

GREEN RIDGEWOOD MEETING

October 10, 2024, 7:30-9:30 PM

RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE

Attendees: Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair, Beth Gould Creller – Vice Chair, Nurhan Ezik, Justin Manger, Joan Hubertus, Peter Jerdee, Bill Armbruster, Jill Fasano (Village Staff Member), Frank Mortimer (Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board Member), Saurabh Dani (Board of Education Member) Vivian Ewell (Student Liaison); **Green Team:** Mike Faherty – Chair, Adam Peterseil, Alina Mordkovich, Luly Melarti, Manpreet Tyagi; **Guests:** Miles Luo (RHS), Carolyn Jacoby, Susan Ruane, Ava Delmonaco (student), Walter Rothaug

Administration

1. Welcome, membership update, and Attendee Introductions
 - Bill Armbruster – new member of Green Ridgewood
 - Membership of Green Ridgewood and Green Team is at full capacity
 - The minutes of the June 6, 2024 and September 12, 2024 meetings are approved unanimously.

Updates/Discussion/Strategy

2. Village Council Liaison Report (presented by the Chair in Pam Perron's absence)
 - At the Village Council meeting last night, the Council passed an ordinance to increase the fines for overgrown tree wells in the Central Business District and also increased the fines town-wide for people who let weeds grow higher than 10 inches.
 - At the View on Crest Road, the Council awarded a contract for \$38,919 to a landscaper to clear the site and replant with screening material and mulch to give residents below a buffer. The problem is flooding downstream that eventually leads to HoHoKus Brook and invasive trees that block views from above (tree of heaven, which also attracts invasive lantern flies that feed on it).
 - The Council awarded a contract for \$97,645 for resodding and resurfacing of the lower Hawes field and alleviating flooding.
 - Rescinded the temporary contract with Atlantic Coast Recycling and entered into a three-year contract with them now that they have rebuilt after the fire.
 - The Village has taken possession of the Town Garage on Franklin Avenue. The building will be demolished soon, probably by Christmas or before. Seller will get its first payment when the building is down. Then the site has to sit 2 years before final testing. If the site passes, the seller will then get the \$300,000 balance of the purchase price.
 - On October 19 at 9:00 am., the Shade Tree Commission is planting saplings in the Somerville school district. Members are encouraged to participate. at Somerville Parking Lot (S. Pleasant).

- The Council passed 3 bond ordinances to build 3 more PFAS treatment facilities – Main in Glen Rock, Eastside in Ridgewood and Mountain in Wyckoff).

3. Ridgewood Water Report–Boil water Advisory & communication plan (Jill)

- On September 18, a boil water advisory was issued by RW because the water pressure went below 20 psi in very isolated areas. The boil water alert went out to a larger area out of caution and because of DEP guidance.
- Because of prioritization of PFAS remediation, RW capital improvements were halted that would have prevented this from occurring.
- The main problem is communications. RW and the Village use the Everbridge reverse 911 system. Approximately 5,500 of 8,100 homes were signed up to receive alerts, so not everyone got them.
- Now RW is putting email addresses for everyone it could find into the system, i.e., moving from an opt-in to an opt-out method. Approximately 3,500 homes have been added; 64 have opted out. This is for emergency alert purposes only. RW is still working on improving communications for residents of the other 3 communities it services.
- The main cause of the low pressure was over watering and lack of regard for the watering rules. People have been watering more because we have a 3-inch rain deficit [year-to-date].
- Ridgewood enforces the watering rules. After the first violation a warning is issued, after the second a ticket with an \$85 fine.
- Glen Rock is letting RW enforce the rules by writing tickets there. RW is in discussions with Midland Park and Wyckoff to try to get their agreement to that too.
- A staff member at RW is regularly monitoring the watering violations reporting email address now. This has gotten better since June. Enforcement inspections occur Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays between 4:00 and 7:00 a.m. and are conducted by mostly RW staff, as well as the Village building inspector and public works inspector.
- David met with Richard, Jill and Mike Coors about how to improve communications. The key message is conservation and being cognizant of putting PFAS, pesticides and other harmful substances into the ground that will come back through the water system later. It is important to build consumer awareness; studies show chemicals are overused in suburbia even more than in agriculture.

4. Columbia Student Recommendations – next steps

a. Rain Barrels (Frank)

- The program for subsidized purchase of up to 100 rain barrels by Ridgewood residents has launched. Rain barrels was one of the Columbia students’ key short-term recommendations to address flooding.

- Backyard Living will sell the barrels at a \$25 discount, GR will write BL one reimbursement check.
 - Frank got valuable input on the flier from several GR members. The flier presents it as primarily a water conservation measure (which it is), and less as a flood mitigation measure.
 - The Shade Tree Commission and Pam Perron and Siobhan Winograd on the Village Council will promote it too. It will also be featured in the forthcoming GR newsletter, and everyone is encouraged to post it on their social media pages.
 - Orders for the barrels are already being taken. They will physically arrive at Backyard Living in November. The barrels include a kit for installation by drilling a hole rather than cutting the drain.
- b. Decarbonization/Energy Grant and Measurement (Beth, David)
- As discussed in the September GR meeting, the Village has received a \$10,000 community energy planning grant from Sustainable Jersey. It will be used to get use measurements and flooding information. We are trying hard to make this happen, but there are roadblocks. We need a designated person in Village Hall to work with us on this.
 - A consultant can be hired to figure out how much and what kind of energy the Village is using in Village buildings and its vehicle fleet.
 - There is an opportunity to work with Rutgers Cooperative Extension on the flooding issues, particularly in HoHoKus Brook and the Saddle River.
 - Jill noted that PSE&G program has replaced all the lights in one building. They just do the installation but are not expected to help with the measurements project (comparing the utility bills). Inefficient Village buildings are low-hanging fruit for improving the Village carbon footprint.
- c. Food Scrap Grant Application (David)
- The Village has applied for a USDA \$150,000 grant to expand the food scrap program.
 - The existing pilot program under which up to 200 residents receive scrap containers to store and deliver their food scraps to the recycling center is still undersubscribed. With the expansion, the goal is to increase this to 500 residents/containers, about 6 dropoff stations around the Village, and the option of weekly pickups at home for a small monthly fee.
 - Several members participating in the pilot program noted a problem is that the scraps rot quickly in the container and a general foul odor. A possible solution used elsewhere (e.g., in Sweden) is to place the scraps in a leaf bag container so that it aerates. Susan noted the

Borough of Queens has a large pilot program that has been expanded to the outer boroughs of NYC. It uses brown rat proof containers.

- David will try to set up regular meetings between Sean Hamlin and the Resource Management subcommittee. Luly and other members who have input to provide on the food scrap program are encouraged to participate in those meetings or email Sean directly with their input.

5. Bergen County Outreach/New Columbia Project (David)

- a. David met with Craig Dorsett (Chief of Staff, Bergen County Executive and also acting commissioner of parks) as part of an effort to build a stronger working relationships with the County. Lucine Beylerian who works on renewable energy projects for Bergen County, and is a Ridgewood resident was also in attendance.

- Bergen County acknowledged that the park is in serious need of improvement. The river banks are being ripped to shreds and the sides of the pathways falling apart. Craig is working on finding additional resources to address the concerns and participate in the project noted immediately below.

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

- Alina and David have been talking about developing Saddle River Park as a model sustainable park as another potential project with Columbia. Bergen County owns Saddle River Park (DEP owns the waterway) so the County has direct responsibility for it, which provides a foundation for getting County engagement.
- We are trying to bring the 6 adjacent towns, the County, and Bergen Hub together to figure out how to fix the river and park and turn it into something beautiful. Alina will draft a proposal for Columbia, Joan, David, Pam, Mike and Frank will provide feedback. The goal is to send the proposal to Professor Cohen at Columbia (Dean of the Graduate School of International and Public Affairs) by October 28 (the next deadline). The proposal will have park use, flooding and nature components (e.g., making it more pollinator-friendly). Other parties for this project would include NJDEP and potentially other communities impacted by flooding such as Lodi.
- The project would take place in early 2025 with implementation of recommendations over a few years. Money for the improvements would need to be appropriated.

- c. Future meeting with NJ Assemblywoman Lisa Swain and others (Joan)

- Saurabh discussed a meeting with Mark Schwarz (superintendent) and Richard Matthews (the newly appointed business administrator) on formalizing lines of communication between GR and the Board of Education. An invitation to a forthcoming meeting is expected.
- RHS got permission from PSE&G to put vegetation on one corner of the RHS football stadium.
- The High School Green Club has had excellent retention of new members so far this year.
- Willard School wants to conduct an Earth Day assembly, and the possibility of a joint elementary schools Earth Day booth on food audits is being discussed.
- Saurabh raised the idea of Aramark, which has a services contract with Ridgewood Public Schools, entering into a separate contract with the Village. It could work on temperature measurements, etc. for the measurements project. There was general agreement that would be a good idea. Some of the \$10,000 grant could be applied to this.
- The school district is working on replacement of the Ridge and Hawes Schools' 1950s-era HVAC systems, hopefully with heat pump systems. Mitsubishi has a 40% nonprofit discount on its heat pumps. The school district will get pricing in a few weeks; Saurabh will keep GR apprised. Beth will attend the meeting next Monday at the Education Center, to show GR's support for the project and talk about how it ties into GR's goals.
- There is a pending proposal to convert the Ben Franklin Middle School sports field to artificial turf. There was general agreement that the Health Department, GR or someone else needs to weigh in on this proposal. One issue it raises is the greater risk of players overheating. It was noted that Montclair has put a 3-year moratorium on turf fields, and that there is a lawsuit over PFAS in a turf field installed in Portsmouth, New Hampshire after the city was promised it would be PFAS-free.
- There is a proposal to raise the height of the bridge on the west side of the RHS football field.

7. Communications Newsletter (Justin M) – 10-15 minutes

- The draft newsletter #3 has been circulated. Justin summarized its contents: Leave the Leaves, Resilience, Flooding and Stormwater, Rain Barrels for Ridgewood, Miles Luo Spotlight, and Introducing "Walter," Op-Ed Columnist.
- We would like to come up with additional characters/voices (in addition to Walter) to use in future newsletters.
- This newsletter is going into the next weekly Village email blast and also directly to the 200 email addresses of residents who have opted in. It is also being posted to the GR website and it can be reposted; and it is linked on Ridgewood Instagram.
- We are still in discussion with Keith about the possibility of a stand alone email blast of the newsletter to the entire Village email list.

- Justin will give the final newsletter to Carol on Monday.
8. Parks and Recreation Joint Meeting on October 22 (Frank)
 - The agenda for this joint meeting was set on a Zoom this morning. It will be the first joint meeting between GR and Parks and Recreation. All members are encouraged to attend and we would like at least all the subcommittee chairs to be there. The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. on October 22 right next door to this meeting room.
 - We hope this will lead to production collaborations.
 9. Climate Fresk – Next steps (David)
 - David Reached out to Alexis Milcent several weeks ago and gave him direct feedback that three hours was too long, and that the presentation was too heavy on the science and not heavy enough on what people can do in their own community to address climate change.
 - Alexis was very receptive to this feedback and is now giving us an opportunity to work with Climate Fresk to redesign what Fresk is in the United States. A 1-hour to 1-1/2 hour zoom call is being scheduled for us to provide our input.
 10. Subcommittees – Goals/Membership (to the extent not already covered above)
 - a. Resilience, Flooding and Stormwater – (Joan)
 - Joan attended a training presentation hosted by the NJ League of Conservation Voters (NJLCV), who are policy advocates working with ANJEC and New Jersey Future. Joan will circulate a link to the hour-long presentation. It addresses pushback on DEP’s latest policy changes. Key points include that the warmer the air, the more water it can hold (for example, an increase of 1 degree Celsius means the air can hold 7% more moisture) and there is a heightened risk of flooding and a need for flood preparedness.
 - As part of its 2024 stormwater series, ANJEC gave a presentation on how municipalities can create stormwater utilities to fund flooding prevention projects. East Brunswick was the first to establish a stormwater utility and Maplewood is next.
 - The next part of the series covers stormwater ordinances updating and MS4 (inventory on impervious space and impermeable surfaces), on Zoom next Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. RFS subcommittee members were asked to attend.
 - The whole series costs \$25. Episodes are posted on YouTube about a week after the live presentation.
 - b. Green Building & Sustainability – (Beth)
 - The subcommittee met and discussed its goals for this year, principally to move forward with measuring the Village’s carbon

footprint so that usage goals can be set. A google drive has been set up but not populated with data yet. Utility bills from last year covering power and water usage are needed. There is a list of buildings, but an inventory of their heat sources etc. is still needed. The Village's fleet of vehicles is the biggest problem/opportunity to tackle, because there is no automatic way to track usage and getting data will be labor intensive. A consultant should be hired for that.

- The focus of the first grant will be on helping Rich finish EV station setup at RW.
 - Jill noted that RW might buy an EV for smaller vehicles, but not for their trucks.
 - None of the new vehicles approved for acquisition by the Village are EVs. One reason for this is that if a vehicle in the municipal fleet is designated for snow removal (even secondarily), it cannot be replaced with an EV.
- The \$10,000 grant is only for research and information gathering. At the end of year, when we show Sustainable Jersey our plan, this can open us up to a \$100,000 grant.
- c. Resource Management and Conservation – (David)
 - It has been renamed Resource Management and Conservation subcommittee.
 - David will set up a meeting with Sean Hamlin and is waiting for information from him.
- d. Green Team Update – Planning for 2025 – (Mike)
 - For the 2025 cycle, GT will either resubmit for bronze certification or try to get back to silver. If we wait, many of our existing actions expire. Bronze requires 150 points, silver requires 350 points. We were at 260 points but some of those actions have been expiring.
 - One subcommittee member will be designated to focus on inputting into the system while the rest of the members develop the information to input.
 - We are awaiting word on when Sustainable Jersey will open up the system or the schedule for 2025.
- e. Finance – (David presented in Justin Jonsson's absence)
 - GR has a balance of approximately \$17,000 (before upcoming expenditures on the rain barrel subsidy)

Future Events (5 minutes)

11. Future Meeting Dates 2024/2025: October 22 (Joint meeting with Parks and Recreation), November 7, December 5, January 9, 2025, February 6, 2025. Likely Bergen Hub meeting in Ridgewood on January 27, 2025

12. Other/New Business

- Army Corps of Engineers – Per Susan, some appropriation is going through that will dictate how much the Corps can spend on our flooding projects. We will learn more in 2 weeks. We have made clear that GR expects to be actively involved.
- Saurabh: All schools added filters compatible for PFAS removal. Every school has at least 2 filters that filter out PFAS. The school district is awaiting pricing on replacing filters in all the other fountains set up for bottles.

The meeting ended at 9:35 PM.

Submitted by Peter Jerdee, Secretary.