

GREEN RIDGEWOOD MINUTES

October 9, 2025, 7:30-9:30 PM

RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE

Attendees: Green Ridgewood: David Refkin - Chair, Justin Manger - Vice Chair, Joan Hubertus, Bill Armbruster, Peter Jerdee, Jane Rouse, Beth Gould Creller, Pam Perron - Village Council liaison, Vicky Van Dyke - **Parks & Rec liaison**, Anika Mukkatira - Student liaison; Green Team: Mike Faherty, Manpreet Tyagi, Sean Elliott, Mark Kaplan guests: Miles Luo (RHS), Carolyn Jacoby, George Wolfson, Cynthia O'Keefe

Administration

1. Welcome and Attendee Introductions. Sean Elliott, our newest Green Team **member**, **introduced** himself. He's been living in the Village about three years. Guest Cynthia O'Keefe introduced herself said her principal concern is **the proposed** new turf field at the Schedler property near her home.
2. September 4th meeting minutes unanimously approved.

Updates/Discussion/Strategy

3. **Green Team Report** - Mike Faherty (Mike went first because he had to leave early.)

The Green Team recently met and Mike has had individual discussions with nearly all members. Mike mentioned the need for recertification every three years from **Sustainable Jersey**. **Ridgewood has been certified since 2016**. **Initiatives that we could** tout in our application include the new tree ordinance, the storm water ordinance, rain gardens, the Columbia University reports the past two summers, and potentially, a construction recycling ordinance if the Village Council were to pass one. Joe Ferrante has experience in this and is leading the Green Team efforts in this regard. Mike said it won't be hard to get recertified as Bronze, but maybe we could get **Silver**, **which** is the top level. (There's no gold level.) The first submission is due in February, the second in May, and the third in July. Mike said this will involve a lot of paperwork, but that we've **never started this early and that we want to keep it easy for Village management**.

George Wolfson expressed concern about capturing the rewards of Sustainable Jersey (SJ) **certification**. Mike said it's largely about grants. He has submitted two applications but we were rejected both times. David said that in the last year we had been **awarded** two energy grants and that we'll be working more with SJ. We're applying for a \$1.67 million grant now from New Jersey DEP. George added that Woodbridge is always very successful getting grants from SJ and certification points. He suggested that we call Woodbridge and find out if there's a secret sauce they use that could be helpful to us.

David said that he, Mike, and Peter just met to discuss leaf blowers. Mike said there's a limit to how many things we can take on. Joan suggested that we could ask the Planning Board how we can get points from SJ.

Pam asked if we can get credit if open space referendum passes. Carolyn suggested contacting the Shade Tree Committee regarding its sapling program.

4. **Village Council Liaison Report** (Pam Perron)

- Pearls Premium grass has been planted on a 10 by 10-foot plot in front of **Ridgewood Water**.
- The Council approved bonds for \$5.5 million for PFAS treatment. The main treatment facility will have a grand opening on Oct. 16. State legislators backed a state grant for \$1 million for the facility.
- The open space referendum is on the ballot. If approved, the open-space tax will increase from 0.5 cents to one cent per \$1,000 of assessed property value. It would cost the average homeowner about \$35 per year and would provide the money the Village needs to acquire land that could be used for open space and also to improve existing open space.
- Ridgewood Water is buying two hybrid vehicles. One is a plug-in hybrid.
- Franklin Lakes and Washington Township have signed up to use the densifier for recycling styrofoam. The Village will get \$5 a bag for Styrofoam they bring here. Several other towns are also using our Styrofoam densifier. **Ridgewood and Ridgefield Park are the only towns in Bergen County with such a densifier.**
- The Village is working through a community energy planning grant from SJ. **These grants are funneled through Carol Bialkowski, director of communications and special projects for the Village.**
- We learned this week of another SJ grant that is for outreach to residents. A woman at SJ has a template that we could use. There are three options for residents. **One is for low-income residents. Another is for home energy solutions.** A third offers zero-interest loans. There's another line for businesses. It's called the [Sustainable Jersey-PSE&G Energy Efficiency Partnership](#). It would require a resolution from the Council.
- The Council passed Resolution 215382 to develop a turf field at Schedler Park.
- Downs Tree Service was awarded a \$60,000 contract to plant trees around the Village. These won't be planted in the Central Business District because it's already been fully planted. The Village has received 120 requests from residents to plant trees on the municipal strip adjoining their property. The Shade Tree Commission may move trees from the municipal strip to residents' property, but the question then is whether it's the resident's tree or a Village tree. George Wolfson said that quite a few median strips are too small for planting trees large enough to improve the canopy.
- The Parks Department is running a program together with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference on how to maintain trails. The first session will be Oct. 12 at Grove Park. **The second will be Oct. 26 at Kings Pond Park.**

There was no report from Ridgewood Water because Jill Fasano was absent due to a death in her family, but David mentioned that rainfall has been down 33% over the past 13 months. Pam said we meet every three months with the other towns served by

Ridgewood Water - Midland Park, Wyckoff and Glen Rock. It serves a total of 21,000 customers.

Chairman's Report - David Refkin

- **Climate resiliency grant from NJ DEP.** This would be a \$10 million grant. The original deadline for submission was Oct. 14. At our request, DEP pushed it back to Oct. 29. **Following our encouragement, Bergen County will be the "Prime"** and submit the application. At least 3 contiguous communities must participate in the grant application. The community-based organization participating in the grant application will be Hackensack Riverkeeper. Last night Glen Rock passed a resolution supporting the application. For the first time, the county acknowledges it has some level of responsibility for coping with flooding. We have 20 days to file the grant. Pam and David will be meeting with county officials in Hackensack on Tuesday encouraging a working partnership between the County and municipal governments. **The county wants to expand it to other communities affected by the Saddle River, such as Lodi.**

- Columbia study

North Jersey.com had a story about the Saddle River Park study by Columbia University graduate students two days ago. (Here's the [link](#).)

Glen Rock, Paramus and Rochelle Park are working with us. The NJDEP grant would be federal money, coming from NOAA and HUD. Each community has to fill out an application, as do the county and Hackensack Riverkeeper.

We released the report last week (Sept. 4). The six communities covered by the study **are still talking.**

The Columbia report recommends the inclusion of an Environmental Learning Center. Joan Hubertus has discussed it with Parks and Recreation. One question to consider: **What would Ridgewood's vision of a living laboratory be?**

Pam just learned about some land on Grove Street that the Village recently took over for failure to pay taxes. It could be a place for planting native plants. There's a PSE&G easement on that property. David noted that the Rose Center, across from the high school, **could be the site for the laboratory.**

Joan said she would like to walk before we run and that we should decide how we'll **incubate the Learning Center before we pick the location**

- **Schools Report** (Anika Mukkatira, Miles Luo)

Anika said the AP Environmental Studies students are deciding on their long-term projects and that the Green Club has been doing clean-ups. One idea is green roofing. **Someone's** planting wild flowers at the new roundabout. Other ideas include composting and bioswales. Miles said most of these projects are still in their infancy. **Another possibility is an energy audit.**

Beth suggested recycling/reusing sports equipment.

Pam said there's a new bike lane that was just put in on South Pleasant Avenue.

Miles suggested placing tape on the windows of buildings with large glass windows. Some 800,000 birds a year die from crashing into windows. It's already past migration season, but the tape could be useful for the future. The tape is invisible to humans. (Here's an [article](#) from the Cornell Ornithological Lab about birds and windows. There are also many products on line aiming to make windows safer for birds.)

David said we have had two meetings with the Board of Education on sustainability issues. **David, Bill, Saurabh and Miles attended the last one. The school district did an energy audit at the end of July. It's looking at low-hanging fruit. There have been discussions about the field at Benjamin Franklin Middle School and whether it should be converted to artificial turf or remain as grass. Electric school buses are still up for discussion. The school district also surveyed the principals at the 10 schools in the district. The survey found a high level of interest in sustainability issues and practices.**

- **Wildflower Meadows and Rain Gardens**

Miles emailed everyone on the Green Ridgewood/Green Team email list a 28-page slide show on the merits of grass lawns as opposed to replacing them with wildflowers and rain gardens. Miles acknowledged that he hates lawns because they're bad for the environment. We can advocate for replacing lawns. One suggestion: leave the leaves on the ground. One question is whether this would lead to more ticks. Miles pointed out that the No. 1 thing that leads to more ticks is the increase in the deer population. He acknowledged that there would be times when people's yards would not look great if they did not mow their lawns or replaced them with wildflowers, but said the New York Times has an article every 2 or 3 months about replacing lawns.

We have 2 student liaisons on the Shade Tree Committee.

On Sunday students will be doing a Duck Pond Tree Inventory.

- **Resource Management & Conservation Subcommittee** - (Peter Jerdee)

Leaf blowers were the biggest issue at the subcommittee meeting. Whether by Village ordinance or state legislation, restricting or prohibiting the use of gas-powered leaf blowers is an ongoing topic of discussion.

One objective is to require all landscapers doing business in the village to register and pay an annual fee of \$50. This would facilitate communications and give village an opportunity to get information on landscapers' equipment

Princeton and East Hampton, NY, have landscaper-registration ordinances. One problem is the Village government's reliance on gas-powered leaf blowers. Pam noted that we can't as a practical matter have an ordinance that bans private leaf blowers if the Village is still using them.

Pam and David discussed the status of the energy audit from the Village earlier this year. Some progress is being made but the requirements from Sustainable NJ are very precise, and time-consuming.

Peter is in contact with [AGZA](#), the American Green Zone Alliance, a group that helps **businesses and communities adopt sustainable landscaping practices.**

[S217](#)- This bill, sponsored by State Senator Bob Smith would prohibit the sale of two-stroke leaf blowers in 2 years and ban their use in 4 years. The bill would also eventually limit 4-stroke leaf blowers and there is a longer-term requirement of only electric leaf **blowers.**

Peter stressed the importance of a public awareness campaign. David will be meeting with Ellie Gruber of the League of Women Voters. Carolyn Jacoby mentioned that she is on the LWV Environmental Committee.

“Skip the Stuff” - as of July, at least 25 municipalities in New Jersey, including Glen Rock, have passed ordinances that would prohibit giving out plastic utensils, **condiments, etc., with take-out food orders unless the customer requests them.**

The subcommittee discussed the [Beyond Plastics](#) website and voluntary ordinances.

Peter also mentioned a group called [Advocates for Transforming Landscaping in New Jersey](#). Lois Kraus of Westwood leads the group.

- **Resilience, Flooding, & Stormwater Subcommittee** (Joan Hubertus)

Joan discussed the lessons learned from rain gardens at three municipal parks -- Habernickel, Graydon and Veterans. Workers removed a truckload of rocks when they re-established the Habernickel rain garden. At Graydon, we need professional effort to root out the knotweed.

Joan suggested that instead of taking on new projects, we should double down on these **three.**

Rutgers - landscaper training on rain gardens. Rutgers was still waiting to get their funding. We will probably wait until January or February for the landscaper training program.

- **Communications** (Justin Manger) - The Columbia report on Saddle River County Park is on the home page of the Green Ridgewood website. Justin will be asking Carol Bialkowski to post it on the Village website. Justine hopes to get the new newsletter out in the next week or two. The newsletter will also include the leaf pickup schedule and mention the open space referendum, as well as Miles' **report on wildflowers and rain gardens. The website and newsletter will also include the North Jersey.com article re Saddle River Park.**

- **Finances (Jane Rouse)** -- We're trying to determine our expenses year-to-date and determine how we can project a budget going forward. We have a big open question now recognizing the proceeds from Earth Day. Jane is working with the Village finance team. David thinks we are \$2,000 to \$3,000 short and that our **balance is in the range of \$15-\$18K.**

- Green Building/Sustainability Subcommittee

Energy audit is happening at the Village level. We are trying to determine where we can make investments to save money. This is especially urgent given the recent 17.4% increase in electricity rates from PSE&G

Database for plastic and grass fields. There are a lot of questions regarding the **economic, environmental and health impacts.**

Montclair State did a study recently on the long-term economics of turf fields.

The NFL Players Association says they want to play on grass fields. The World Cup **games next year will all be played on grass.**

The Benjamin Franklin field could be an issue.

Future meeting dates - 1st Thursday of the month except for Jan. 8

Submitted by Bill Armbruster, 10/25/25