Regarding the Community Center and the need for additional space, Councilmember Winograd stated that a Certificate of Occupancy for the Zabriskie-Schedler house was issued in 2024. The house is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. Despite some issues with parking spaces and under-development of the Schedler property at the current time, Councilmember Winograd said that she would like the employees working at the Community Center to tour the Zabriskie-Schedler house, to see if it could be used for additional space, since it is an underutilized Village asset. Councilmember Winograd added that she agrees that the staff of the Parks and Recreation Department do a wonderful job for the Village.

3. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. REVIEW OF DEPARTMENTAL BUDGETS AND CAPITAL REQUESTS

1. PARKS DEPARTMENT

At the meeting this evening to present their budget requests were Nancy Bigos, Director of the Parks and Recreation Department; Katie Frey, Supervisor of Recreation; Matthew Andreula, Supervisor of Parks; and Deanna Schablik, Recreation Program Coordinator.

Mr. Kazmark stated that this evening, the Village Councilmembers will consider budget requests regarding the Parks Department, Recreation Department, Graydon Pool, Community Center and Project Pride. In addition, budget requests will be heard regarding the Police Department, Parking Utility, Trust/Accumulated Leave, and Staff Levels.

Ms. Bigos began by expressing her gratitude for the understanding, collaboration and support of the Village Council; for the leadership and expertise of the Village Manager and Chief Financial Officer; and for the support given to the Parks and Recreation Department by all Village Department Directors, Supervisors and employees. Ms. Bigos also stated that she was grateful for the collaboration with various organizations and groups, including the Conservancy for Ridgewood Public Lands (CRPL); HealthBarn; Women Gardeners of Ridgewood; sports groups; Project Pride; the Kasschau Bandshell; various civic groups; the Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board; the Open Space Committee; the Fields Committee; the Community Center Advisory Board; and the Shade Tree Commission.

Ms. Bigos said that she is grateful for her dedicated staff, who have worked hard to improve the infrastructure and park system in the Village. Some accomplishments in 2024 include the improved LED lighting system at Veterans Field; renovations and long overdue maintenance at Citizens Park, such as removing brush and overgrowth, leveling the ground, and installation of benches; complete renovations to South Pleasant Park/Hawes Field this past fall, including new

sod, benches, and trees; pouring footings for the installation of the new pavilion structure at Habernickel Park; planting of approximately 200 trees throughout the Village; planting of 100 saplings throughout the Village; and Mulch Monday.

Ms. Bigos indicated that the Recreation Division has successfully launched the Master Library System (MLS), which is used for the scheduling of fields and facilities owned by the Village and/or the Board of Education. New sports groups have been introduced, and Village employees have been trained to use the MLS. The Community Center has expanded its program offerings and bus transportation for seniors. Ms. Bigos indicated that she has written two memorandums to the Village Council, requesting that they consider the repair and resurfacing of the pickleball courts at Glen School, which are in dire need of repair, as well as the total repair and resurfacing of the Somerville tennis courts.

Ms. Bigos spoke about a park inventory that was started several years ago by members and volunteers of the Parks, Recreation and Conservation (PRC) Board. She is pleased that there is a comprehensive park inventory listed on the Village website that identifies all of the municipal park properties, lists the recreational amenities for each park, and provides other relevant information.

Regarding the Parks Department, Ms. Bigos indicated that there is a \$30,000.00 budget request regarding salaries and wages for temporary and seasonal workers for park maintenance (Account 013). This request is the same as was requested and allocated for in the 2024 budget, although the entire amount was not used. Ms. Bigos stated that seasonal staff are hard to find. Several young adults have been hired, but Ms. Bigos said that she is starting to look for more mature individuals to fill these positions, since younger people do not seem to stay for a long period of time.

Councilmember Weitz pointed out that there is an increase in salaries and wages for full-time employees (Account 011) by approximately \$250,000.00. He asked whether this was as a result of step increases (contractual obligations) or whether this was the result of potentially hiring more staff. Ms. Bigos replied that she is desirous of increasing staff levels in the Parks Department, by adding two park maintenance workers in entry-level positions (\$53,000.00 starting salary for each, plus benefits). The remaining increases represent step increases for existing staff and promotions. Ms. Bigos stated that the two additional workers are needed so that the Parks Department can “catch up” on maintenance needs for parks and fields. She stated that there are many complaints by residents regarding the condition of the parks and fields. Ms. Bigos stated that there are many special events held in Village parks and fields, particularly in Memorial Park at Van Neste Square, necessitating the need for increased maintenance of the grounds, including trash pickup, emptying of trash receptacles, leaf blowing, and grass edging. Councilmember Weitz said that he fully supports the hiring of more maintenance staff, but stated that cuts would need to be made elsewhere in the budget, to offset this cost.

Councilmember Winograd agreed that many members of the public have complained about the condition of Village parks and fields, and residents have stated that they want more programming and events. In addition, she stated that it is crucial to have the grounds cleaned after large events, such as the Fourth of July fireworks, for health and sanitary reasons. Employees also have to set up in preparation for events, which takes a lot of manpower, as well as clean up afterwards. Staffing has to be increased if programming is increased. The additional trees that have been planted throughout the Village need watering and maintenance, such as pruning.

A discussion ensued about how many employees Ms. Bigos is asking to hire. Mr. Kazmark pointed out that it has been very difficult to fill the Tree Maintenance Worker positions, particular Tree Maintenance Worker III, which has been vacant for a while. There is someone currently who is willing to take the Tree Maintenance Worker III position. Councilmember Winograd noted that the spreadsheets show requests to hire four maintenance workers, and Ms. Bigos stated that she is looking to hire at least two full-time maintenance workers. Mayor Vagianos pointed out that the increased request of \$250,000.00 for salaries and wages represents approximately \$30,000.00 for step increases and promotions and approximately \$220,000.00 for increased staffing (four workers).

Mr. Kazmark pointed out that the starting salary for a Maintenance Worker I is \$55,073.00. There is a request for three new employees to fill the Maintenance Worker I positions. There is another request to fill a Maintenance Worker I position, which is carried over from 2024, since one employee left this year. The hiring of three additional maintenance workers will restore the staffing levels in the Parks Department, since cuts have been made over the years due to budget constraints. Mayor Vagianos asked if the amount of \$165,000.00 is requested to fill the three maintenance worker positions, and another \$80,000.00 to fill two other positions. Mr. Kazmark replied that a request of \$72,245.00 is being made to fill the Tree Maintenance Worker III position, which offer has already been made to an employee. In addition, there is a vacant position with a \$55,073.00 salary. Upon questioning by Mayor Vagianos, Mr. Kazmark replied that there is a total request to hire five new staff members. Mr. Kazmark added that there are eight existing employees who receive step increases. Further discussion ensued wherein Mr. Kazmark explained to Mayor Vagianos and the other Village Councilmembers what the actual employee requests are for 2025.

Councilmember Weitz asked if part-time employees could be considered, rather than full-time employees, since benefits would not need to be given to part-time employees. Ms. Bigos indicated that this suggestion could certainly be explored. Councilmember Mortimer stated that it is noteworthy to understand the wide scope of services provided by employees of the Parks Department. Services range from park maintenance to snow removal.

Mayor Vagianos asked Ms. Bigos how long it has been since she had the three maintenance worker positions filled in the Parks Department. Ms. Bigos replied that the Parks Department has not had a full contingent of employees since Dr. Kenneth Gabbert was Village Manager, in approximately 2010, at which time they lost a major part of their staff. Mr. Kazmark stated that the Village and the sports organizations in Ridgewood have made considerable investments in parks and recreational facilities, and the Village is obligated to make sure that the improvements are maintained at all parks and recreational fields, so that these investments are protected.

Councilmember Winograd mentioned that the Conservancy for Ridgewood Public Lands (CRPL) and Women Gardeners of Ridgewood have also made significant contributions to beautify the parks and open space in Ridgewood. Mr. Kazmark added that Mr. Andreula and his crew must maintain the recreational fields in the Village three to four times per week, and the Village must ensure that the playing fields are safe for student athletes.

Ms. Bigos stated that the CRPL, Project Pride, and Women Gardeners of Ridgewood probably donate more than 200 man hours each year towards maintaining public lands, such as winterizing the Children's Butterfly Garden behind The Stable. She said it was the volunteers who truly make a difference for the Parks and Recreation Department.

Addressing Ms. McCarthy's earlier comments, Mr. Kazmark explained that there is a budget request of \$35,300.00 for the Kasschau Shell (Account 098). Councilmember Weitz noted that \$29,300.00 was appropriated for the Kasschau Shell in 2024, and he asked what the extra request of \$6,000.00 will be used for. Ms. Bigos said that the \$18,500.00 shown on the spreadsheet for performers represents the amount of money fundraised in the past through the efforts of Ms. McCarthy and members of the Kasschau Shell Committee. The remaining operating expenses, including printing, sound system, emergency repairs, salaries for the Signal Department, and the scholarship, are contained in their municipal budget requests. She mentioned that the \$6,000.00 is to pay people to operate the sound system during concerts, using their own equipment.

2. RECREATION DEPARTMENT

Ms. Bigos said that Ms. Frey oversees the operation of the Summer Day Camp and Graydon Pool. Ms. Frey stated that there is an increase in the 2025 budget request for temporary and seasonal employees (\$228,401.25, Account 013) since 2024 (\$203,500.00). The actual spend in 2024 was \$207,220.85. Ms. Frey explained that if there is a summer without a lot of rain, the Summer Day Camp is run almost every day and there are no cancellations, which is what occurred in 2024. This resulted in increased salaries and wages being paid to summer camp employees. One of the main reasons for the increase in salaries and wages for 2025 is due to the fact that the minimum wage has increased again and the higher pay received by older camp counselors, so that they are incentivized to continue working in this capacity. Out of the 85 camp counselors, they have lost six, so they have a 91% retention rate.

Councilmember Weitz asked if the overall head count for temporary and seasonal workers is increasing, or if the increase is due to increased pay for existing workers. Ms. Frey replied that the head count will remain the same, but they are being paid more for retention. Ms. Frey explained the configuration of the various groups in the Summer Day Camp and the ratio of counselors to children. There are 75 counselors working 5-1/2 hours per day, for 29 days out of the summer. There are also three administrative counselors, who work the same 29 days, undergo eight hours of training, and conduct interviews for camp counselors.

Councilmember Weitz noted that the budget request for full-time salaries (Account 011) for 2025 has increased by approximately \$67,000.00 (\$298,695.82 appropriated for 2024, \$315,939.55 was the actual spend in 2024, and this year's budget request is \$365,192.34). Ms. Frey explained that in 2024, Victor Amoroso, from the Signal Department, cleaned the Lester Stable at night and doubled as a nighttime supervisor. When an outside cleaning vendor was hired by the Village, the full-time staff in the Recreation Department had to assume these responsibilities (supervising the Lester Stable outside of operating hours). Ms. Frey mentioned that the Ridgewood Lacrosse Association and Ridgewood Baseball and Softball Association hold meetings at the Stable. She calculated the hours spent by employees supervising the building during nights and weekends, and arrived at the figure of \$4,250.00. Ms. Frey said that she calculated the amount of \$2,268.30 for employees working special events, such as Earth Day, the Street Fair, and Downtown for the Holidays. The amount of \$2,200 was calculated for staff that attend Village committee meetings (Fields, Open Space, Kasschau Shell, and Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board) and take minutes.

Councilmember Winograd noted that prices for the Summer Day Camp were increased in 2024, and she asked where that revenue is shown on the spreadsheets. Ms. Frey replied that revenue from Summer Day Camp registrations first goes into an account and is then transferred to the Recreation Trust. Expenses for buses, field trips and T-shirts are paid out of this trust. Operational expenses (materials and supplies) are paid out of Account 030.

Councilmember Winograd asked if consideration has ever been given to moving some of the meetings held at Lester Stable to Village Hall, since Village Hall is open at night anyway and there are plenty of rooms. In this way, staff overtime would not be incurred. Ms. Bigos said that she will consider this suggestion going forward. Councilmember Winograd added that the Zabriskie-Schedler house is also available for meetings.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked about the figure of \$3,000.00 for rentals shown for Account 014 (Overtime). Mr. Frey replied that staff overtime is incurred whenever a private entity rents the Lester Stable for a birthday party, wedding, or art gallery reception.

Mayor Vagianos asked if the senior programs are budgeted for in the Community Center budget, and Ms. Bigos replied that they are.

3. GRAYDON POOL

Councilmember Mortimer asked Ms. Bigos how she managed to decrease the budget request for salaries and wages (Account 013) for temporary and seasonal help (\$395,612.16 appropriated in 2024, \$391,199.42 spent in 2024, and \$382,885.70 request for 2025). Ms. Frey said that the budget requests for 2024 were based upon the 12 lifeguards they anticipated would be employed as summer help; however, they were fortunate enough to hire 18 lifeguards, enabling each zone at Graydon Pool to be fully operational. When there are fewer lifeguards, some zones at Graydon Pool need to be closed. Ms. Frey said that the request for salaries and wages this year are based upon 18 lifeguards being employed, with a 94-day operational season. Ms. Frey said that she calculated the days when all eight zones need to be open, such as during summer camps and swim team meets (last week of June, entire month of July, and first week of August). Otherwise, only six lifeguard stands need to be open. On weekdays during the month of June, only two to four stands need to be open during school hours. All of these calculations allowed Ms. Frey to arrive at a realistic budget request for salaries and wages.

Councilmember Weitz asked how it was possible that there will be more coverage (lifeguards) for 2025 but less of a spend than in 2024 (\$391,199.42). Ms. Frey replied that the salaries and wages for badge and security staff has been reduced, due to the management team being able to streamline operations at Graydon Pool. Instead of placing staff at each entrance to Graydon Pool, they will now employ a walking security guard who will check the grounds and entrances. Mr. Kazmark indicated that this line item is being reduced by \$20,000.00 for 2025. Councilmember Weitz asked Ms. Bigos if she has any concerns with the proposed budget compromising safety at Graydon Pool, and Ms. Frey replied that she is satisfied that there are enough funds requested to provide residents with adequate safety measures. If there were not enough lifeguards to ensure safety, Ms. Frey said that they would just close out the zones where there was no coverage.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked about the budget request for maintenance in 2025 of \$15,120.00 (Account 024), indicating that the amount of \$27,072.00 was appropriated in 2024. She asked how they were able to reduce this figure by approximately \$12,000.00. Ms. Frey replied that this was accomplished by hiring more people and “splitting the day better.” In past years, there were two full-time employees performing maintenance eight hours per day. In 2024, they had six young men who worked part time, with staggered hours, cleaning bathrooms, grooming the sand, and performing other duties.

Mayor Vagianos praised Ms. Bigos and Ms. Frey for creatively adjusting their staffing levels to save money, while not compromising safety. He said that this was remarkable, considering the fact that hourly wages were increased last year for lifeguards, since there was a nationwide shortage. Councilmember Winograd said that working at Graydon Pool presents a great opportunity for young adults in the Village.

Councilmember Winograd asked how much revenue was generated at Graydon Pool in 2024, and Mr. Rooney replied that \$371,000.00 was generated in 2024.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked about printing and binding (Account 023). She said that there were coupon books in 2024. Ms. Frey said that they will no longer have coupon books in 2025, but rather everything will be done electronically via Community Pass. The coupons that are not used in one year will roll over for the following year. The badge personnel will be able to redeem all guest passes online, from a badge holder's account.

Deputy Mayor Perron also asked about Account 029, Other Contractual Services, which has Goosetown Radio Rental listed on the detailed spreadsheet. She noted that this expense increased by 30%. Ms. Frey said that they have been working with hand-me-down radios given to them by other Village departments (Fire and Office of Emergency Management). These radios do not always work and have static. Goosetown Radio was recommended by Jeremy Kleiman, Director of the Office of Emergency Management, and Goosetown Radio was able to deliver smaller radios to use at Graydon Pool. These radios have a great frequency and transmissions are clearer, enabling the staff to make less mistakes. They would like to utilize these radios year after year at Graydon Pool.

Deputy Mayor Perron then asked about Account 050, Purchase of Other Equipment. She asked what "rescue tubes" are. Ms. Frey replied that rescue tubes are long, red rectangular lifeguard tubes that are lifesaving flotation devices.

4. COMMUNITY CENTER

Ms. Bigos stated that there is a request in the 2025 budget of \$5,000.00 for overtime for the staff in the Community Center. They are trying to accommodate the needs of all Ridgewood residents, by expanding programs and holding programs at night and on the weekend. During these events, staff must be available to supervise building use, safety and accountability.

Councilmember Weitz noted the increase in salary and wages for the full-time Director, and asked if this was due to a step raise, and Ms. Frey confirmed same. Upon questioning by Deputy Mayor Perron, Ms. Frey confirmed that Deanna Schablik was the only employee at the Community Center.

Referring to the letter distributed to the Village Councilmembers by Mr. Kazmark, written by Renee Watson (President of Highlights in Leisure Time, H.I.L.T.), Mayor Vagianos stated that seniors in Ridgewood contribute heavily to the Village's tax base, yet get very little in return since they pay taxes on things they don't even use, such as school taxes. Mayor Vagianos asked how the Village could increase services and programs for seniors. He noted that Ms. Schablik does a phenomenal job, but she is a "one-woman show." He asked what could be done to

increase senior programming in the Village. He said that other municipalities have more robust senior programming than Ridgewood does. Ms. Bigos said that Ms. Kloak made some suggestions earlier, but Mayor Vagianos was a bit late to this evening's meeting. Ms. Bigos asked Ms. Kloak to repeat her earlier statements.

Liz Kloak, a resident of Ridgewood, reiterated that she serves as Vice President of the Community Center Advisory Board. She is also a member of the Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board. She said that the Community Center acts as a social and cultural resource for Village residents, especially for seniors and middle school-aged children. Ms. Kloak stated that the current staffing model at the Community Center needs to be reassessed to allow for weekend and evening programming and larger community-wide events. Its current form does not provide for any expansion or changing demands, specifically the timing of certain events, such as on the weekends.

Ms. Kloak said that she conducted an informal, non-scientific poll and called seven senior centers in neighboring communities to ascertain their staffing models. She learned that all of these centers have two or more full-time employees, and most average between six and eight part-time employees and/or per diem program assistants. This additional staff keep programs running smoothly. In Ridgewood, there is one person running the events in the Community Center, all the time. Ms. Kloak indicated that the Advisory Board is committed to providing additional resources to expand programs and support healthy social interactions with meals and other enhancements. She stated that the board cannot be expected to fundraise to pay staff members' salaries.

Ms. Kloak asked the Village Councilmembers to consider increasing the monies allocated to the Community Center, so that additional staff members may be hired and programs can be expanded. In addition, she invited the Village Councilmembers to the Community Center's first "Lunch and Learn" program for seniors, which will be held on April 22, 2024. This program is sponsored by the Advisory Board and paid for through fundraising. Ms. Kloak said that it is her hope that these types of senior programs will be sponsored in the future by local entities.

Mayor Vagianos thanked Ms. Kloak for her comments. He said that he recently had lunch with a friend and her mother, a vibrant 84-year-old who is a member of H.I.L.T. and who lives a wonderful, enriched life by attending various senior programming in Ridgewood. He again asked what can be done to enhance senior programming in the Village.

Ms. Bigos said that the first step would be to hire additional staff, even a part-time assistant to help Ms. Schablik expand program offerings. Ms. Schablik works at the Lester Stable for part of the day, answering phones, assisting residents, planning bus trips, and developing programs. On other days, she plans age-friendly workshops and works as an escort on bus trips. Ms. Bigos said that Ms. Schablik has a lot of responsibilities and varied duties. She praised the dedication and loyalty of her staff, and Mayor Vagianos concurred.

Councilmember Mortimer suggested organizing a brainstorming meeting to come up with ideas regarding enhanced senior programming. Mayor Vagianos said that he would like Ms. Bigos and her staff to develop a proposal for increased staffing at the Community Center, to present to the Village Councilmembers at the next budget meeting on February 27, 2025. Ms. Bigos said that she will do so.

Councilmember Winograd asked Ms. Kloak to provide her with a list of the seven community centers she contacted, so that Councilmember Winograd can review what kinds of programs these different municipalities offer, how they budget monies to pay for the programs, and how much seniors have to pay, if anything, to attend programs and events. Councilmember Winograd added that the Ridgewood Library also has a lot of programming and events for seniors. Deputy Mayor Perron said that seniors who use the Senior Bus should be surveyed to ascertain what types of programming and/or events they would like to attend.

5. PROJECT PRIDE

Ms. Bigos stated that there is a new Chair of the Project Pride Committee. The budget request of \$5,000.00 for part-time salaries is for employees who assist at tree planting events, such as Adopt-A-Sapling and Mulch Monday, and take care of watering all of the newly planted trees and potted flowers in the Village. These employees work alongside resident volunteers, to plant flowers in the Central Business District (CBD) and clean up after the plantings have been completed. In addition, there is a request for horticultural supplies and materials (Account 030) in the amount of \$20,000.00. Ms. Bigos said that she would like to purchase new containers for the CBD, since several containers are cracked, broken and old. There is a meeting of the Project Pride Committee next week, and they will review the inventory of the containers in the CBD at that time.

Councilmember Winograd said that she and others have worked very hard to improve the aesthetics in the CBD, in order to make it a vibrant place to shop and dine. She feels that new containers would add to the charm of the CBD, which will help local businesses in the Village to thrive. She stated that some of the present containers are too small for the plants to thrive. In addition, two containers were struck by vehicles in 2024.

Councilmember Weitz stated that all of the suggestions made by Ms. Bigos have merit, but he noted that \$15,000.00 was allocated in 2024 for materials and supplies, out of which only \$12,232.32 was spent, and the request for 2025 is \$20,000.00.

Regarding Capital Budget requests, Ms. Bigos stated that they are focused on improving the infrastructure in the Village's park system. There is a request for 2025 for funds to finish the Graydon Pool fencing along the berm. Currently, there is temporary plastic fencing along the berm that is not adequate enough to provide security at Graydon Pool, since intruders can simply

hop over the fence. Ms. Bigos said that it is important that there is only one entrance/exit to the pool to enhance accountability and ensure that all patrons using the facility have badges. In addition, the bridge in the woods behind Graydon Pool, which was installed in 1999, is starting to deteriorate, even though the timbers have been painted periodically. She would like to be able to replace the decaying timbers on the bridge. In addition, Ms. Bigos said that she would like to replace the awning outside of the Pool Manager's Office.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked what type of fence would be erected along the berm. Ms. Bigos said that she would like to have a steel fence installed, similar to the one that is partially around the perimeter of the pool. She will work alongside the Engineering Department to accomplish same, since the fence has to be erected outside of the floodway. A fence would enable her staff to control entrance to the facility and ensure the safety of young patrons. Deputy Mayor Perron recalled when a child went missing at Graydon Pool, and there were people searching on Maple Field for the child, since there was no fence to prevent the child from wandering away from the pool grounds.

Regarding a sunshade replacement, Deputy Mayor Perron asked Ms. Bigos if she was going to install the sunshade where the big tree was recently taken down, and Ms. Bigos confirmed same. She said that there are currently several shade systems at the pool, and she would like to add an extension to the children's area, to increase the shade there as well. A freestanding 20 foot by 20 foot sunshade would be installed where the ash trees were removed. She said that the emerald ash borer has eaten into all of the cambium (layer between the bark and wood of ash trees).

Deputy Mayor Perron asked what a "Groundsmaster" is. Mr. Andreula explained that the Toro Groundsmaster 5900 is needed to replace the 2012 PK111, a large mower with a 16-foot wingspan on it, which is used to mow all of the athletic fields in the Village. He told Deputy Mayor Perron that this mower is not available in a hybrid/electric model at this time. Dependent upon the weather, the athletic fields are mowed one to two times per week during the spring and summer months. Mr. Andreula stated that the existing mower is "pretty tired" at this point and they have been putting off making a request for a new mower, but he stated that the time has come when a replacement is needed.

Deputy Mayor Perron suggested that Mr. Andreula consider testing out an automatic mower, which would save money for the Village in terms of staffing. She said that EcoQuipUSA sells these autonomous, robotic mowers. She said that the owners of EcoQuipUSA would be happy to make a presentation of their product at a Village Council meeting. Mr. Andreula indicated that he would certainly look into that. He said that he has looked into this technology, as well as automatic field painters. Mr. Andreula said that he has some concerns about the safety of children running around the fields, while this automatic machinery is operating.

Mayor Vagianos said that many residents asked about the trees that were removed at Graydon Pool, in particular the immense tree located by the deep end which provided a lot of shade for patrons. He asked how much shade would be provided with the sunshade replacement the Parks Department is requesting to purchase. Councilmember Winograd said that one can view the base in the ground where they propose to install the sunshade. By viewing the base, Mayor Vagianos could estimate the amount of surface area it would cover. Councilmember Winograd said that the sunshade probably wouldn't provide as much shade as the tree did, but it would provide approximately 40% of the shade that the tree provided. Ms. Frey agreed, stating that the shade "sail" dimensions are 20 feet by 20 feet. It would be similar to the canopy by the swim lane. She indicated that she has some pictures from Graydon Pool that would probably depict the amount of shade that the tree provided, and stated that the sunshade would probably not provide as much shade as was afforded by the tree. She said that the sunshade would not cover the playground area.

When Mayor Vagianos asked about the budget request for the sunshade, Ms. Frey indicated that the figure shown of \$59,000.00 is for the purchase of four sunshades or sails. One would be located where the removed tree once stood, and the others can be attached to the existing sunshade bases on the Linwood Avenue side (shallower end) of the pool, to extend the shade area. Ms. Frey said that only two "add on" shades could be purchased for the Linwood Avenue side, and the third sunshade could be added to the fourth sunshade, on the deep end side, to increase the shade afforded by the fourth sunshade.

Mayor Vagianos said that Councilmember Winograd stated that the sunshade would afford about 40% of the shade afforded by the tree, yet Ms. Frey said that it would afford almost as much shade, which Mayor Vagianos said sounded like approximately 80%. Ms. Frey said that the sunshade would afford close to as much shade as the tree provided.

Councilmember Weitz said that he was in favor of the budget request for the Maple Turf Sinking Fund. He asked Ms. Bigos what her top two or three priority items were in their Capital Budget requests. Ms. Bigos said that the most important item would be the fence to provide safety and security at Graydon Pool (\$56,000.00). The second priority would be the playground at Habernickel Park (\$139,000.00), which would replace the existing wooden structure.

Ms. Bigos indicated that they received a Local Government Improvement Grant from the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) for \$68,000.00, so she would like to match this grant with Village funds. The total cost for the playground will be approximately \$192,000.00. Mr. Kazmark indicated that the Village has to take action soon in this regard, since the "clock is ticking" on the Village's eligibility for this grant. Councilmember Winograd indicated that this is an accessibility grant, and several parents have complained to her that there are no handicapped accessible playgrounds in Ridgewood. Councilmember Winograd added that the budget request

of \$160,000.00 for residential tree planting (200 street trees and not saplings) should be appropriated, since there will be no new trees planted otherwise in 2025.

Councilmember Weitz said that the items at the bottom of the “wish list” appear to be the sunshade replacement and the Groundskeeper 5900. Deputy Mayor Perron reiterated that she has received a lot of complaints about the lack of shade at Graydon Pool. Councilmember Weitz stated that even more complaints from residents will be received if there is a 6% or 7% tax increase for 2025.

Mr. Kazmark pointed out that the Capital Budget requests have no impact on the overall tax rate, other than the 5% downpayment on any of the capital purchases that the Village Council approves. He cautioned that they are very close to the \$7.5 million statutory maximum on the Capital Budget. Mr. Kazmark added that the two emergency appropriations made in 2024 for the soil testing and archaeological study at the Schedler property (\$350,000.00) and sewer plant upgrades at the Water Pollution Control Facility (\$478,000.00) will be included in the \$7.5 million Capital Budget for 2025.

Mayor Vagianos clarified that the \$7.5 million is not a statutory maximum, but rather a figure that should be maintained in order to retain the Village’s AAA bond rating. Councilmember Weitz asked what the 2025 Capital Budget requests are at the current time, and Mr. Kazmark said that the initial requests totaled in excess of \$12 million. Mr. Kazmark said that out of this amount, \$4.5 million has already been cut from the requests. Councilmember Weitz asked if the Capital Budget requests made by the Parks and Recreation Department were contained within the \$7.5 million at this time, and Mr. Kazmark replied that most of the capital requests heard this evening are included in the \$7.5 million.

Councilmember Winograd added that a lot of money was spent in 2024 to refurbish some of the fields in Ridgewood (Hawes and Citizens Fields), since their condition had deteriorated, and it would be a shame to not maintain these fields. That is why she feels the purchase of a new mower for the Parks Department would be beneficial. The Capital Budget request for the playground at Habernickel Park is also important, since if the Village does not contribute funds towards this endeavor, it stands the risk of losing the grant money from the DCA. Deputy Mayor Perron added that invasive species of trees in several Ridgewood parks need attention and maintenance. Mayor Vagianos said how much he appreciated Councilmember Weitz’s clear-eyed, yet realistic and sometimes painful view, of what the Village can afford. Deputy Mayor Perron said that the diversion will most likely be fulfilled by the end of 2025, which will enable the Village to apply for more grants.

At this point, a break was taken, from 6:48 p.m. to 7:15 p.m. Following the break, roll call was taken by Ms. Mailander and all Village Councilmembers were present.

6. POLICE DEPARTMENT

Police Chief Forest Lyons began by stating that total call volume has increased in the Police Department by 10.3%, from 23,252 calls in 2023 to 25,620 calls in 2024, an increase of 2,368 calls. Chief Lyons said that these calls are of a more serious nature, and not as simple as business checks. He anticipates that this trend will continue in 2025.

Councilmember Weitz asked why there has been such an uptick in calls. Chief Lyons said that the Police Department has been dealing with repeat offenders constantly, since these offenders are usually released within 24 hours, as a result of governmental policy changes enacted by the State of New Jersey. In the past, offenders were incarcerated for a period of time, but currently, it is mandated that they be released sooner. There has been an uptick in arrests, mostly of recidivistic offenders.

In addition, Chief Lyons stated people have been returning to their normal schedules since the Covid pandemic. He has noticed that interactions between people have become more abrasive and less tolerant. He said that the Police Department is investigating a lot more automobile accidents than ever before, and it appears that drivers are paying less attention to the road than previously, particularly as a result of advances in technology.

Chief Lyons said that he has witnessed a seismic shift in policing requirements recently, including reporting, licensing, training, and changes in technology. He said that costs have risen dramatically concerning technology, supplies, materials, and equipment, along with yearly increases for contractual services. Chief Lyons said that there has been a paradigm shift in the Police Department, where every facet of policing is either regulated or mandated. This increases the cost of budgetary items for the Police Department. In addition, policemen are taken off their regular duties to comply with mandated training, which places a heavier burden on other police officers. He said that his budget requests are not frivolous, but merely an attempt to keep up with the current trends, which he described as challenging.

Chief Lyons said that there is currently a separate computer system that does the licensing, which comprises approximately 25% to 30% of his time. Since 2024, every police officer in the State of New Jersey has to be licensed through the Police Training Commission (PTC). New standards have been issued, requiring background checks on each police officer, even though such background checks were performed when they were first hired. Chief Lyons stated that these background checks are very labor intensive and expensive. Detectives have to be taken off pending cases in order to investigate the Village's police officers. In addition to background checks, social media checks have to be performed and each officer's training has to be verified. In 2025, new types of training have been mandated, and more training will be mandated in 2026. While Chief Lyons fully supports training for the police force, having police officers undergo training means that they are "off the road" and not performing their usual responsibilities. He

said that the Police Department does not have enough staff to maintain patrol functions and train officers at the same time. As a result, police officers have to train on their days off, which results in increased overtime. Defensive Tactics Training entails 16 hours, and Active Shooter Training entails another 16 hours. There are 43 staff members who need to undergo this training. Chief Lyons said that he is short six officers, through no fault of the Village Council. He said it is very difficult to find police officer candidates.

Regarding salaries and wages (Account 011) for full-time employees, Mr. Kazmark stated that the monies allocated in the 2024 Budget for hiring new police officers have not yet been spent, since it has been challenging for Chief Lyons to hire qualified candidates. A lot of the overtime requests for 2025 are due to the training requirements mandated by the Attorney General's Office.

Chief Lyons reviewed some of the accomplishments and projects undertaken by the Police Department in 2024, many of which were undertaken to improve pedestrian safety in the Village. Their motorcycle unit is now fully operational. Chief Lyons said that the public loves to see officers patrolling on motorcycles. A complete audit of the evidence held at the Police Department was performed, which entails thousands of items. Each item has to be audited, tracked, and inserted into the system. In addition, three Special Law Enforcement Officer Class IIIs were deployed to the middle schools and high school, and Chief Lyons is hoping to expand this program. He said that 2024 was the first year that licensing was required for police officers, which he described as a major undertaking.

Chief Lyons said that all of these activities were accomplished, despite being short staffed by six officers. He said that overtime was mitigated as much as possible, mostly by taking officers from the Detective Bureau and Traffic Safety Bureau off of their regular duties and putting them on patrol duties. Chief Lyons indicated that there are three police officer candidates in the academy currently, all of whom should be working for the Village around the middle of March. These candidates will not become full-fledged police officers until approximately October 2025.

Chief Lyons said that the Police Department will be accredited in 2025 by the State of New Jersey. He described the process by which this was accomplished. Mr. Kazmark added that accreditation is important for the Police Department to bring standards up to current levels, by updating rules and regulations. Accreditation helps to lower the Village's insurance premiums with the Joint Insurance Fund, as well as aiding the Police Department in defending any potential litigation.

Chief Lyons then spoke about recruiting, hiring and training new officers. Recruiting efforts have been increased. The Police Department partnered today with Bergen Community College, and several officers were at the college handing out information on Civil Service exams and the Alternate Route Program, to generate interest from the students and spread awareness regarding open positions for police officers and Parking Enforcement Officers. Once a potential candidate has been given a job offer, the candidate attends the Police Academy. After graduation from the

Academy, the candidate must undergo a four-month training program while being shadowed by an existing police officer. Chief Lyons said that he is attempting to hire eight more officers this year, which will take up a substantial amount of time and resources. He said that, thanks to the Village Council, there will be a Police Sergeant who will act as liaison for Ridgewood public schools and the newly appointed Special Law Enforcement Officer Class IIIs. This will enhance security at all schools and create rapport with students.

Councilmember Weitz noted that the Police Department budget requests for 2025 have increased by approximately \$825,000.00 over last year. He assumed that the increases for salaries and wages were due to step raises. Chief Lyons confirmed same, and indicated that the amount requested includes salaries and wages for the eight police officers he hopes to hire for the police force. Councilmember Weitz noted that the request for overtime for 2025 (\$500,000.00) has increased since 2024 (\$333,000.00), as well as the requests for clothing, uniforms, and vehicle leasing. He asked Chief Lyons to elaborate on some of these requests.

Chief Lyons said that one of the major deltas in his budget requests is the \$165,000.00 extra requested for overtime, which will be driven by the State mandates for training and by the fact that the department will be short staffed until approximately March 2026. Chief Lyons said that the budget request for contractual services for 2025 (\$724,779.00, Account 029) has increased since the 2024 appropriation of \$579,915.80, with an actual spend in 2024 of \$564,969.64. Chief Lyons indicated that the contract for the school crossing guards has increased by \$87,000.00. He explained that there are 31 crossing guard posts, which must be staffed 62 times per day for both morning and afternoon shifts. Some posts are only staffed in the morning, and some are only staffed in the afternoon. Even with the Village partnering with an outside vendor for school crossing guards, there has been a problem with hiring and retaining employees. Therefore, the wages had to be increased to provide incentive and retention. The amount requested for school crossing guards includes raises, administrative fees, and mandated health and other benefits. Chief Lyons mentioned that two extra posts were added for safety, on Clinton Avenue near Ridge School and on Doremus Avenue.

Mr. Kazmark mentioned that he conferred with Dr. Mark Schwarz, Superintendent of Schools. Over the summer, they will perform an audit of all crossing guard locations, especially in sparse residential areas, in an effort to determine whether all of the guard posts are warranted. Councilmember Mortimer said that rather than cut out some of the guard posts, the posts should be relocated, especially since Chief Lyons mentioned the uptick in car accidents.

Councilmember Weitz noted that Account 055, Vehicle Leasing, has an increased budget request of \$234,000.00, when compared to an \$85,000.00 appropriation in 2024. Chief Lyons said that there had been a 2025 Capital Budget request of \$320,000.00 to purchase new police vehicles, but this request has been removed from their Capital Budget. That request has been transferred to their Operating Budget requests for equipment for police vehicles. Mr. Kazmark added that

vehicles are being leased now, so lease payments cannot be part of the Capital Budget. Chief Lyons explained to Councilmember Weitz the types of smaller vehicles he would like to get for the Police Department, rather than the larger Tahoes.

Councilmember Mortimer asked Chief Lyons about his plans, if any, to expand the Special Law Enforcement Officer Class IIIs in the schools. Chief Lyons stated that he spoke with the Superintendent of Schools, and this subject will be discussed during the Board of Education (BOE) budget meetings. Chief Lyons said that the BOE reimburses the Police Department for the salaries of the Special Law Enforcement Class III Officers (SLEOs).

Councilmember Weitz said that he completely agrees with expanding these personnel, so that there can be one in every school. He said that he would be advocating for same during the BOE budget meetings. Chief Lyons said that he has received nothing but positive reviews from parents about these SLEOs. Councilmember Winograd asked if Glen School would be included in the schools receiving these officers, and Chief Lyons replied in the affirmative. Councilmember Winograd asked Chief Lyons how many police officers are on the force, and Chief Lyons stated that there are currently 43 active police officers, with three still in the academy. This does not include the three SLEOs. After the three candidates graduate from the academy, the police force will still need three additional staff members to be completely staffed with 49 staff members, since two police officers are leaving by the end of 2025. Councilmember Winograd thanked the Police Department for partnering with the ACCESS Committee and receiving autism training.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked about the employees in the Police Department who are at the top of the “steps” (Step 10 raises) and noted that their salaries are blank for 2025. She asked if these are the employees who are retiring, and Chief Lyons replied in the affirmative. Deputy Mayor Perron then asked what the Honor Guard is. Chief Lyons explained that the Honor Guard attends police-related and other funerals, as well as the Fourth of July Flag Raising Ceremony. At funerals, the Honor Guard performs a “casket watch” and performs other ceremonial duties in order to show respect.

Deputy Mayor Perron then asked about the detailed spreadsheet for Account 029, Other Contractual Services, which mentions a social worker contract for 40 hours per month at a cost of \$18,000.00. She said that this is half of the cost for the social worker, and she asked who was paying the other half. Mr. Rooney replied that the other half is being paid for by the Health Department. Chief Lyons explained how the social worker is utilized by the Police Department to provide long-term relief for people who do not really belong in the criminal justice system. When Deputy Mayor Perron asked if there was a Police Department budget request to pay a social worker last year, Chief Lyons replied that there was a part-time social worker whose wages were completely paid for in 2024 through a grant received by the Health Department.

Deputy Mayor Perron noted that the request for Account 032, Clothing and Uniforms, has almost doubled since 2024, and she asked why it has increased. Chief Lyons said that the figure shown for 2025 (\$74,500.00) represents clothing and uniforms for eight police officers, whereas there were only two police officers last year for whom clothing and uniforms were required (budget appropriation of \$33,400.00). Mr. Kazmark indicated that this is a restorative request.

Deputy Mayor Perron thanked whoever donated the motorcycle to the Police Department, and asked if a resolution approving same had ever been adopted. Councilmember Winograd replied that such a resolution was adopted. Chief Lyons explained that there is one motorcycle that was purchased by the Police Department, and the donated motorcycle that has mechanical problems. A resolution was just adopted by the Village Council to authorize repairs to the second motorcycle. Chief Lyons indicated that the Maryland State Police Motorcycle Course has an 18% pass rate, evidencing how hard the course is. The motorcycle that was donated will be utilized as a training bike for police officers, to prepare them adequately for the motorcycle course, so that they don't have to take the course repeatedly.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked about Account 055, Vehicle Leasing. She noted that there were two pickups indicated on the detailed spreadsheet, with a notation that these items were income generating. Chief Lyons explained that these two pickups are rented from United Rental and are utilized for extra-duty details, such as when road work is being done by Public Service Electric & Gas (PSE&G) or Verizon. These companies pay an hourly fee when these pickups are utilized, and this creates a lot of revenue, which more than offsets the rental costs of the pickups. The pickups carry traffic cones, caution tape, and other safety apparatus, and are used for four to five months per year.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked about the budget request of \$125,000.00 for vehicle maintenance, noting that there was no appropriation for this item in 2024. Chief Lyons indicated that this line item used to be in the Fleet Division budget, and it was moved over to the Police Department budget. It is not a new expense, but was merely transferred from one budget to the other. Chief Lyons explained that while on the road, some police vehicles get damaged, and these funds will be used to restore the body work and perform mechanical repairs, so that the police vehicles look professional and operate effectively. Mr. Kazmark indicated that since some police vehicles are leased, any vehicle damage or mechanical issues must be repaired by the Village. Mr. Rooney added that there is a maintenance package for each leased vehicle, which includes oil changes. Mr. Kazmark indicated that any costs for damage done to police vehicles, through no fault of the Village employee, are recuperated through the at-fault driver's insurance.

Councilmember Winograd asked if outfitting the police vehicles damages the vehicles. Chief Lyons replied that any outfitting done to police vehicles causes negligible depreciation of the vehicles. He explained that if the hood of a police vehicle is damaged, for instance, the body work would cost the Village approximately \$1,500.00. However, if the vehicle is returned with

the existing damage, the depreciation on the vehicle would be approximately \$3,500.00 to \$4,000.00. Chief Lyons said that it behooves the Village to fix the damage before the car is returned to Enterprise, so that the Village can receive a discount on the next rental, without any depreciation taken off the value of the returned vehicle. He said that while outfitting a police vehicle does cause minor damage, Enterprise has been very reasonable in overlooking this minor damage.

Mayor Vagianos asked how a hood could be repaired for only \$1,500.00, and Chief Lyons replied that the damage he was referring to was done during a hailstorm. Mayor Vagianos asked what the staffing levels in the Police Department will be after the two retirements and the hiring of new police officers. Chief Lyons replied that he is striving to have a police force of 49, and the current requested funding would bring the headcount to 47. When questioned by Mayor Vagianos, Chief Lyons said that he believed that Ridgewood has the largest public school district in Bergen County, even larger than Hackensack (without counting magnet or charter schools).

Mayor Vagianos recalled Chief Lyons mentioning that he would like to downsize the police fleet to smaller SUVs. He asked if it would be feasible to downsize to a few sedan-type vehicles, for economic and environmental reasons. Chief Lyons stated that they are expecting the delivery of the first hybrid vehicle purchased by the Police Department either this week or next week. He said that their vehicles are outfitted with a lot of equipment, which may possibly fit into the largest size of sedan available, like a Cadillac, which would not generate any gas savings. Chief Lyons said that fully electric vehicles have not worked successfully in the past, but he is excited to try out the new hybrid. They have rented a hybrid car in the past and it worked very well. He is concerned about getting good mileage, so if the newly purchased hybrid vehicle works out successfully, he will look into purchasing more Ford Explorer hybrid vehicles. He said that the Police Department really cannot use anything smaller than a Ford Explorer, since a cage has to be installed in the back, for transporting prisoners, and there has to be enough room for all of the Police Officer's equipment.

Mayor Vagianos asked how much a Ford Explorer hybrid vehicle costs as opposed to a regular Explorer gas vehicle. Chief Lyons replied that the hybrids are a little more expensive when purchased, about \$3,500.00 to \$4,500.00 more, without being cost prohibitive. He mentioned how difficult it is to actually get hybrid vehicles at the current time. Mayor Vagianos asked how many cars are in the Police Department fleet, and Chief Lyons replied that there are currently 22 cars. Their patrol-ready cars are used almost 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Their administrative cars are used all week, including weekend days. There are also some cars which are nearing their effective lifespan, but they are used for extra-duty road jobs and patrol overtime.

Councilmember Mortimer asked about Account 041, Conferences and Meetings, noting the \$4,000.00 request for attending the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) conference. Councilmember Mortimer asked if Chief Lyons has considered attending

conferences held by the Police Executive Research Foundation (PERF). Chief Lyons said that he always strives to obtain as much knowledge as possible, and he wouldn't mind attending a PERF meeting. He said that this will be the first year he has ever attended an IACP conference. Chief Lyons was told by other Chiefs of Police that not attending the IACP conferences will put him at a disadvantage, since such a wide breadth of knowledge is disseminated at these gatherings. Chief Lyons said that he attended an FBI National Academy briefing and seminar to gain more knowledge. Councilmember Mortimer said that he would fully support Chief Lyons and his staff attending a PERF conference, since the better trained that officers are, the better they can serve residents. Chief Lyons spoke about the paradigm shift recently in policing methods, techniques, and regulations, which results in increased overtime and increased pressure for police officers.

Councilmember Mortimer asked if speed signs and radar are included in the Police Department budget. Chief Lyons said that there are some unused capital funds from past years, and these funds will be used to purchase same. Mr. Kazmark said that funds for pedestrian crossing signs are built into the Capital Budget for the Signal Division. Councilmember Mortimer said that the purchase of more speed signs will help to enhance pedestrian safety.

Mr. Kazmark noted that the Police Department Capital Budget requests were far more extensive when they first started the budget process, but the only capital request for 2025 is the amount of \$144,000.00 for vehicle outfitting. Mr. Kazmark indicated that some unused capital funds will be used to fulfill other capital needs. The budget request of \$144,000.00 will be used to outfit the leased cars with police equipment, lights, radios, and other gear. Mayor Vagianos remarked that the needs of the Police Department are usually expensive and take up a large part of the Village Budget every year. He said that he appreciated the fact that the Police Department Capital Budget requests for 2025 are small, so that other Village departments can be appropriated more capital money for their needs.

Mr. Kazmark indicated that there are ongoing discussions with two vendors regarding communication upgrades, in conjunction with the Glen Rock Police Department. He said that it will cost a significant amount to upgrade the communication system infrastructure, but discussions are still in the early stages and he does not expect to have a final determination on the vendor until the later part of 2025 or early part of 2026.

7. PARKING UTILITY

Mr. Rooney began his review of the Parking Utility budget by praising Ms. Andreula for her assistance and expertise while developing the budget. Mr. Rooney said that he would like to have at least one full-time employee and two part-time employees (Parking Enforcement Officers) in the Parking Utility. He lost one full-time employee in 2024, and there is a budget request for 2025 to hire one full-time employee. Mr. Rooney said that projected costs for 2025 have

decreased by approximately 2%, when compared to 2024 expenses. He stated that Account 029-030, Other Expenses, has increased by 24%. This increase is due to the anticipated contract with Walker Consultants in 2025, an engineering construction/planning firm which will assist the Village with signage, placement of kiosks, flow of traffic in and out of the Hudson Street Parking Garage, and improvement of logistics in the parking garage. A budget request of \$50,000.00 has been made for this line item. The increase is also due to a request for security at the Hudson Street Parking Garage in the amount of \$57,200.00. An outside service (unarmed former police officers who are licensed) provides security for certain hours during the day to prevent children from riding their bicycles in the garage and to monitor the area. Using an outside vendor for this service costs considerably less than if a police officer performed these duties.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked about the special emergencies that led to the budget request of \$142,336.00 (Account 098). Mr. Rooney explained that during the Covid pandemic, there were special emergencies in the General Fund and the Parking Utility Fund for revenue shortfalls that were anticipated. The State of New Jersey allowed the Village to pass a special emergency appropriation which is funded over five years, to put into the budget to help the Village get through that loss of revenue. There are two years left on this. Mr. Kazmark said that this special emergency appropriation basically filled the deficit from lack of revenue in the Parking Utility during Covid, when most employees were working from home and not commuting to work.

Mr. Rooney said that another increase is for the Capital Improvement Fund (\$55,000.00, Account 502-550). This represents a 5% downpayment to Walker Consultants, related to the capital request to replace the kiosks in the CBD.

Councilmember Winograd asked if there has been any progress made reporting the outages with the kiosks. Mr. Rooney said that it was his understanding that there is a phone number on every kiosk which a patron can call to report that a kiosk is not working. This number is tied to Northwest Bergen Central Dispatch, who then get in touch with the staff in the Signal Division to investigate the malfunctioning kiosk. Deputy Mayor Perron said that she was using a kiosk in the CBD that did not have a phone number on it, and Councilmember Winograd concurred. Mr. Rooney asked Deputy Mayor Perron and Councilmember Winograd to report to him any kiosk which does not have a phone number on it. Mr. Kazmark said that he would ask the Parking Enforcement Officer (PEO) to take an inventory of each kiosk in the CBD to determine if a phone number is on each one.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked what the expiration date of the contract is with the kiosk company. Mr. Rooney replied that all of the kiosks have been paid for by the Village, and now the Village just pays for maintenance of the kiosks, so that the system can process credit card transactions. Mr. Kazmark said that he has had discussions with Walker Consultants about determining whether or not the kiosks are placed in the appropriate locations. This needs to be determined

before the existing kiosks are upgraded. He will be exploring new technology relative to kiosks with Walker Consultants, such as kiosks having ATM-like features rather than push buttons.

Councilmember Mortimer remarked that a lot of seniors have issues with the kiosks. Mr. Kazmark said that this is one of the reasons why he would like to employ kiosks with the newest technology. Mr. Rooney said that the anticipated costs of these new kiosks is approximately \$1 million, if every kiosk in the CBD were replaced. There are 99 kiosks currently in the CBD, which replaced approximately 1,900 parking meters. When Mayor Vagianos asked if 99 kiosks were actually needed, Mr. Kazmark said that he will be discussing with Walker Consultants whether so many kiosks are needed, where they should be strategically placed, and what new technology could be utilized. At this time, the Village Councilmembers just need to consider whether or not to approve the 5% downpayment to Walker Consultants, who will assist in determining the best placement for the kiosks, the number of kiosks needed, and what technology should be utilized.

When questioned by Councilmember Winograd, Mr. Rooney replied that the current kiosk vendor only provides their own kiosk. Mr. Rooney has inquired whether there were any upgrades or software changes available for the kiosks, and he was told by the vendor that there were none. Following this response, Mr. Rooney reached out to approximately 12 other vendors, all of which provide different types of kiosks. Costs ranged from \$500.00 to \$7,000.00 per kiosk. He said that some of the kiosks had a lot of bells and whistles, and the internal workings of the kiosks determine how much they will cost. Mr. Rooney said that Walker Consultants can provide guidance as to which vendor has the best deal.

There was a discussion about how Walker Consultants was used as a vendor previously by the Village, and how they have always been very knowledgeable. Upon questioning by Mayor Vagianos, Mr. Kazmark confirmed that the cost for replacement of the kiosks would not have any effect on the \$7.5 million Capital Budget. Mr. Kazmark said that the kiosks would be paid off through a bond that would come from Parking Utility revenue.

8. TRUST/ACCUMULATED LEAVE

Mr. Rooney indicated that he furnished the Village Councilmembers with Trust Account activity during 2025. Items affecting the Operating Budget would be the Recycling Trust Reserve, Recreation Trust, Reserve for Open Space, Reserve for Terminal Leave, Terminal Leave Water, and Reserve for Snow Removal. These are the large items that flow through the budget that have been used in the past to balance the budget. Mr. Rooney explained that regarding the Recreation Trust, money generated from programming fees goes into the trust and is used to offset the cost of the programs. Similarly, money generated from the sale of recyclables goes into the Recycling Trust. Mr. Rooney indicated that these reserves have either built up over time or are starting to diminish. The Snow Trust balance was increasing, but then diminished during the first six weeks

of 2025, due to multiple snowstorms. This will have an impact on how much Mr. Rooney can utilize to offset any snow removal costs that are budgeted for in the Operating Budget.

Regarding the Open Space Trust, Deputy Mayor Perron indicated that up until 2024, the funds were used almost exclusively for debt service. This was confirmed by Mr. Rooney. She asked how much money is “freed up” after paying off the Habernickel Park debt. Mr. Rooney said that he would look that information up and let her know. Deputy Mayor Perron said that any available funds in the Open Space Trust could be used to approve some of the requests in the Parks and Recreation Department Budget. A discussion ensued about how the Open Space Trust fund should be dealt with in the future, i.e., whether to let the funds accrue for future property purchases by the Village or use it for other projects. Mr. Kazmark mentioned that, for example, monies could be allocated out of the Open Space Trust Fund to deal with the fact that Twinney Pond is being overtaken by invasive tree species.

Councilmember Winograd mentioned that the funds in the Open Space Trust fund cannot be used for just anything, such as buying a new garbage truck. The use of the money is limited in scope. Councilmember Winograd explained that the Village’s Open Space Trust fund is funded through the Village’s open space tax. As the money in the Open Space Trust fund accrues, it allows the Village to be nimble if a property, which is on the open space wish list, comes up for sale, in that the money to purchase the property will be readily available. She asked Mr. Rooney if he could supply her with a copy of the bond for the Schedler property, the bond for Habernickel Park, and the bond for the Bozzo property on North Monroe Street, and how much still has to be paid on the bonds.

9. STAFF LEVELS

Mr. Rooney said that he performed an evaluation of staffing levels, by department, for full-time employees for 2024 and anticipated staffing levels in 2025. Councilmember Weitz asked if staffing levels will increase or decrease for 2025. Mr. Kazmark pointed out the totals on the spreadsheets prepared by Mr. Rooney. In 2024, there were a total of 310 employees, 286 full time and 24 part time. In 2025, it is anticipated that there will be a total of 324 employees, 298 full time and 26 part time. These numbers are based upon the budget requests which have been made by various departments, and the numbers are subject to change.

Councilmember Weitz noted that staffing levels would be increased by 12 full-time and 2 part-time employees. He recalled additional hire requests from the Police Department (3) and Parks and Recreation Department (3). He asked about the other additional employees. Mr. Kazmark replied that the Fire Department asked to hire two new firefighters. Mr. Kazmark said that Fire Chief John Judge is facing some employee retirements, and he is trying to “get ahead of the curve” by hiring new firefighters now, since they must first undergo a year of training before they can become employed as full-fledged firefighters. Mr. Kazmark said that the spreadsheets

show two new positions in Ridgewood Water, one for an Environmental Engineer Trainee and one for a Building Manager/Public Works Inspector. The new positions were necessitated by the work being done by Ridgewood Water for mandated lead service line replacements. Another job position is available in the Water Pollution Control Facility. There is also a request for a part-time Registered Environmental Health Specialist (Health Inspector) for the Health Department. There is a new position in the Recycling Department for a Laborer. An administrative position (Keyboarding Clerk I) in the Building Department has also been requested.

Councilmember Weitz expressed his concerns about paying for all of these salaries and wages in 2025, plus benefits. He urged the Village Councilmembers to be judicious when arriving at decisions for new employees. Councilmember Winograd stated that no one wants the budget or taxes to increase, but residents are always clamoring for services in the Village. She said that less employees translates to a cut in services. Councilmember Weitz said that he never wants to be in a situation again where Village employees may be furloughed. A discussion ensued between Councilmember Winograd and Councilmember Weitz about which new hires would be essential, such as new hires for the Police Department.

Mr. Kazmark said that out of the 12 new full-time positions, two of them have already been hired in the Fire Department, to replace retirees. Three new hires are Laborers for the Parks and Recreation Department, one is for the Water Pollution Control Facility, one is a part-time Health Inspector, one is the Laborer for the Recycling Division, one is the Keyboarding Clerk 1 in the Building Department, one is a part-time Tree Enforcement Officer for Shade Tree, and the other two new hires are for Ridgewood Water. There may be an additional request next week for a new employee at the Community Center. Mr. Kazmark indicated that he would like to know at this point which new hires the Village Councilmembers would support and which are “non-starters,” before he develops his final spending plan.

Mayor Vagianos stated that the new hires for the Police Department and Fire Department are a given, since they will enhance safety. He stated that he supports the hiring of a new employee for the Building Department, since there have been nine separate incidents of people, since the beginning of 2025, contacting him to complain about not receiving their permits in a timely manner. Mayor Vagianos said that he supported the new hires for the Parks and Recreation Department, since the Village has invested a lot of money recently to refurbish some of the athletic fields in Ridgewood and they must be constantly maintained. Mayor Vagianos said that he could not personally comment about the new hires for the Water Pollution Control Facility, Recycling Division, or Health Department.

Mr. Kazmark stated that the new hire for the Health Department is essential, since health inspections are required to be performed frequently, particularly during Village events such as the Ridgewood Street Fair. Deputy Mayor Perron suggested that perhaps the Village should start charging the groups sponsoring the events.

Councilmember Weitz asked if some of the proposed full-time positions could be changed to part-time positions, such as the new hires for the Parks and Recreation Department, since the athletic fields do not need much maintenance during the winter months. He suggested that perhaps there was a way to streamline operations in certain departments, such as cross-training, so that employees could be used more efficiently. Councilmember Weitz said that the staffing levels in Ridgewood cannot keep growing, if the population of Ridgewood remains static.

Councilmember Mortimer said that the staff levels are not really growing, but rather there is a movement to replace staff members who will be retiring in the foreseeable future. He stated that some Department Directors are finding it difficult to find suitable candidates to hire. Councilmember Mortimer pointed out that overtime costs are increasing because various departments are short staffed and people have to be pulled off of their regular duties to perform other responsibilities within the department.

Councilmember Winograd said that she was in favor of exploring changing the full-time positions to part-time positions. However, she stated that there is a trend among new hires to obtain valuable training in the Village and then move to other municipalities who offer them full-time positions with benefits. Regarding the expansion of staff in the Community Center, Councilmember Winograd felt that appropriate grants should be explored with Millennium Strategies, to offset the cost of hiring an additional employee for the Community Center. Councilmember Winograd said that the request to hire more personnel for the Parks and Recreation Department is restorative, since that department got “hit hard” during the Covid pandemic.

Mayor Vagianos stated that the community of Ridgewood residents values the services that are provided by the Village. He said that residents would not be happy if rear yard garbage pickup were taken away, and they would not be happy with a large tax increase, either. He stated that the deciding factor for hiring new employees will be the final cost of all of the other budget requests that are approved by the Village Council. Mr. Kazmark reiterated that the budget documents are “living, breathing documents” that are subject to change at any moment. He thanked the Village Councilmembers for their feedback regarding their opinions about new hires. Mayor Vagianos said that he does not believe any of the requested hires is a “non-starter.”

Councilmember Weitz said that he is not against hiring new personnel, but he feels that the requests made by Christopher Rutishauser, Village Engineer, were not as well thought out as the other departments. He said that he was concerned about hiring all of these new employees, since the Village will be paying their salaries and wages for a very long time. He said that he wants to avoid layoffs and furloughs of Village employees in the future, and is concerned that the hiring of these new employees is not sustainable.

Deputy Mayor Perron reiterated her suggestion about using an automated mower to take care of the athletic fields in Ridgewood. Regarding the Recycling Division, she said that it makes no sense to have Mr. Hamlin, Supervisor of the Recycling Division, driving a garbage truck when the department is short staffed. She brought up the fact that this could lead to qualified employees and supervisors moving to other municipalities, where they are offered positions and responsibilities more suitable to their capabilities. Mr. Kazmark agreed that a Department Director or Supervisor should not be driving a garbage truck, and such employees could become disillusioned and get a job with another municipality. He said that most Department Directors/Supervisors “roll up their sleeves” and do whatever is necessary to get the job done, but in the end, new personnel in the appropriate job classifications need to be hired to alleviate staff shortages in various departments.

Deputy Mayor Perron asked if per diem workers could be hired, rather than full- or part-time workers. Mr. Kazmark agreed that there have been significant changes in employment since the Covid pandemic, and acknowledged the difficulty faced by some departments in hiring the standard of employee to which the Village has become accustomed. More challenges arise when trying to hire a part-time employee or to hire an employee on a per diem basis. He stated that inconsistency leads to a lack of motivation and commitment.

Councilmember Weitz asked Ms. Mailander to let him know, before the next Village Council meeting, what the employee headcount in the Village was five or ten years ago. Ms. Mailander said that she would do so. Mayor Vagianos asked how many new employees were requested for the Police Department and Fire Department, and Mr. Kazmark replied that there were two new firefighters (replacements for employees out on disability, retiring, or deployed in the military). Councilmember Winograd pointed out how crucial it is to hire a new inspector for the Health Department, who needs to inspect food vendors for various events in the Village and then to ensure that there is no garbage left to attract vermin, after the events are held.

B. WRAP-UP AND NEXT STEPS

Mr. Kazmark stated that the next budget meeting will take place on February 27, 2025. At that time, the complete Capital Budget will be reviewed by the Village Council, as well as revenues and the proposed tax levy. The tentative date for introduction of the final budget will take place on March 12, 2025.

4. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no comments from the public.

5. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Village Council, on a motion by Councilmember Mortimer, seconded by Deputy Mayor Perron, and carried unanimously by voice vote, the Village Council's Special Public Budget Meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Paul Vagianos
Mayor

Heather A. Mailander
Village Clerk