



VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD



Ridgewood Community ACCESS Committee Meeting Minutes 5/16/25

The ZOOM meeting began at 2:00pm.

Attendees: Jaimie Davis, Gregory Alter, Jeffrey Hoffman, Surbhi Kapadia, Jan Philips, Laura McKenna, Robin Ritter, Sheila Brogan, Siobhan Winograd, Ashley Loria, Emily Cathcart, Lisa Gardner

Item 1: Welcome

Minutes from last meeting were approved (motion to approve by Ashley, seconded by Emily).

Item 2: President's Report

Welcome Emily Cathcart as an official member of the Access Committee. Emily grew up in New Jersey and her parents moved to Ridgewood in 2023. She is an attorney with two children; her oldest has autism and is part of the Rise program through the schools. Emily enjoys getting involved in the Ridgewood community and found that Access is right up her alley. We look forward to having Emily join us.

Welcome Gregory Alter, Village intern who will be assisting with Access. Gregory is excited for the opportunity to work with the Ridgewood community.

Hearing grant: Siobhan received a note from a woman about the potential to apply for a hearing grant. Bergen County must apply for the grant on behalf of Ridgewood. Siobhan mentioned the senior center and the building itself having issues with hearing problems including acoustics. Again, we cannot apply for the grant, Bergen County has to apply on our behalf. The grant is worth \$70K. Tracy Zur was contacted and Siobhan mentioned that she believes Bergen County will apply on our behalf and we are hoping to be the recipient to update acoustics and other hearing-related issues in the community. Midland Park has also applied in past years and received some money. Siobhan mentioned that hearing is the invisible disability and it becomes an issue for many people as they age. The Village has received complaints about hearing issues with our older community. Though Bergen County will be applying, Siobhan mentioned using our grant-writing services to make it easier for them.

Item 3: Executive Board Reports

Jesse, Erica, were unavailable for the meeting. No reports from Lisa.

Item 4: Village Council Report

The budget was approved at the Wednesday council meeting, Board of Ed also approved theirs. Tomorrow (Saturday, 5/17) is Town Beautification to beautify main street and plant flowers. Siobhan asked for any volunteers interested in meeting and helping.



Item 5: Sensory-Friendly Dinners

May 27 at Le Pancake Cafe. Flyers and link have been circulated. The hope is to build an email list to notify folks of upcoming dinners. Gregory will assist with this mission to create an email distribution list to notify people of when the dinners are scheduled. The hope is to advertise to folks both in Ridgewood and outside of Ridgewood. The fire department (FMBA) will have a sensory friendly Touch a Truck and barbecue on Saturday, June 14 from 12-2pm (rain date-September 21). Stop & Shop will sponsor as well. They also lined up the Bergen County bomb squad and they will also be there with robot demonstrations. There will be a break for dinner events during the summer to start up again in the fall. Siobhan questioned if the bomb squad will bring the dog, Jaimie was unsure.

Item 6: SEPAG Report

Jaimie will be finishing up her term as SEPAG president on June 10 during their last information meeting. The district hired a new director of special programs named Alicia Pavone, and she started a few weeks ago. There will be an informal meet and greet on Monday informal meet and greet at the education center on the third floor from 3:30-4pm.

Last information meeting will be June 10. Superintendent Schwartz does an annual state of the school survey for parents and students and then has a big presentation, and SEPAG has asked that he give an additional presentation for special education parents which was appreciated last year. That meeting prompted parental input on special education in the district. A recording will also be available for those who are interested.

Meghann Bierly and Dave Rosen will be co-presidents moving forward and will hopefully join in on Access meetings in the future for SEPAG updates.

Laura inquired about receiving highlights about special education updates. Jaimie mentioned Meghann and Dave attending Access meetings to provide those updates. Also suggested subscribing to the weekly e-newsletter. Jaimie also mentioned Sheila attending the meetings and offering updates as well.

State of the Schools address will be on June 2 with Dr. Mark Schwarz. Sheila explained that the parent surveys included questions to identify parents with children with special needs to a new block of questions that will be incorporated in the report.

Sheila mentioned hiring director of special services. On the agenda for Monday they plan to discuss the goals and the process that was followed for Dr. Schwarz to attend to; goals that were established for him for the fall- he will be reporting on that. Sheila also mentioned that they will be hiring a director of school counseling which is a K-12 position. There will be a new principal coming to Ridge school in October-Principal Jasper. Talking to Dr. Schwart and to Dr. Fenwick about having Principal Jasper come for a meet and greet before the end of the school year for children and parents to have the opportunity to meet him. Date TBD. He will be starting July 1.



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Other BOE updates from Sheila: Travell- Laura Carr will be appointed as the principal (she is interim as of right now). New hiring for teachers and a new ESL teacher. New director of special programs, Michelle Fenwick and her team will be looking at what we need to do for improvements and challenges that we have in special education. No budget cuts to staff or programs. New HVAC at Glen School and Ridge. Might get money from the state for new windows for both schools. Siobhan also mentioned Ridge's prominent advocacy for new inclusive playground equipment.

Item 7: Village Department Reports

Deanna was unable to join the meeting and did not have any notes to go over.

Health Department (Surbhi): May is mental health awareness month. The Village has been leading a digital and lawn sign campaign for mental health awareness. Village posts with PSAs about mental health and what it is and what "stigma free" means. Putting out helpful info like numbers to call during mental health crises, how to take care of mental health, etc.

Siobhan (Stigma Free rep) feels the Health Department stepped up in efforts to talk about mental health through the digital campaign. Siobhan mentioned that the Ridgewood Public School system copied the content and gave a shout-out to Stigma Free to increase views. The goal is to change the wording from "striving to be Stigma Free" to "what does it mean to be Stigma Free" and figuring the necessary steps forward. Siobhan mentioned that it's palatable content and proud of the content that the Health Department and communications group have provided to lead to important discussions.

Surbhi gave a lot of credit to Danielle who created a lot of the content that was discussed.

Lawn signs are up at the Village, water, fire, schools, library, and Stable.

Item 8: Old Business

Siobhan- we hit the goal of 100 people to get CPR certified with the Fire Department.

Item 9: New Business

Summer Meetings (Jaimie):

Do we have them? Suspend for the summer? Access typically has 10 meetings, splinter meeting in August to discuss Access Week which is scheduled for October 18-19 (weekend dates).

Jan asked if there will be an interfaith service on that Sunday. Siobhan mentioned speaking with Paul Aronsohn to confirm but there are talks about having a service on Sunday at the library.

Siobhan also confirmed that food only on Saturday.

Jan mentioned Joanne's services are at 7pm, so Siobhan talked about having a service earlier in the day.



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Vote to modify for a summer schedule by skipping a July meeting: Emily made a motion to approve and Robin seconded. Motion passed. Next meeting will be Friday, June 20 at 2pm, and reconvene in August.

Before closing, Siobhan mentioned to Ashley to prepare a Save the Date for Access Week, Jeffrey and Ashley both agreed to work on putting something together to reserve the dates for Access Week.

Meeting concluded at 2:38pm.

The next meeting will be Friday, June 20 at 2:00pm via ZOOM.