

A SPECIAL PUBLIC 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 APRIL 23, 2025 AT 7:30 P.M.

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

Mayor Vagianos called the meeting to order at 9:05 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, Winograd, and Mayor Vagianos. Also present were Keith Kazmark, Village Manager; Heather Mailander, Village Clerk; and Matthew Rogers, Village Attorney.

2. APPLICATION FOR BERGEN COUNTY OPEN SPACE TRUST FUND GRANT – FIELD IMPROVEMENTS AT CITIZENS PARK

A. EXPLANATION OF FIELD IMPROVEMENTS AT CITIZENS PARK

Mr. Kazmark explained that, this year, the Village's application for the Bergen County Open Space Trust Fund grant will be earmarked for field improvements at Citizens Park. He stated that as one of the Village's oldest park properties, the original recreational amenities in Citizens Park date back to the 1960s and are in need of improvement. Improvements will include the installation of new six-foot, vinyl-coated black chain link fencing along Godwin Avenue and North Monroe Street; installation of two covered player benches, with fencing and concrete flooring; refurbishment of the backstop; and two sets of 15-foot spectator bleacher seating.

Mr. Kazmark stated that the new fencing will be installed from each of the corners of the outfield to behind home plate (backstop). The current inner chain link fencing on the third base side of the field will be extended to match the length of the inner chain link fencing on the first base side. The new bleacher seating will comply with current safety standards, with chain link siding on them, to prevent falls. The covered player benches will accommodate both home and visiting teams. Service gates will be installed by the first base side, for Parks Department personnel to use when maintaining the field. There will be entrances to the field on both Godwin Avenue and North Monroe Street.

Mr. Kazmark then reviewed the estimates for this capital project. It is estimated that the new fencing will cost \$47,400.00; the four covered player benches and two spectator bleachers will cost \$90,370.00; installation of the covered player benches, fencing and concrete pad will cost \$100,785.00; and refurbishment of the backstop will cost \$5,000.00. The total cost of these improvements would amount to \$243,555.00. The covered player benches will protect the players from the sun on a hot day and during inclement weather.

Funding in the amount of \$121,775.00 is being requested for this matching grant application. Mr. Kazmark said that the Village will seek some contribution in the 2026 Capital Budget, so that this project can commence next year.

B. PUBLIC HEARING ON GRANT APPLICATION FOR FIELD IMPROVEMENTS AT CITIZENS PARK

Mayor Vagianos opened the Public Hearing on the grant application for field improvements at Citizens Park.

Boyd A. Loving, a resident of Ridgewood, recalled that the font size used in the PowerPoint presentation given by Robert Rooney, Chief Financial Officer, during the budget hearings was going to be the “standard” font size used going forward. Mr. Loving said that he and others could not see anything on the screen, while sitting in the back of the room. He asked that all Village departments be required to use the larger font size for their presentations in the future.

Mr. Loving requested that Mayor Vagianos announce before the start of a Public Hearing that viewers listening at home are allowed to call in to make comments via hybrid access.

Mayor Vagianos thanked Mr. Loving for bringing these matters to the attention of the Village Councilmembers. He confirmed that residents viewing the meeting from home are welcome to call in to make comments during a Public Hearing. Mayor Vagianos also said that he will ensure that all presentations given before the Village Council in the future will have a font size large enough for everyone to read what is on the screen.

Since there were no further public comments, Mayor Vagianos moved that the Public Hearing be closed. Deputy Mayor Perron seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote

AYES: Councilmembers Mortimer, Winograd, Perron, Weitz and Vagianos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

ABSTAIN: None

Councilmember Winograd stated that before a standard font size is established for use in presentations, they need to ensure that is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Mr. Kazmark said that this matter will be discussed at the next Village staff meeting.

3. **APPLICATION FOR BERGEN COUNTY HISTORIC PRESERVATION TRUST FUND GRANT – RESTORATION OF PEDESTRIAN TUNNEL AT TRAIN STATION**

A. **EXPLANATION OF RESTORATION OF PEDESTRIAN TUNNEL AT TRAIN STATION**

Mr. Kazmark explained that this matter pertains to an application by the Village for a Bergen County Historic Preservation Trust Fund grant for restoration of the pedestrian tunnel, at the Ridgewood Train Station. Another grant application will be made to the New Jersey Historic Preservation Trust Fund for funding for the restoration of the pedestrian tunnel, but only the application to the Bergen County Historic Preservation Trust Fund will be discussed this evening.

Mr. Kazmark indicated that the tunnel beneath the historic Ridgewood Train Station is a vital pedestrian passageway, regularly used by commuters, students, families and visitors. However, its current deteriorated state, with poor lighting, peeling paint, structural wear and general disrepair, creates an unwelcoming and unsafe environment for those using the tunnel. Mr. Kazmark also stated that there are drainage issues plaguing the tunnel, which create runoff. The Village is requesting \$599,335.00 in grant funding from the Bergen County Historic Preservation Trust Fund to rehabilitate the pedestrian tunnel. Ms. Mailander clarified that the actual amount is \$541,880.00, and this is the amount that is stated in the resolution to be considered this evening. Mr. Kazmark indicated that the amount of the grant was not updated by the architect who prepared the presentation. Deputy Mayor Perron asked if this was a matching grant, and Mr. Kazmark replied that it was. Mr. Kazmark said that the amount of \$400,000.00 is available to be used towards this project (old capital funds), which will enable the Village to be more “grant worthy” when making application for grant monies.

B. **PUBLIC HEARING ON GRANT APPLICATION FOR RESTORATION OF PEDESTRIAN TUNNEL AT TRAIN STATION**

Mayor Vagianos opened the Public Hearing on the grant application for restoration of the pedestrian tunnel at the Ridgewood Train Station.

Boyd A. Loving, a resident of Ridgewood, asked if this was a matching grant, and Mr. Kazmark confirmed that it was a matching grant. Mr. Loving asked why all of the Village Councilmembers looked toward the Village Manager for an answer to this question, and he asked if the Village Councilmembers actually read their packets before a Village Council meeting. He said that any one of the Village Councilmembers should have been able to answer his question. Matthew Rogers, Village Attorney, said that the Village Councilmembers were simply giving the Village Manager “first dibs” at answering such questions. Councilmember Weitz indicated that he

nodded his head in the affirmative to answer Mr. Loving's question, but he and the other Village Councilmembers do not usually speak while another person is speaking. Deputy Mayor Perron said that she asked if this was a matching grant so that the public knows that it is a matching grant, not because she did not read the packet. Councilmember Winograd added that the Village Councilmembers get their packets delivered at their homes and review same, but there are usually further additions and modifications made to the packet on the night of Village Council meetings, and that is the reason why Mr. Loving would see the Village Councilmembers look to the Village Manager for any answers to questions from the public.

Mr. Loving asked the amount of grant money the Village will be requesting from the New Jersey Historic Preservation Trust Fund. Mr. Kazmark said he does not know the amount offhand, but he will have Ms. Bialkowski in his office furnish Mr. Loving with that information tomorrow. He said that the application to the State does not require a Public Hearing. Mr. Loving said that he has some concerns because, since the matching grant application is requesting the amount of \$541,880.00, this will bring the total amount to be spent to refurbish the pedestrian tunnel at over \$1 million. Mr. Loving said that the Village will probably have to match the grant monies from the State as well. He feels that this is a lot of money to spend just to refurbish the pedestrian tunnel. He mentioned that the stock market has declined 6.73% in 2025 thus far, and some residents are seeing their stock portfolios decline. That is why he is concerned about the huge cost being proposed to refurbish the pedestrian tunnel.

Mr. Loving said that he was aware that a consultant hired by the Village has estimated what the costs to renovate the pedestrian tunnel would be, and the Ridgewood Arts Council has also proposed a plan to install art in the tunnel, at a cost of \$1 million (through fundraising). Mr. Loving asked if it was necessary to spend over \$2 million to renovate the pedestrian tunnel. He again asked if any reimbursement had been received by the Village from the driver of the car that hit the tunnel entryway on the east side of the train station (which damages have not yet been repaired). He said that these insurance proceeds could help to pay for some of the restoration work to the pedestrian tunnel. Mr. Loving added that the driver of another car hit the tunnel entryway on the west side of the train station (this damage has already been repaired). He asked whether any insurance proceeds were collected from the person who hit the entryway on the west side. Mr. Loving asked what restorative work has been recommended by Connolly and Hickey, the historical architect hired by the Village, and what the cost of this work would be.

Councilmember Weitz recalled that he was underwhelmed when Connolly and Hickey made their presentation before the Village Council, regarding their recommendations and cost estimates to improve the pedestrian tunnel. He said that the Village Councilmembers spoke with other consultants about the pedestrian tunnel project, a project that is necessary because the tunnel is a major artery for commuters. Councilmember Weitz also mentioned that whenever renovations are done to an historic structure, there are restrictions on what types of materials can be used to do the renovations, which can drive up expenses.

Councilmember Winograd said that the first thing that will be done to the train station is to repair the damage to the tunnel entryway on the east side of the train station. Mr. Loving asked if the repairs were going to be paid for with insurance money. Councilmember Winograd said she did not know what funds were being used to make the repairs. She said that Ridgewood is unique, since there are historic elements in the Village, as well as an historic district. The Ridgewood Train Station is designated as an historic site within the historic district, and it is really important to preserve this historic site. The repairs to the entryway need to be done as quickly as possible, since there have been many complaints by residents regarding its unsightly appearance.

Mr. Loving said that he understood what Councilmember Winograd was saying, but he again asked if Connolly and Hickey had informed the Village Council how much the renovations to the pedestrian tunnel would cost. Mr. Kazmark pointed out that the Village has changed historical architects within the last few weeks, and the new historical architect is now in the process of reviewing what was previously prepared by Connolly and Hickey, as well as the paperwork that will be submitted to the New Jersey Historic Preservation Trust Fund. This is the reason why Mr. Kazmark does not have an estimate of what the renovations will cost, at this time.

Mr. Loving said that the economy is “not the greatest” at this time, and he is concerned about the Village spending too much money to renovate the pedestrian tunnel. He said that he gets especially nervous when there is talk about investing another \$1 million into the pedestrian tunnel to make it a “destination.” Mr. Loving said that he could not think of any benefit to Village taxpayers by spending so much money on renovating the pedestrian tunnel.

Deputy Mayor Perron said that the deteriorated condition of the pedestrian tunnel has been the topic of numerous discussions at Central Business District Advisory Committee (CBDAC) meetings, and she said that the poor condition of the tunnel is a disincentive for people to want to come to Ridgewood to shop and dine. She said that “spiffing up” the tunnel will benefit local businesses in the Central Business District. Deputy Mayor Perron spoke about the efflorescence on the ceilings and walls, as well as the hydrostatic pressure that water exerts on the pedestrian tunnel walls, and how much engineering and structural work it will take to restore the tunnel. She said that it was not akin to painting a bedroom wall. Deputy Mayor Perron said that no investment has been made to the pedestrian tunnel since 2011.

Rurik Halaby, a resident of Ridgewood, said that this was the most ridiculous discussion he has ever heard. Mr. Halaby said that the tunnel needs a major overhaul, since it is collapsing and leaking. He spoke about the Great Depression and the great Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs which were developed during that time, including many infrastructure projects, in order to stimulate the economy. Mr. Halaby said that it is ludicrous for someone to say that the Village should not invest money in the pedestrian tunnel, due to the state of the economy. He encouraged the Village Councilmembers to continue doing whatever they can do to clean up the pedestrian tunnel and make it structurally safe.

Since there were no further public comments, Mayor Vagianos moved that the Public Hearing be closed. Councilmember Winograd seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote

AYES: Councilmembers Mortimer, Winograd, Perron, Weitz and Vagianos

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

ABSTAIN: None

Addressing Mr. Loving, Mayor Vagianos stated that all of the Village Councilmembers are “aghast” at the cost estimates to renovate the pedestrian tunnel. However, he reminded Mr. Loving that the Village invested \$2.6 million to renovate the historic Zabriskie-Schedler house. He said that renovating an historic structure or home is always much more expensive than renovating a non-historic home or structure. Mayor Vagianos said that the renovation work to the pedestrian tunnel cannot wait, despite the state of the economy, since some of the ceilings are currently being supported by makeshift two-by-four pieces of lumber.

Councilmember Winograd said that the pedestrian tunnel is an important passageway for commuters, students, residents and visitors. Elderly residents of Ridgecrest use the tunnel all of the time to get to the east side of Ridgewood, and students use the tunnel to get to Ridge School.

Councilmember Weitz stated that funds for the art installation at the pedestrian tunnel will be raised privately. He is in favor of the Village investing funds to make the pedestrian tunnel safe. Since trains travel over the tunnel multiple times a day, it is critical that the tunnel be made structurally sound. He thanked Mr. Kazmark for applying for grants from both Bergen County and the State.

Councilmember Mortimer agreed with Councilmember Weitz, stating that the structural soundness of the pedestrian tunnel is of the utmost importance.

Mr. Kazmark confirmed that the art installation at the pedestrian tunnel will be funded through private donations and applicable grants relative to the arts. The Village is not contributing any money towards the art installation.

4. RESOLUTIONS

Ms. Mailander indicated that the following resolutions, numbered 25-217 through 25-224, would be adopted by a Consent Agenda, with one vote by the Village Council, and would be read by title only:

5. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Village Council, on a motion by Councilmember Weitz, seconded by Councilmember Mortimer, and carried unanimously by voice vote, the Village Council's Special Public Meeting was adjourned at 9:27 p.m. and the Public Work Session was reconvened.

Paul Vagianos
Mayor

Heather A. Mailander
Village Clerk