

GREEN RIDGEWOOD MEETING

September 12, 2024, 7:30-9:30 PM

RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE

Attendees: Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair, Beth Gould Creller – Vice Chair, Justin Jonsson, Peter Jerdee, Nurhan Ezik, Justin Manger, Joan Hubertus, Pamela Perron (Village Council Liaison), Jill Fasano (Village Staff Member), Vivian Ewell (Student Liaison); **Green Team:** Mike Faherty – Chair, Adam Peterseil, Mark Kaplan, Alina Mordkovich, Luly Melarti, Manpreet Tyagi; **Guests:** Miles Luo (RHS), George Wolfson, Susan Ruane.

Administration

1. Chair’s welcome, membership update, and attendee introductions
 - Peter Jerdee – new member of Green Ridgewood
 - Mark Kaplan – new member of Green Team
 - Julia Grant - new Green Team student liaison
 - Yvone Nava had to resign from Green Ridgewood due to increased work commitments. The Chair expressed appreciation for her long-running service to the committee. Deliberations have begun on how to fill the vacancy she has left. Peter Jerdee has agreed to take on the secretarial function, which Yvone had filled, on a trial basis.
2. Approval of meeting minutes
 - The draft June 6, 2024 minutes do not include attendees. Approval of the minutes is postponed pending determination of attendees.
 - July 11, 2024 minutes are approved unanimously.

Updates/Discussion/Strategy

3. Village Council Liaison Report (Pam)
 - The Village now owns the Town Garage by eminent domain. The seller will be doing the environmental cleanup there, not the Village. The building will come down soon, Seller is taking out the lift, backfilling the holes. The Village’s signal division will take out the walls. TBD what level of remediation there needs to be depending on intended use. The degree of contamination is not known yet. Preference expressed to take the adjoining parking lot property (or a portion of it) and make a park out of the two properties. While this would not generate any tax revenue, all the new housing units in the last few years have created a need for more park space, and there’s a lot of excess office space downtown already. Part of the purchase price paid after demolition, the rest on the back end when

the site is cleaned up to DEP's satisfaction. Joan suggested that given the amount of impervious surface downtown, detention basins could be put into the property to catch some of the runoff. Mike noted that historically there was a stream there and there was concern that could spread contamination from the site.

- Schedler – Significant environmental testing is being performed at the site. The Village will do whatever remediation the EPA tells us to do. There is no timeframe for when we will hear back from EPA, there are no findings or a plan yet.

4. NJ Community Energy Grant (Pam)

- The Village has received a \$10,000 grant for environmental planning. Pam has asked the Village Manager if the grant can be used to hire a consultant for the measurements project, and checking with our grant writer to confirm that use is within the scope of the grant application. If not, then maybe the grant could be used to install EV chargers.

5. Columbia Student Recommendations – next steps

a. Measurement (David)

- A few members of GR met with Keith and Michael in July and again in August to make sure measurement data we get is useful for certification. This is an important issue to keep on the front burner.
- Beth noted we asked Keith asked for energy bills, fleet vehicle use information, a use inventory of all Village buildings and data on how they are heated and cooled. We would like to have another point of contact so we don't have to always go to Keith for these things. David noted this was one of Columbia's recommendations, and demonstrating we are implementing their recommendations will be viewed positively for a potential new project.

b. Flooding

- Rain barrels (Pam) — Backyard Living (BL) has offered two models, one costing \$150 per barrel and the other \$175. Pam proposed that Green Ridgewood subsidize individual resident's purchases of rain barrels by \$25 dollars.
 - Both models are attractive. Frank Mortimer is preparing a flyer showing and describing both options. Frank wants some input from us on what the message should be. A discussion of the messaging ensued. It was proposed that, given the barrels' limited utility as a flooding measure, the messaging should highlight that it is for drought prevention too. There was general agreement that the flyer should be put into the GR newsletter.
 - An important practical issue is how the barrel can be hooked up for irrigation. It is more suitable for flower bed irrigation than for lawns, given the low

water pressure, but the pressure can be increased by elevated installation of the barrel.

- Rollout of the barrel purchase program is expected this winter or next spring. Mike suggested ordering a test barrel and trying it out this fall.
 - The possible mechanics of the GR subsidy was discussed. If the interest level is sufficient, BL may be willing to sell at a \$25 discount and be reimbursed by GR in the aggregate, rather than GR issuing reimbursement checks to individual customers.
 - Saddle River Park (David) – There is potential for having Columbia students work on a model park for Saddle River Park. David is meeting initially with Acting Parks Commissioner and County Exec. Chief of Staff Craig Dorsett with plans for a follow up meeting to bring others into the discussion. Flooding and safety are the two most pressing concerns. Columbia could help us tie this project in with not only flood prevention (a lot of bad flooding impacts six communities with total population of 120,000), but also decarbonization (microgrid).
 - Alina will talk with Professor Cohen at Columbia soon, and then will write a proposal and send it to Cohen’s secretary. Craig Dorsett said he wants to learn more about what Columbia can do for us.
 - Mike has talked to people in Fair Lawn who said the path is a safety problem because it is not designed correctly. There has been money in past to put bike lanes in. Mike also noted the project should be described as more like High Line Park than Central Park – i.e., more about nature and ecology, incorporating natural vegetation, helping pollinators, incorporating rain gardens to absorb runoff, etc. In a public comment period In June, David brought up the issue of safety to the Bergen County Commissioners.
- c. Decarbonization (Pam, Beth, David)
- The proposal for extending school bus eligibility from a 2-mile radius from the school to a ¾-mile radius, and utilizing electric buses, would be more impactful for elementary school and middle school students than high school students (in part because of after-school activities). It was noted that the biggest challenge is the general shortage of bus drivers. Saurabh Dani was going to follow up with Mark Schwarz (Superintendent) about it.
 - There was a discussion about the problem of so many students being picked up from schools by car, and how to determine the size of the problem. Justin M. noted there are safety and pollution aspects to the problem, as well as the potential for time savings for parents and building community by fostering interaction between students and between parents through busing. He intends to attend the next weekly or biweekly HSA coffee meeting and raise this.

- Leaf blowers – Mike noted Sustainable Jersey now gives credits (points) for restrictions on leaf blowers, including for issuing promotional materials, having a landscaper’s registry, and having an ordinance banning gas leaf blowers town-wide, all year or seasonal.
- d. Food Scrap Grant Application (David)
- David talked to Sean Hamlin about expanding the Village food scraps program. Sean submitted a grant application (\$150,000) with the Department of Agriculture within the last week or two. The idea is to dramatically expand upon the existing pilot program for food scrap pickup which requires bringing food scraps to be dropped off at the recycling center. A new program could include an opt-in option for weekly pick-up from the driveway for a small fee as well as free drop-off sites throughout the village. The existing program is still a pilot; currently, Johanna Luttrell, recycling coordinator, gives any interested Village resident a scraps bucket.
 - Regarding the recycling program generally, Nurhan suggested we ask Sean whether the waste recycling could be picked up from both sides of the street in one run rather than doing one side at a time. It was noted this may depend on what is being picked up and how wide the street is. This could be looked at when there is more data. David noted we should meet with Sean on a regular basis to ask these sorts of questions.
6. Army Corps of Engineers – Next Steps (Joan)
- The work continues to get funding to start the recommended projects on flooding. Joan has told Keith that we want to be actively engaged with the Corps throughout this process on both the short term and the longer term projects.
7. Bergen Hub and County Outreach (David)
- The Steering Committee meets this week. We are trying to make Bergen Hub meaningful and develop a brand and recognition for its work.
 - We have had direct interactions with other Bergen County communities, including Saddle River and Rochelle Park, to talk about resilience and climate. The Ridgefield Park densifier is not functioning due to staffing issues. Ridgewood has the only other densifier in the county. Sean says we have agreements with 6 other communities for recycling their Styrofoam. Ridgewood is staffing the densifier now. David will ask about other potential agreements.
 - For discussion on Saddle River Park, see 5.b. above.
8. School Activities including new rain gardens (Miles and Vivian)
- The students who developed the rain gardens project last year graduated before the project could be implemented. Miles is now trying to get new students from

his AP Environmental Studies course involved. GR approved \$420 in project match funding for the rain gardens.

- The High School Green Club has held its first meeting of the school year.
- Discussions with Damian Smith about additional bike racks for the middle schools and the high school are ongoing.
- Miles is coordinating on a sustainability meeting in mid-October.
- Two large trees behind the bleachers were recently taken out despite no evidence they were dying and no arborist report. Miles did not learn this until after the fact. Damian acknowledged there needs to be better communication.
- David (and Saurabh) plan to talk to Mark about trying to build a bigger role for GR offering our expertise and working together with Mark.
- Vivian continues to work on schools recycling issues. It is challenging to get statistics on recycling in the schools; Miles will keep trying.

9. Communications Newsletter (Justin M)

- Newsletter #3 will include pieces on water conservation, rain barrels, the food scrap pilot program, leave the leaves, and the Columbia grad master plan, among others. Miles will be the featured member. We are aiming for its release in end September to early October.
- We're trying to put some polling into the newsletter and need to figure out a polling mechanism (e.g. Survey Monkey). Possible polling topics include school buses and leaf blowers.
- Peter suggested we figure out whether it's possible to send the GR newsletters out directly to the 7,000 resident emails the Village blasts out to, in addition to the newsletter being linked in the Village blasts. This will need to be discussed with Carol.
- Pam noted it would help to have resident letters to the Village discussing concerns about leaf blowers, to counteract the roughly 200 letters opposing leaf blower restrictions.

10. Meeting with Ridgewood Water Re: Improving Communications (Jill)

- On Monday, 9/9, Jill, Rich, Mike and David met to discuss how to improve Ridgewood Water's public communications. In July, DEP awarded RW its inaugural Our Water's Worth It award for water conservation and addressing PFAS, but some people have dismissed it as bogus. RW is asking GR for help with communications on the topics of water conservation and water quality (especially PFAS), including to build resident awareness of the impact of their personal water practices.
- There was a broad-ranging discussion of water conservation and quality and messaging ideas. Joan noted promoting grass seeds requiring less water. George

stressed educating on the importance of conservation, not just means of conservation.

- Adam raised the widespread flouting of irrigation rules around town. Jill stated Ridgewood Water does physical compliance checks Monday, Thursday and Friday mornings. Joan suggested doing a case study on the recent event when the water tanks quickly emptied out and noted there must be data available to help determine the cause. There should be data on how much water people use relative to their lot sizes. Mike raised the importance of educating, e.g., that when the grass is cut less frequently it does not need as much water. Beth suggested creating a campaign around water conservation, similar to last year's "leave the leaves" campaign, giving the basics of water management in your home. This could also be done with energy use and other topics.
- There was a broad discussion of education and enforcement around water conservation, and there was general agreement that both were important.
- Ideas to incentivize conservation included variable pricing – e.g., charge more in August, or the more you use, the higher rate you pay. Pam noted Ridgewood Water started looking into variable pricing, but then PFAS became the focus. George suggested creating usage standards and noted the possibility of electronic monitoring through the water meters.
- Ideas for the ad campaign included a poster with statistics, Super Science Saturday at RHS, making it an Earth Day theme, and a water feature in the GR newsletter, a banner on the train trestle, and reposts of small pieces of information on Facebook. Manpreet, Justin and Mike will work on creating posts. The focus of the campaign should be not on RW (which some people unfairly view as tainted because of the PFAS issue), but on best practices for responsible citizens. David stated and it was agreed that the Resource Management and Communications Subcommittees should work together on this messaging.

11. Subcommittees – Goals/Membership

- David stated that each subcommittee should meet monthly between the monthly GR meetings. One GR member should chair each subcommittee, and at least one Green Team member should be on each subcommittee, for purposes of Sustainable Jersey credits. Non-members are also invited to be on subcommittees, and several already are.
- a. Resilience, Flooding and Stormwater (Joan)
- Joan handed out and walked the Committee through a draft of the RF&S Subcommittee Goals to be discussed further at the next subcommittee meeting. The individual goals discussed included participation in Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permitting; conducting a study to understand the impact of storms comprising 3 inches of rain in a 24-hour period or 1.25 inches of rain in a

1 hour period; a sponsor enhanced stormwater ordinance in 2025; submission of Sustainable Jersey Artifacts; and revisiting the dam at Upper Ridgewood Tennis Club (DEP has told URTC the dam is not being maintained properly, and Chris (Village Engineer) asked whether GR wants to get involved)

- It was noted that the \$10,000 energy grant can only be used for sustainability, not flooding. Joan noted grant application writing as an additional goal for the RF&S subcommittee.
- b. Resource Management (David)
- Areas for the subcommittee to focus on this year include food scraps, water quality, and communications over water/RW issues. The subcommittee will have a meeting before the next Committee meeting to talk about goals.
- c. Green Team Update – Planning for 2025 (Mike)
- Green Team is embedded in everything Green Ridgewood does and is not a subcommittee with its own projects. GT members' focus should be on the important projects in the (other) subcommittees that the GT members can help move forward. Separately, GT will continue to have a quarterly check-in on Sustainable Jersey crediting.
- d. Other
- George raised the need for a better relationship between the Village and PSE&G and asked what GR can do to help improve it, given the importance of PSE&G to many issues GR works on. David asked whether it would better to do it at the Bergen County level. Jill will put David in touch with Donnette Gurley, a PSE&G public relations person she interacts with.

Future Events

12. Future Meeting Dates: October 10, October 22 (Joint meeting with Parks and Recreation), November 7, and December 5, 2024; January 9, 2025. There will likely be a Bergen Hub meeting in Ridgewood on January 27, 2025.

Other/New Business

- A motion to approve David Refkin's attendance at the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions' (ANJEC) annual conference in Mount Holly on September 27 and to reimburse him for up to \$150 in mileage and attendance expenses was unanimously approved.
- A motion to appropriate \$2500 out of GR's funds to provide a subsidy of \$25 for the first 100 Ridgewood residents to purchase a rain barrel, for residential use only and limited to one barrel per resident, was approved by a vote of 14 in favor and 2 opposed.

Submitted by Peter Jerdee