



# VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD



## Ridgewood Community ACCESS Committee Meeting Minutes 3/21/25

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

Present: Jaimie Davis, Jesse Schwartzmann, Robin Ritter, Ashley Loria, Deanna Schablik, Lisa Gardner, Surbhi Kapadia, Keith Kazmark, Sheila Brogan, Siobhan Winograd, David Rainey, Karen Sheehy, Emily Cathcart, Katie Frey, Cara Lynn Robinson-Deutsch, Laura McKenna, Jeff Hofmann, Erica Dunckley

### ***Item 1: Welcome***

Jaimie welcomed everyone to the meeting. She thanked both Robin and Ines for their hard work over the last many years. She also acknowledged that they are “big shoes to fill.” Minutes from the Feb. meeting were approved. Motion by Ashley, seconded by Surbhi. Motion passed.

### ***Item 2: Executive Board Reports***

Lisa: Still trying to find out if the invoice for the banner has been paid. Siobhan said that it has been paid. That was the only thing she was waiting on.

Erica didn't have anything to report.

Jaimie acknowledged Jesse as the new Vice-Chair of the committee.

Siobhan: she's happy that the Village is recognizing ACCESS on social media. In addition, the money for the playground is there. The sub-committee has been very mobile. If we move forward with the Schedler plan and the diversion, Ridgewood is looking at the potential of three new playgrounds in the next 12 months. Also, she's reached out to the Fire Dept. for a CPR date. ACCESS is attending as well as Shade Tree.

***Item 3: Sensory-friendly dinner: Jaimie:*** The next one is this Monday at MacMurphy's starting at 5:00 until 8:00. We have about 45 people signed up, not including the first responders. We are seeing the same people coming to the dinners, which is great, and some new names as well. It's time to get started on the next flyer. It's April 30th at Raymond's. She'll work with Paul V. to set up May. June is the Touch-a-Truck barbeque at the firehouse.

### ***Item 4: Playground Update - Cara and Katie***

Katie introduced David Rainey of Boyce Associates who designed it. Keith sent out the schematic to everyone. If we have any questions, please ask him.

Siobhan explained to David the strong interest the town has in creating this playground. This is from our committee, the parents, the Board of Ed, and our town's Park Dept. There is even a splinter group of parents dedicated to this happening.

Cara asked a question about the ramp. David explained that the 4 ft ramp will meet with the 4 foot deck and then gradually down to the 2 foot deck and then will shoot off to the right side and down to the one foot deck near where the concrete meets at the base level. There will be steps at the other end as well. They're working with the footprint they have, making it as inclusive as possible. They couldn't include the rubber surfacing because of the exorbitant cost. It's currently



mulch. He explained that there are no actual “inclusive” playground parameters but due to space and cost, they are doing as much as they can to make it as inclusive as possible. Katie brought up the fact that when they started working with David 2 years ago, it was to replace the ADA existing wooden structure that was beginning to show signs of wear. They weren’t looking at inclusivity yet. Going forward when they plan any other playground, the rubber surface would be something that would be considered.

David said that this playground with its fully-ramped system allows for parallel play, which is a huge advantage.

Katie said that if we take out 1-2 toddler swings we can replace them with a special inclusive swing. They needed to raise the money for the swings. No final say yet on the swing set. Still working on the whole structure. David said any child could sit in that seat. Siobhan asked if we would say yes on the swing and we all gave thumbs up.

Jaimie said that it’s important for everyone to see that that swing is there.

David said that they have a communication board that points to different pictures and emotions on the playground and it was agreed that that would be a wonderful addition. David will send a link to Katie on the board that they currently have. He will check to see if they are familiar with a PODD board.

There are 4 tot swings currently. These are also known as bucket swings. Further discussion on swings will happen. Maybe 2 belts, a handicapped and a tot swing.

Siobhan thanked David for being here. Katie mentioned that Boyce Assocs spoke at a conference last month. Continuing education credits are being offered for conferences like this.

The Berdan playground in Fair Lawn is fantastic according to Katie. David said he will send us a list of the playgrounds they have created. The surface is really important, according to Cara.

David agreed. Cara will send out some dates to visit the playgrounds, possibly in April.

#### ***Item 5: Village Dept. Reports***

Surbhi: Ridgewood was recently designated by the NJ Health Quality Institute as a Mayor’s Wellness Campaign Healthy Town 2024. Part of the reason why is the focus on inclusionary programming and a wide and diverse range of health topics that were covered over the past year. She thanked all the committees and depts from town who collaborated on these programs.

March is Nutrition month. The Health Dept. issued a PSA in the Village eNews and on social media. They had 2 programs on nutrition. Nut butter tasting thanks to Deanna and ShopRite. And in collaboration with Valley on understanding food labels. Next Thurs. In the community center.

Last year in April, which is Autism Awareness month, Jaimie gave us some guidance and ideas about programming in the SEPAG community. Danielle and Surbhi made a breakthrough in finding a speaker for that speaker. More details to come.

Stigma-free: topic of mental health in special needs individuals and their families. She’s trying to provide a program around that. Siobhan mentioned that for the whole month of May Stigma-free will issue an e-notice each week on a different, but related topic. ACCESS could be one of those segments. Maybe Surbhi’s program could happen in May and could coincide with this e-notice.



## VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD



HILT: Deanna: for the benefit of our new chairpeople, Deanna gave an overview of the HILT mission and activities. She is planning a trip to the Newark Museum in April and a Planetarium show as well.

NJRPA Conference that she and Katie attended. They also offered an Age-friendly workshop that was a first. She's seen a lot of new things that they are addressing now.

### ***Item 6: Old Business***

Laura: she keeps track of different services in NJ for programs that help individuals with autism and their parents. She is beginning to see cuts in services - trickle down from DOGE and Medicaid. BCC had to axe a program for young adults with intellectual disabilities, doing hydroponic gardening in a shipping container. Rutgers had to cut a program for community living, one that's been around for 30 years. She hosted a panel of the Ridgewood League of Women Voters on alternatives to college for our students for whom college isn't their choice. They had representatives from Bergen County Technical HS, BCC and Lincoln Tech. It was very inspiring. Barb Chilemi, 57 yo mother of a child with special needs passed away from cardiac arrest a few weeks ago. Her heart attack went undetected because her symptoms were different from those of men. Laura suggested to Surbhi that perhaps she could do a program on women's cardiac issues. Surbhi said that last Feb. they held a program on women's heart health and they brought up that topic. Also Laura realized that caretakers need to take care of themselves too.

Laura has a request to increase accessibility for all areas of Ridgewood, including the east side. She brought up the ramp that goes over Rte 17 that is hazardous. Sidewalks are needed near the new bridge going over the Saddle River. And we need buses as well on that side of town. Siobhan suggested that if Laura has a priority project that she wants to done, to send that to her.

Laura spoke about the new center for autism in Ridgewood, the Cope Center for Autism. Jaime is involved in it too. Jenn Cope, a neurologist, and her husband Tim Cope have started this new non-profit. They are going to be doing three things: fast-lining diagnostics for kids who need an autism diagnosis because now there is a 3 year wait list in Bergen County and throughout the country to get an autism diagnosis. They'll be providing support for parents who don't know what the first step is - everything from ADA to college. Eventually they will offer an after-school program for middle and high school students. Computers, art supplies, kitchen, will be offered for neurodivergent kids. Laura set up a FB page. They're working on the website now. They will have a ribbon-cutting ceremony. They're in the basement of the building right now that houses a sleep center but they will be in the rest of the building soon. They figure they'll be able to help everyone from Rockland to Newark. Siobhan said that a tour for the committee would be great. SEPAG update from Jaimie: they had a very successful gala fundraiser last week. They hoped to raise \$5,000. They're at \$7,700! Every year SEPAG awards 3 scholarships to graduating seniors. Last year they started giving awards to students graduating from the STEPSS program. And in recognition for all the things the YMCA is doing for the students, they are gifting the students their 1st year membership to the Y. The Y can be a social hub for them. Because of her new responsibilities with the Cope Center and being Chair of ACCESS, she is stepping down from SEPAG. She will encourage the new chair to attend our meetings.

For our next meeting, the 25th might be the best date, since the 18th is Good Friday.



## VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD



Sheila wanted to commend the library on the work they're doing for people with dementia and their caregivers. In April there will be a movie for this group at the Washington Twp cinema. They're showing Mamma Mia. The lights will be on and it's going to be sensory-friendly. Jaimie suggested that this group may want to attend the sensory-friendly dinners because they're not limited to just kids. Sheila said that would be a topic for discussion with Randy at the library. Robin said she will make that connection. Jaimie encouraged them to speak to her and she can give them some ideas about to plan for the dinners. She said the restaurants have been wonderful. Jaimie said having the 1st responders there was very helpful too, for both sides.

The meeting ended at 3:10.

***The next meeting will be via ZOOM on Friday, April 25th at 2:00 pm.***