

Ridgewood Community ACCESS Committee
Meeting Minutes 2/21/25

The ZOOM meeting began at 2:00 p.m.

Present: Robin Ritter, Siobhan Winograd, Ashley Loria, Joanne Stolfo, Jesse Schwartzmann, Deanna Schablik, Jeff Hofmann, Cara Lynn, Jaimie Davis, Surbhi Kapadia, Emily Cathcart, Elena Croy, Karen Sheehy, Jan Phillips, Erica Dunckley, Tracy Zur, County Executive

Item 1: Welcome

Robin welcomed everyone to the meeting. Minutes from the December meeting were approved. Motion by Ashley, seconded by Joanne. Motion carried.

Item 2: Executive Reports

Lisa was not able to attend, but she said she is up to date.

Ashley reports that she is pregnant, due in July. Jeff, who assisted with the Patrice film will fill in for her.

Siobhan: She expressed that, because we have several changes happening on the committee with Ashley going on leave and Robin retiring, she has been working behind the scenes to ask Jaimie to be the new Chair and Jesse the Vice-Chair and both have agreed. She is thrilled that they both said yes.

Item 3: Bergen County Commissioner, Tracy Zur joined the meeting. Robin introduced her by saying that she has been a tireless advocate for our community. We're very lucky to have her. Tracy thanked us for inviting her. She said that Ridgewood has always been at the forefront of the special needs community, offering fashion shows, library programs and rec sports. Engaging the business community as well. She was impressed with how many people attended our meeting. She wanted to sit in on our meeting, as she does in many communities to see what we're planning for now and in the future. We can learn from collaborating and learning from each other. She wants to be a resource for us. She discussed the different accessible playgrounds in the county. She mentioned Fair Lawn, Rutherford, Norwood, a new bid for one in Riverside Park on the No. Arlington/Lyndhurst border, beginning phases in Saddle Brook, a park that floods frequently. She discussed the Master Plan of the parks. They reached out to 32 communities. In south Bergen there is not as much open space as in northern Bergen. Robin asked if there had been any discussion about our Duck Pond park, specifically the swings that were vandalized. Tracy said that the new swings were supposed to have been installed on Dec. 12.

Cara asked if the design had been changed so that the belts couldn't be cut off. Tracy wasn't sure.

Siobhan said that Tracy has been very helpful about the swing issue. Our Village Council is committed to funding \$139,000 to complete the phase at Habernickel, which will have ADA inclusion in it. We don't yet have a special needs playground in Ridgewood. Tracy mentioned that we should take a look at Fair Lawn's and Rutherford's Access for All playgrounds. Norwood's should be open by now too.

It would be good for us to network with the people who spearheaded those projects. The one in Rutherford was built with no taxpayer money, only donations. Fair Lawn also had corporate and foundation partnerships. Norwood received an open space grant.

We also have a \$65,000 grant.

Siobhan emphasized that it's important for the families too. She asked if Jaime or Elena had any questions.

Jaime wondered whether the fact that the one playground (Ridge) is on school property will affect the funding. Tracy said that schools qualify for open space dollars. Siobhan mentioned that we're in a park time-out right now due to a past diversion. Hopefully that will end in March. Tracy said that we're not sure what will come out of Washington, but we should be OK with open space dollars, which are state-based. She encouraged us to speak with Kathy McGowan, a councilwoman in Rutherford for her ideas on funding.

Tracy gave us her email and asked us to email her if we have questions.

Joanne asked her about transportation help for our special population. Riders Choice is a program that Joanne mentioned. Her daughter Diana tried to use it in Allendale but was told that she was outside of the service area. Tracy said that they are working to get more funding in that area as well.

Robin thanked Tracy for attending the meeting and offering her assistance.

Item 4: Report of Village Liaison, Siobhan Winograd

Siobhan reported that the Council is in the process of budgeting now. It is going well.

They have discussed rebranding our slogan "Proud to be Stigma-free" to "Striving to be Stigma-free."

Elena mentioned the proclamation and art exhibit in the Senior Lounge on the 3rd Chromosome on March 21. Last year it was a big event held at Puzo's.

Last year a member of one of the Village committees had a heart attack at a meeting. The CPR that he received from 2 other members saved his life. CPR training for all the committees was discussed.

Item 5: Sensory-Friendly Dinner - Jaimie Davis

Jaimie reviewed the inception of the dinners and how they have progressed. They were last organized last year through SEPAG. Now they are under the aegis of ACCESS. The 1st Responders attend now as well. It is beneficial for both them and the children.

They have a budget for toys from the Village to distribute at the dinners.

Jaimie described the huge success of the tree lighting evening in December.

Non-residents are also coming to the dinners now. The next one is on March 24 at MacMurphy's; April 30 at Raymond's; May at Baumgart's and June is the Touch-a-Truck barbecue at the Fire Dept.

Tracy was very excited about this idea. She said that it could really lead to empowerment for the children.

SEPAG - Jaimie said she has received lots of feedback from Laura's Board of Ed presentation in Dec. As a result, the Board will conduct a survey of parents, teachers and students.

There will be a fund-raising gala on Thurs March 13 at 6:30 at the Park West Loft. Funds raised will be used for scholarships and gifts to student graduates in the STEPPS program for their first year membership.

Item 6. Village Dept. Reports

Health Dept. - Surbhi

Feb. is Heart Health Month. Heart Disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women.

Next Friday, 2/28 there will be a blood drive from 12-6, NJ Blood Services in the youth lounge.

Thanks to Deanna.

Bird Flu - the risk to the general population is low. People are contracting it though - farmers and dairy workers. Avoid direct contact with wild birds. Don't drink raw milk.

Jan. is National Radon Action month. The Health Dept. received free testing kits. They have all been distributed. But they have been awarded a grant for more.

A postcard was sent to all residents about the potential for lead poisoning in the old houses in Ridgewood.

In a joint effort with Parks & Recs, they will be offering Mental Health First Aid training (MHFA). There will be 2 eight-hour courses, the first on April 28 for adults, 8:30-4 at the Communications Center.

They have free NARCAN kits - life-saving medicine that can reverse an opioid overdose. All 1st Responders have it. They want to make it available to all residents.

HILT: Deanna

Deanna needed to leave the meeting so Siobhan reported that the ROID Grant looks positive.

Laura McKenna said that she would like to see more activities for our special young adults.

Siobhan said that, according to Deanna, that is looking very positive.

Item 7. Old Business

Playground: Cara inquired about its progress. She has seen some of the plans. Jesse and Siobhan will go and inspect it. Siobhan reiterated about the \$139,000 and \$65,000 funding from the Village.

Movie: Patrice - Jan. 14

Robin recognized Diana (Joanne Stolfo's daughter) and her partner Matt who were featured in the film. Bergen Community College would like them to come and speak at the college.

Item 8: New Business

The League of Women Voters is having a program on Tues. 3/11 at 7 pm titled, "What are my options after (and during) High School?"

The meeting ended at 3:20. The next meeting will be Friday March 21 @ 2:00 pm via ZOOM.