

# **GREEN RIDGEWOOD MINUTES**

**September 4, 2025, 7:30-9:30 PM**

## **RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE**

**Attendees:** Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair, Justin Manger – Vice Chair, Joan Hubertus, Peter Jerdee, Jane Rouse, Pam Perron – Village Council liaison, Jill Fasano – Village Staff member, Vicky Van Dyke – Parks & Rec liaison, Saurabh Dani – Board of Education liaison, Anika Mukkatira – Student liaison; Green Team: Geri Atwood, Joe Ferrante, Alina Mordkovich, Manpreet Tyagi; guests: Miles Luo (RHS), Carolyn Jacoby, Jim Bostler – Chair, Open Space Committee, Bob Riccoboni - Paramus Environmental Commission, Rayhan Mahmoud - intern for Pam Perron

### **Administration**

1. Welcome and Attendee Introductions
2. July 10<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes unanimously approved.

### **Updates/Discussion/Strategy**

3. Chair Report, Green Ridgewood highlights (David)
  - Changes in member roles – Beth stepping down as Vice Chair and Green Building and Sustainability (GBS) Subcommittee Chair, will remain GR member with primary focus as liaison to the schools; David will move into GBS chair; Peter will take over David's role as Resource Management and Conservation Subcommittee chair, except that David will continue with responsibilities for Ridgewood Water issues for now; Bill will take over the Secretarial role from Peter; Justin will fill the role of Vice Chair.
  - A new Green Team member has been selected, will be announced and join as soon as the Village Council approves his appointment.
4. Village Council Liaison Report (Pam)
  - PFAS treatment plants are a major current Village environmental initiative; contracted for Cedar Hill facility (rebiting underway) and three other facilities – by the end of 2026, we should have PFAS down to non-detectable levels in our water.
  - Bids received for bike lanes from BF to Somerville. The Village installed sidewalks on S Pleasant, which are beautiful. The bike lanes are next. They will eventually extend north of Ridgewood Ave.
  - Draft landscaper registry ordinance has gone through Village Attorney review. It still needs work; GR members will review it with Pam next.
  - Both empty lots (formerly the Town Garage) next to Ben & Jerrys are now Village owned. They still need contamination cleanup. Town Garage lot's former owner's PLRP expert will have access to the monitor wells and both sides will share information.

- There is a new shared service agreement between the Village and the Board of Education to provide three police officers as school resource officers for safety and as deterrent to criminal activity, and to increase their salaries.
  - Schedler House and property is subject to plan to develop park with a field. Because it is a historic site, it went before the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) in a public hearing in July. It was long and many environmental and public health issues were brought up. The hearing was continued and finished August 21 with recommendations for the DEP commissioner. The assistant DEP commissioner's opinion accepted most of the recommendations, on nine conditions. Last night the Village Council voted to authorize the plan to proceed – which includes that the field will have artificial turf. Artificial turf carries many potential environmental and health risks that were not addressed because they were not within the jurisdiction of the historical commission. DEP approved it, but the order says members of SHPO can refer environmental issues “to the appropriate section.” Pam plans to submit written questions to DEP about this.
    - An additional environmental concern is that the new Schedler plan would eliminate additional original trees, as the field was moved north. Concerns were presented about the environmental impact of this change.
  - It was reported that at the recent facilities committee meeting, when asked about the potential of an artificial turf field, BoE Superintendent Mark Schwarz took the position that there is no money to convert BF field to turf. The sports teams said they might raise the money. Mark is open to hearing environmental concerns about turf, but we need to engage with him. David plans to reach out to Mark.
5. Columbia University: Bergen County Saddle River Project (Alina, David, Joan)
- It was a challenging summer for the project, but we have ended up with a strong plan.
    - a. Report out – Overview of Key Findings (Alina, Joan, David)
      - The final project presentation by the Columbia Climate School student team leader took place by Zoom on August 18 and was attended by 38 people including two Bergen County commissioners.
      - Bergen County is the #1 county most vulnerable to flooding in the US, because it is paved over, has high population density, very valuable real estate (\$72 billion) and is rated low for preparedness.
      - The presentation and report are structured around four pillars of sustainability – environmental, economic, social, and governance.
        - Environmental – ecosystem degradation and extensive riverbank erosion
        - Economic – High insurance premiums, significant insurance gaps; \$250,000 cap is not nearly enough to rebuild here
        - Social – safety issues, deferred maintenance backlog
        - Governance – park user interaction, community/agency collaboration

- Flood mitigation – The students primarily looked at it through detailed maps, not hydrology/deep science, so their findings need to be validated. But their recommendations are very precise.
  - Detention basin – holding water for period of time to enable less flooding – will help in minor floods. Recommended location in Otto Pehle Lake in Saddle Brook and nearby parking lot.
  - Stormwater swales – Otto Pehle Lake and an area in Rochelle Park.
  - Riparian buffer restoration – The river is less deep now, which means it floods out more. Location: Fair Lawn mostly (a lot of damage). Also, some areas outside the park slow down and filter runoff.
  - Wetland construction – part of Grove Park to be restored to wetland. Create basin to hold water when it floods.
  - Collaboration needed between the communities and the Park/County – community benefits, needs to help with measures in its space too.
- Economic side: Study identified nearly \$7.2 billion of at-risk property – of that, nearly \$4 billion is in Paramus (even before new development including Costco on Route 17). Garden State Plaza was built on top of a lowlands/lake/streams.
  - It was noted there is an important opportunity to put in detention basins during new construction (e.g., Costco). Costco construction is still subject to final plan approval by Paramus Planning Board in the near future.
  - 59% increase in flood insurance premiums; \$28.7 billion insurance gaps.
  - Community rating system – Ridgewood and Rochelle Park have ratings that get its citizens discounts on flood insurance – other communities should get involved. Insurance companies are leaving Bergen County or jacking up their flood insurance rates.
- Social issues, safety, and wellbeing – need community feedback system. The Park system has very limited staff, no naturalist, no key performance indicators, no org chart, no operating or capital plan by park and no long-term planning. More community engagement and transparency are needed.
- “Living Laboratory” – Immersion of education into natural park environment offers much to multiple generations. Everybody the students talked to was very excited about it.
  - Outdoors as a Classroom concept — Bring in schools, nonprofits, public/private partnership to teach about local ecology, water issues, etc. Start with a concept paper to dive into more detail. Craig Dorset (acting parks commissioner and chief of staff for County Executive Tedesco) wants a naturalist and likes the idea of a Living Lab.
  - Potential locations for environmental learning centers include the James Rose Center, Glen Rock Arboretum, and a historical building in Fair Lawn.
- The road map has 3 phases: (1) create task force sponsored by the County Executive to design the longer-term governance structure and publish a

concept paper for the Living Lab (months 1-6); (2) set up a consortium, to socialize the Living Lab concept paper, pilot the Living Lab, propose consortium implementation plan, co-create and communicate plans for safety & mitigation interventions, CRS and municipal bonds, and initiate preferred funding vehicles/oversight (months 7-18 and ongoing); and (3) launch Saddle River Trust, form a Saddle River Special District, and create funding through an integrated investment strategy (months 19-36 and ongoing).

b. Moving forward with key partners (David, all)

- The project is a great fit for a \$300,000 (for communities) NJ regional climate resilience planning grant. The application is due October 14. We will get our grant writers involved.
- David will be speaking to members of the Glen Rock environmental commission and is engaging with Craig Dorset and the 2 Bergen County Commissioners who heard the presentation.
- The Bergen Record will interview David, Alina, Joan, Dr. Degnan and Columbia students next Tuesday, and GR will make the project report public soon.

6. Schedler decision & future strategy on artificial turf and grass (Pam, David, all)

- After strategy discussions within a subgroup of GR, it was decided not to actively oppose the Schedler artificial turf proposal before the Village Council but to talk to individual Village Council members about our concerns.
- The Maple Field turf is nearing the end of its life. It floods frequently. We should gather research on medical findings and costs and be prepared to weigh in well before the decision on Maple Field is made.
- The flooding and other ecological implications of removing many of the trees from the Schedler site should be evaluated. There has never been a forestry study of this area. GR can have a role in asking those questions, at the State level.
  - Joe will investigate whether there is an environmental impact statement requirement at the NJ State level.
  - We will try to engage with NJDEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette at the ANJEC conference in October.

7. Open Space Committee (Jim Bostler – Chair)

- Jim spoke in favor of the Open Space tax referendum on the ballot in November. Open Space has been hampered with the retirement of debt for Habernickel and Citizens Park. The referendum calls for an increase of the Open Space tax from 0.5 to 1 cent per \$100 of assessed property value, or from around \$36 to around \$72 for the average residential property. It would fund Open Space's mandates for (1) acquisitions (2) development (advising Village Council and Planning Board), and (3) Maintenance (of trails, not general maintenance), and potentially help with flood

mitigation as well. The parks really need some work, the longer we wait the worse it will get. For example, people can't find the trails at Grove Park anymore; bikers go cross country and destroy the park.

- Some ideas from the Saddle River Park project could be applied to HoHoKus Brook (e.g., a property next to a flood zone behind Dunham trail could be acquired). Several Blue Acres properties could be bought and put into Open Space. Flood zone property could also potentially double as a recreation area or park-to-park access point.

8. Resilience, Flooding, Stormwater Subcommittee Activities (Joan)

- a. Rain Gardens/Landscaper Outreach/Rutgers – October
  - Rutgers is still waiting for funding. We are still exploring alternatives.
- b. Board of Ed flood insurance costs just went up \$70,000 per year just for Stevens and High School fields.

9. Community Energy Planning Grant/Measurement: Green Building/Sustainability Subc. (David)

- This project seems to have stalled, time is running out. David is meeting with Carol tomorrow about moving it forward. The 17% PSE&G bill increase makes this urgent.

10. Communications: Topics for next newsletter (Justin)

- Planned topics are the Columbia report, Schedler, and EVs/green subsidies. If members have other ideas, let Justin know.

**Other**

11. New Business

- On Tuesday, Sept. 9, a public hearing will take place on the Village's proposal to NJDEP/Green Acres to rectify a 1983 diversion of a small park at 308-316 S. Broad Street to public use (sale for affordable housing units) without DEP approval. The violation was discovered in 2011, and the Village has since lost millions in Green Acres grant money because of it. In negotiations, DEP/Green Acres offered to accept the proposal which calls for conversion to park land of a vacant property on Hammond Road and a right-of-way known as Marlborough Road, installation of recreational amenities at Kings Pond Park, and payment to the Garden State Preservation Trust.

12. Future Meeting Dates 2025 -2026: October 9, November 6, December 4, January 8, 2026.