

GREEN RIDGEWOOD MEETING

November 7, 2024, 7:30-9:30 PM

RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE

Attendees: Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair; Joan Hubertus, Bill Armbruster, Peter Jerdee, Justin Jonsson, Justin Manger, Frank Mortimer (Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board Member), Jill Fasano (Village Staff Member); **Green Team:** Alina Mordkovich, Mark Kaplan, Adam Peterseil, Manpreet Tyagi; **Guests:** Paul Vagianos (Village Council), Carolyn Jacoby, George Wolfson, Susan Ruane, Rurik Halaby, Joe Ferrante, Ariadna Karole (Green Team RHS), Jolie Wolcott (Green Team RHS), Maeve Schoeler (Green Team RHS), Anika Mukkatira (Green Team RHS)

Administration

1. Welcome and Attendee Introductions
2. The October 10, 2024, meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Updates/Discussion/Strategy

3. Chair Report, Green Ridgewood highlights & membership update (David)
 - The Chair gave brief remarks acknowledging the large potential impacts of this week's national elections on environmental policies and encouraged the membership to recommit itself to its work to make life better in Ridgewood by seeking out better local solutions and providing leadership on sustainability issues at the County level and beyond.
4. Village Council Liaison Report (Paul)
 - The Village Council passed a resolution to remove the underground storage tanks on the section of the parking lot on North Walnut Street next to the Town Garage. The Village will work together with the seller to remediate the area. The seller is obligated to clean the Town Garage site. The Village is obligated to clean under the parking lot. There will be testing to determine the level of contamination and remove contaminated soil. It will likely take 2 years to get a clean bill of health from DEP on the Town Garage site because of the groundwater testing and remediation.
 - The Planning Board sent a proposed ordinance to the Village Council last night to approve circular driveways on residential lots. The proposed ordinance will allow them but require 100 feet of frontage (which will confine them to larger lots). Existing circular drives will be grandfathered. There will be 3 readings of the proposed ordinance.
 - Joan suggested that the new driveways be required to be made out of permeable pavers. Paul suggested submitting a letter to that effect and

providing public comment at the first reading of the ordinance at Village Council.

- It was noted that if a circular driveway takes out more than 200 square feet of permeable surface, this would trigger restrictions under the new stormwater ordinance.
 - The stormwater ordinance has been sent to DEP and Bergen County for review. The County had minor revisions to it. By way of background, DEP required all NJ municipalities to enact a new stormwater management ordinance, and Ridgewood made its more stringent, while also ensuring it would not be too onerous (e.g., so residents would choose to let their walkway fall into disrepair rather than comply with its requirements). Paul thinks the ordinance will be the gold standard for NJ, and Joan's guidance in educating the Village Council on the matter was invaluable.
 - Schedler – DEP required the Village to implement a community outreach program concerning the site. The cost is \$30,000. We must answer virtually all questions from every resident, most of whom come from the Schedler community, working with the environmental consultant Matrix. The answers will be publicly distributed. The status of the remediation project is that DEP is expected to approve the testing standards over the next week or two; Matrix is now in final negotiations with DEP. After approval, remediation can start immediately. This will involve removal of soil, likely including the entire berm.
 - At the Village Council meeting, Councilmember Siobhan Winograd reported on sapling planting. Many homeowners don't want any kind of tree in the right of way in front of their house. Of 55 residents of the Schedler neighborhood whose rights of way had been identified by the Village as suitable planting sites, 19 refused to let saplings be planted. Village employees witnessed residents objecting to trees being planted in front of their properties but also objecting to trees in front of others' properties being cut down. George noted part of the problem is unclear rules as to who is responsible for maintenance of trees in the right of way, which could be clarified by ordinance. Paul stated that the Village has the right to plant in the right of way, but some residents are understandably concerned because under NJ law (e.g., in connection with sale of home) they have the responsibility to fix sidewalks turned up by toppled trees. Residents also may feel entitled to input on the look of their property. So arguably it is better to focus on properties whose owners do not have objections.
5. Joint Meeting with Parks & Recreation (David/Frank)
- The joint meeting, which took place a few weeks ago, exceeded expectations. Both committees learned a lot from each other. The Parks & Recreation members got behind GR's vision especially on flooding. The plan is to have a joint meeting once per year going forward, and a subcommittee was formed.
 - a. Follow-up meeting (Joan)

- Subsequently, Joan met with Nancy Bigos, Director of Parks & Recreation, and Jovan Mehandzic, Engineering Department, on the topic of rain gardens. They discussed and were in agreement on the goal of restoring four rain gardens and building one new one in our parks in the next year. For the schools, they discussed completing the planned rain gardens at Vets Field and Steven Field, and looking at Ridge, Travell, Willard and GW as potential sites. They also discussed a bioretention swale in the King Pond area of Lake View Drive.

6. Ridgewood Water Communications (Jill)

- Manpreet will talk to Jill about utilizing social media to get the water conservation message out. (Despite only 1 inch of rain in 10 weeks, we are not at stage 4 for water conservation, because many have stopped irrigating this late in the season.) The concept is to come up with a couple of ideas or factoids to put out once or twice a week on the Village’s Facebook page and for members and others to share with their network, on Ridgewood Moms and Dads, etc.
- More generally, Manpreet encouraged members to create awareness of GR with residents by “liking” any GR post they see and linking to the GR website (as well as to the Sustainable Ridgewood website) on their Facebook pages.
- The high school students in attendance noted it would be very helpful to post on Instagram too. TikTok is probably not as useful.

7. Columbia Student Recommendations Implementation – next steps

a. Rain Barrels (Frank)

- To date there has been limited uptake. The \$25 subsidy coupon will be extended from November 11 through at least Cyber Monday. Then the project will be paused until next spring.

b. Moving towards EV’s (David)

- The recent Village Council debate demonstrated that moving the Village toward EVs is recognized as a priority. It is important to convert this into budgeting for the Village to buy more EVs.
- At the Bergen Hub meeting last week, Sustainable Jersey advised that the Federal Direct Pay program, which was initially for private vehicles only, has now been opened up to governments and schools. The deadline for applying for credits for EV purchases made last year is November 15. David will reach out to Bob Rooney, Ridgewood CFO and see what applies.
- Paul noted that last year, as the first step, the Village did a comprehensive assessment of what it has and needs. Charging station infrastructure is needed before EVs can be brought in to replace existing vehicles in a fleet of over 300 when they reach the end of their useful life. We are currently at zero charging stations, except for the garage on Hudson Street. Installing

charging stations is expensive. So far, very few municipalities have made headway toward the NJ municipal fleet standards.

- A big question is where to put the charging stations. The vehicles naturally tend to be in the flood zone. Arrangements will have to be made on property the Village may not own. The Chestnut Street garage, where many of the vehicles are parked needs an overhaul.
- Paul will add this subject to the Village Council agenda.

c. Food Scraps Program (David)

- Sean Hamlin has applied for a \$150,000 US Department of Agriculture grant for expansion of the Village's food scrap program. David will set up a call with Sean for the Resource Management subcommittee's next meeting to discuss this.
- Members are encouraged to review the video and pdf from Sweden circulated by Luly on best practices for food scraps collection, etc.

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

a. Meeting with Assemblywoman Lisa Swain (Joan/David)

- On October 30, Joan and David, along with Gale Sikorski from Saddle Brook and Samuel Bouveron from Rochelle Park, met with Assemblywoman Lisa Swain (38th district and Chair of the Assembly Appropriations Committee) in her office and gave a detailed presentation regarding Saddle River and Saddle River Park. The presentation included disturbing pictures showing bank erosion and lack of maintenance, which are especially bad down by Rochelle Park. They discussed what the future could look like and the need to plan so that the riverbanks can withstand a 500-year storm.
- It was noted that Ridgewood and Saddle River are the only two towns in the County with a CRS rating of 6, which enables people in the flood zone to have lower insurance. This required us to go beyond the minimum standards in improving the flood zone. The Village's engineering department did a good job getting us there. Lisa Swain was not aware of this and now wants to get several mayors to take action in this area.
- The presentation also focused on the need for sponsors, stakeholders and community advocates to facilitate brainstorming on what can be done to remove roadblocks and move the process ahead.
- The presentation was very well received; Lisa will try to commit to some time frames for the process.

b. Potential New Columbia Project – Saddle River Park (David/Alina)

- Alina sent a proposal to Prof. Cohen at Columbia on October 30. Key deliverables include a comprehensive environmental assessment, case studies, a sustainability roadmap, and recommendations including rebuilding

a renewable energy microgrid. Today, Alina received a response that Columbia has initially accepted the proposal and is now sharing a capstone survey with students next week to gauge their interest.

c. Getting Bergen County “on-board” (David)

- David got an audience with Craig Dorset, the County’s Parks Commissioner and Chief of Staff to County Executive Tedesco in early October. David is working to get a commitment from Bergen County that they will provide data and have some level of involvement in a potential Columbia project that would start in January 2025.

9. Students

- The north half of the brook bank along the high school has opportunities for adding trees.
- The high school Green Club is working on sign designs for meadows and is looking for Parks & Recreation to help install signs once they are designed.
- AP Environmental Science and Green Team are experimenting on different grasses, including Pearl’s Premium Grass Seed, and different watering routines and visually assessing how grass is growing.
 - Rurik suggested contacting Rutgers University for help; they are one of the leading research facilities on grasses.
- There was a discussion of students’ limited exposure to climate issues in the high school and middle school curriculum (outside of AP Environmental Science).

10. Grant Opportunities (Joan/David)

- Governor Murphy launched a \$20 million resiliency program to help communities with the NJDEP-mandated MS4 permit program. The biggest change brought by MS4 is that it extends to non-point source pollutants from storm water – the stuff we put on our lawns etc. -- no longer just point source pollutants like factories and gas stations. By January 2026, the Village will need to have lots of information pulled together.
- We are taking a close look at two potential grant applications: One under a \$5 million state program focusing on regional watershed management, and a stormwater resilience construction project grant. Information on both have been sent to Keith who has sent it on to Millennium.

11. Communication Newsletter (Justin)

- Permission for the GR quarterly newsletter to be emailed to all Village residents in a separate blast was withdrawn. We will have to go back to building our mailing list organically.
- The newsletter has not gone out as part of the Village’s weekly email blast yet because we were expecting to send it as a separate blast. Now, we are trying to get the newsletter included in the next weekly blast as soon as possible.

12. Measurement

a. Energy use (Beth/David)

- Beth and David will discuss how best to utilize the \$10,000 grant from Sustainable Jersey – e.g., whether to hire a consultant.

13. Climate Fresk – Next steps

- David talked to Alexi about revamping Climate Fresk for use in the United States. He will set up a small group Zoom call to provide input for Alexi, including with some students.
- A key idea is to make the Climate Fresk 2 hours rather than 3 hours long.
- It was suggested that this could be brought up at a Board of Education meeting. It was noted that NJ mandates climate education, but it is not well organized.
- It was noted that Minecraft has partnered with educators on gamified learning. It has a useful Climate & Sustainability teaching kit.

14. Bergen Hub: 10/25 Bogota and plan for 1/27 Ridgewood

- Twelve communities showed up for the October 25 meeting in Bogota and put together mission statement. Participants from 5 communities (including David) are in the Steering Cmte. /leadership group. There were several good speakers, including from Sustainable Jersey.
- Topics included leaving the leaves, composting pumpkins at Rosler's Nursery in Allendale, the stormwater ordinance, and Emerson's interest in shared styrofoam recycling.
- Ridgewood will host the next meeting on January 27. Rich is interested in speaking on PFAS at the meeting. Other ideas on speakers are encouraged.

15. Other 2025 Priorities: Leaf Blowers, ACoE

- Follow efforts at the state level to move toward electric leaf blowers.
- Other suggestions included focusing on rain gardens, wilding/natural yard, no mow May, tree planting and other sustainable acreage measures and practices under the rubric of Project 1000 Acres, and directing these efforts at businesses, places of worship, etc., as well.

16. Subcommittees – Goals/Membership – 15 minutes

a. Resilience, Flooding and Stormwater – (Joan)

- Rutgers' Green Infrastructure Training Program begins January 10, 2025. There are 10 virtual sessions on Fridays from 10:00 to noon. The sessions are free and members are encouraged to participate. (Joan sent a link following the meeting.)

b. Resource Management – (David)

- A long-term goal for the Village is establishment of a microgrid – a local electrical system that can generate its own power, store it, and use it when needed.
- c. Green Team Update – Planning for 2025 – (GT - Adam)
 - The goal is Bronze certification in 2025 and Silver certification in 2026.
- d. Finance – (Justin J)
 - GR still has a balance of funds of approximately \$17,000 (with annual revenue of approximately \$4,000).

Future Events (5 minutes)

17. Future Meeting Dates 2024/2025: December 5, January 9, 2025, February 6, 2025, March 6, 2025 Bergen Hub meeting in Ridgewood on January 27, 2025

18. Other/New Business

- The proposed school busing expansion was brought up at the joint meeting with Parks and Recreation and will be raised at the Board of Education meeting in a few weeks.