

GREEN RIDGEWOOD AGENDA

December 5, 2024, 7:30-9:30 PM

RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE

Attendees: Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair, Beth Gould Creller – Vice Chair, Joan Hubertus, Bill Armbruster, Peter Jerdee, Justin Jonsson, Justin Manger, Pam Perron (Village Council Liaison), Vivian Ewell (Student Liaison); **Green Team:** Mike Faherty, Mark Kaplan, Luly Melarti, Julia Grant (Student Liaison); **Guests:** Jim Bostler (Open Space Chairman), Carolyn Jacoby, George Wolfson, Susan Ruane, Joe Ferrante, Ariadna Karole (Green Team RHS), Anika Mukkatira (Green Team RHS)

Administration

1. Welcome and Attendee Introductions
2. Approve November 7th meeting minutes.
 - Minutes were unanimously approved

Updates/Discussion/Strategy

3. Chair Report, Green Ridgewood highlights & membership update (David)
 - David briefly reviewed what GR accomplished this year and important ongoing projects. Among the highlights identified were the Columbia sustainability roadmap, the quarterly newsletter, passage of the stormwater ordinance, Climate Fresk, and the student art project.
 - Priorities this coming year include putting into place recommendations from the Columbia roadmap, getting a new Columbia project on Saddle River Park up and running, doing more with the schools and students, and training programs in collaboration with the Ridgewood public library.
 - There is at least one GR member opening. The application deadline has been extended and the Village Council will do interviews soon. Anyone interested should get applications in ASAP.
4. Village Council Liaison Report (Pam)
 - Pam helped organize the 50th RHS reunion this year and collected over \$2000 to contribute to environmental projects at RHS.
 - NJ DEP approved a public outreach plan for the Schedler property. The public can go on the Village website and read reports on the extent of pollution and remediation [<https://www.ridgewoodnj.net/262/Zabriskie-Schedler-House-Property>]. In addition to public comment during Council meetings, residents can submit questions regarding the site to the Village by email. Answers to the first 81 questions have

already been posted

[\[https://www.ridgewoodnj.net/DocumentCenter/View/4544/November-15-2024---Public-Question-Responses---Schedler-Soil-Testing-PDF\]](https://www.ridgewoodnj.net/DocumentCenter/View/4544/November-15-2024---Public-Question-Responses---Schedler-Soil-Testing-PDF)

- The stormwater ordinance has gone through the County and DEP review process. The County had minor, non-substantive changes. The revised ordinance had to be reintroduced and is expected to be passed by the Village Council again on December 11. It will apply retroactively to July when it was first passed before review/revision.
- The circular driveways ordinance will be voted on at the December 11 meeting. It is expected to be approved, but without the permeable paver requirement that David urged be added. This was discussed at length at the Planning Board with the Village Engineer and the Village Planner. There was a fairness concern about requiring permeable pavers for circular but not other driveways, and the reason for the ordinance was to provide the Zoning Board with more clarity on the lot width requirement (100 ft). The Planning Board voted to approve the ordinance without a permeable paver requirement but expressed openness to revisiting that in the future.
 - Joan noted the importance of finding a way to move residents toward using permeable surfaces on their property going forward. She would like to see a statement informing residents of the impacts of creating more impervious surfaces when we are already 40% paved over. Options include dialing back total allowable impervious surfaces on a property and providing a tax rebate to residents putting in pervious surfaces. We should also further consider which materials qualify as permeable.
 - Pam noted there is a pilot program for replacement of concrete sidewalks with flexible sidewalk material at up to six locations (under which the Village reimburses the property owner 50% of the cost of the approved installation of Porous Pave XLS [Res. 22-320]).

5. Open Space Committee (Jim Bostler)

- Open Space is a 9-member committee consisting of 4 citizens and 5 Village liaisons. It is an advisory committee to the Village Council and works with the Planning Board.
- Areas of responsibility include acquisitions (e.g., Habernickel, Schedler, Citizens Park expansion); education (as to why open space is needed, improve quality of life etc.); and communications and stewardship (e.g., park walks).
- The committee wishes to reach out to and collaborate with other Village committees.
- Joan suggested adding rain garden tours in 2025 to get people to understand how they work and appreciate their beauty.

6. Measurement

- a. Sustainable Jersey Grant and Discussions (Energy) – (Beth, Mike)
 - We have until October 2025 to use the \$10,000 grant (longer than we thought). It is a planning grant. We need to brainstorm as many ideas as possible in the area of green energy. Ideas include completing installation of Ridgewood Water EV charging stations, and installing solar panels at the train station.
 - We need to fill out a Sustainable Jersey form and present a plan to the Village and County before presenting it to the State. This will make us eligible for a grant of up to \$250,000.
 - The grant can support multiple initiatives. Millenium is there to help.
 - Just putting the plan together will help with Sustainable Jersey points.
- b. Meeting with Village Manager on next steps (Energy) – (David)
 - David has informed Keith that key information we need is bills, infrastructure type, and size of buildings. Keith has assigned Village personnel to work on it.
- c. Solutions for measuring Saddle River/HoHoKus Brook flow, stormwater – (Joan)
 - Joan has been working with the Watershed Ambassador assigned to Saddle River and Passaic (this is an AmeriCorps program). She has sought input on what we allowed to do to protect the riverbanks and discussed leveraging resources to build rain gardens.
 - Chris Rutishauser, David and Joan met with the Bergen County representative and team leader of the Rutgers Cooperative to find out what they do and how they can help us in preparing the new MS4 requirements taking effect at the end of 2025. Chris noted at the meeting affordable housing requirements are sometimes in conflict with flooding issues. Joan asked Rutgers for help designing a test for rain gardens to see if they are effectively removing pollutants and absorbing water as designed.
 - The state of NJ will build an interactive impervious surface map. Chris’s team will build stormwater drain maps. We are seeking the Army Corps of Engineers’ help with HoHoKus Brook and Saddle River flow information we need. We expect this to show that the sewer systems are too small to handle the water. The plan is to put the maps on a publicly available website, as other NJ towns have done.

7. Ridgewood Water Communications (Justin, Jill, David)

- Manpreet reached out to Jill about a social media communications plan, including setting up templates for putting out nuggets of information on a weekly basis.

- Rich Calbi (RW Director) and Mike Cohrs (RW Business Manager) will speak about PFAS and water conservation at the next Bergen Hub meeting.

8. Columbia Student Recommendations Implementation– next steps

a. Rain Barrels (Frank)

- The rain barrel models are on display at Backyard Living, but the purchases have gone slowly. BL does not place an order until it has a batch of 12 purchases.
- The GR \$25/barrel subsidy has been extended. It was agreed that we should wait until March/April to re-promote the program.

b. Moving towards EVs (David)

- David recently discussed location of EV chargers with Keith. They have to be away from the flood zone. Installing the chargers is a priority for Keith.
- The EVs cannot be put in a parking garage because of fire hazard. Some other locations are under consideration.
- New Village policy is that whenever a new vehicle is needed, getting a green vehicle will be considered. (This will not work for vehicles required to serve as backup for snow removal.)

c. Food Scrap Grant Application (David)

- The Resources subcommittee met with Sean Hamlin, head of Ridgewood Recycling. Their application for a USDA food scraps program grant is still pending. 350 residents currently use the pilot program, out of the original goal of 500. 72 tons of food scraps have been collected since 2021. Sean would like to grow the program where possible, including by giving residents the option of a weekly scraps pickup at a cost of \$10-15 per month if we get the grant.
- The Ridgefield Park Styrofoam recycling facility is being underused. This presents an opportunity for Ridgewood to sign up more communities to use our facility.

d. Best Practices for Food Scraps (Luly)

- Communities in Sweden make food scraps handling easy. Instead of big containers, residents collect scraps in a little brown compost bag under their sink, roll it up daily and take it outside to a larger personal sealed bin that is picked up from home by the town.
- David and the Resources subcommittee will discuss with Sean how we could implement a program along those lines.

9. Bergen County Outreach/New Columbia Project (David/Joan)

a. Status of Columbia Application

- Alina has been talking with Columbia about the application for the Saddle River Park project and should hear back soon.
 - Keith is very supportive.
- b. Activities of “Good Trouble Group” (GTG) (Joan)
- As noted at the last meeting, Joan, David, and residents from Rochelle Park and Saddle Brook gave a joint presentation to Assemblyman Lisa Swain (District 38 and Chair of the Assemblyman Appropriations Cmte.). A member of the GTG from Saddle Brook has followed up with her office since the meeting and has been told to wait until January.
 - The GTG was also told to contact Matthew Bickerton of the County’s Division of Mosquito Control about the collapsing banks, so far with no response. (They treat Saddle River for mosquitoes every season.)
 - We are also trying to meet with the two other representatives from the 38th District and to meet with our 40th District representatives.
 - A Lodi resident is interested in joining the group.
 - 5 of the 6 adjoining communities are aware of the project – all but Paramus. Outreach to Paramus is planned.
 - More meetings are planned.
- c. Getting Bergen County “on-board” (David)
- David has reached out to Craig Dorsett, Chief of Staff to the Bergen County Executive.

10. Ridgewood Schools

- a. Students Update (Vivian and other Students)
- There has been an ongoing effort for 16 months to replace lost and missing recycling waste bins at the high school.
 - For the HoHoKus Brook tree project, an application for a Trees for Schools grant from the NJ School Boards Association is underway.
 - A green seminar series covers topics (e.g., meat consumption) where students can exercise personal control and educate other students.
 - AP projects include the previously discussed grass seeds research as well as placing floor tiles that absorb energy from walking and convert it to energy in high traffic areas.
 - The second wildflower meadow installation on E Ridgewood Ave was completed.
 - A sustainability booth is planned for Super Science Saturday at RHS (March 1, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.).
 - RHS science supervisor said \$15,000 sustainability grant has been extended. They are working to steer some funding to the HHK Brook

vegetation project and are open to other ideas for joint projects with GR.

- b. Board of Education Meeting: December 4, 2024 (David, Beth)
 - David and Beth will talk to the BoE at their next Sustainability meeting about how can GR work with schools more closely and offer our advice on issues such as energy, flooding, and climate education.
- c. Other School Activities (Beth)
 - It was decided that GR will participate in Super Science Saturday like last year (when Pam and George had a table and there was good turnout). Bill Armbruster volunteered to lead this effort for GR.

11. Daffodil Festival/Earth Day Fair (April 27, 2025) – Theme (All)

- David proposed to have two shifts so people don't have to be there for 6 hours. The Fair will be from 11:00 to 2:30, but some GR members will need to be there before and after for setup etc.
- The event steering committee will meet in January.
- We should think about getting sponsors now. Pam will call Nancy Bigos. Materials will be needed before we can solicit sponsors.
- The discussion of potential themes focused on water, extreme weather, and its implications: We had heavy rainfall the first 8 months of this year followed by 4 very dry months. People can't change the weather, but can change how we react to the weather changes. Suggestions included incorporating flooding and water conservation; rain gardens; absorbent grass seed; watering less; rain barrels; No Mow May; 1000 Acres; putting together a check list on conserving water, redirecting water, etc.
- An interactive, child friendly display or activity was suggested to get parents to stop, and talk to their kids about it, etc. We should consider having mini kits of some kind for kids to take home with them. E.g., a rain garden in a box, how to create a rain garden planter.
- One idea was to cover topics that ranked high in the survey results from this year's Earth Day.

12. Resident "Training" Program – (Mark)

- Mark has been meeting with the library about organizing a series of seminars by experts that would be hosted there. The goal is to give people an opportunity to choose what environmental measures are right for them. Roberta Panjwani (Assistant Director, Adult Programming & Community Engagement) responded enthusiastically and offered two possible dates in March for the first seminar. We need to decide on a date and the first topic.

- It was discussed that strong promotion of the events is critical, and that snappy topics are needed to get attention and traction.
- The events should also be recorded and put online.
- Initial topics under consideration are food scraps, rain gardens, artificial turf, and leaf blowers (e.g., a panel with Dr. Sarah Evans, landscapers, and grass people).
- It was noted that the library already has a separate sustainability series – including a composting presentation this Saturday.

13. Grant Opportunities (Joan)

- NJ has a multimillion dollar MS4 grant program in 4 sections – Keith passed it to Vanessa Tousignant from Millennium Strategies. As of one month ago, Vanessa advised that the resilience planning program looks the most interesting and is still being fleshed out.
- Applying for a Federal grant on EVs is also under consideration.

14. Joint Meeting with Parks & Recreation (Joan/Mike)

- The meeting scheduled for this week about grass, rain gardens and flower meadows did not occur. Joan will reach out to the group about scheduling a new date.

15. Communication Newsletter (Justin)

- The quarterly newsletter went out on November 15 as part of the weekly Village email blast (after a delay; Keith did not want to have a separate newsletter blast for us, because then every organization would want one). We got top billing. Will get top billing again. Justin will check how many hits the newsletter got.
- We are aiming for the end of January for the next newsletter. Members should let Justin know about ideas for topics.
- Justin and Mike have discussed redesigning the GR website in 2025 and possibly combining it with the 1000 Acres website.

16. Bergen Leads (Carolyn)

- Bergen Leads is an initiative through Bergen Volunteers with many programs. It was started about 30 years ago, initially to drive support for Bergen volunteer organizations through corporate organizations. Every year, around 30 people (Carolyn is one of them) are chosen from various sectors such as hospitals, municipal governments and utilities to network, for leadership training and as a way for people to see what happening in government county-wide in areas such as education, healthcare, and environment.
- As part of this year's program, Carolyn is helping the food rescue nonprofit Table to Table with mission statements and goals, etc.

- Each Bergen Leads meeting has a theme. Sustainability will be the topic in April 2025.

17. Climate Fresk – Next steps (David)

- David will circle back with a small group to organize a meeting or call with Alexi to provide detailed feedback and ideas for redesigning the Fresk.

18. Bergen Hub: 1/27 or 28 Meeting hosted by Ridgewood (David)

- The meeting will take place in the regular GR meeting room. The date (1/27 or 1/28) will be decided by third week in December.
- The Bergen Hub steering committee has discussed speakers for the meeting.
 - Lois Kraus of Westfield Green Team and Advocates for Transforming Landscaping in NJ will speak on dealing with leaf blowers at the state level.
 - RW will speak on PFAS and water conservation, as noted above.
- At each meeting, each town's sustainability committee talks about their work. As the hosts, we have leeway to go into some more detail and should hit on a few key GR topics.

19. Other 2025 Priorities: Leaf Blowers, Army Corps of Engineers

- Sustainable Jersey has a new action item: 5 to 25 points for town-wide gas leaf blower restrictions.
- Glen Ridge just passed a seasonal leaf blower ban ordinance.
- Separate subcommittee should be considered regarding leaf blowers. Sticking points include landscapers who may need new work to take its place (e.g., rain gardens) and new equipment.
- We are hoping for Congressional approval of funding for the Army Corps of Engineering study related to flooding in Ridgewood in December. There is concern about whether funding could be obtained under the incoming Federal administration.

Future Events

20. Future Meeting Dates 2025: January 9, February 6, March 6, April 3, Bergen Hub meeting in Ridgewood on January 27 or January 28, Daffodil Festival/Earth Day Fair – April 27th