

GREEN RIDGEWOOD MINUTES
April 9, 2026
RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE

Attendees: Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair; Justin Manger - Vice chair; Beth Creller; Bill Armbruster, Jane Rouse, Peter Jerdee; Pam Perron – Village Council liaison; Julia Buckley – Parks and Rec liaison; Miles Luo - RHS staff, Anika Mukkatira -- Student liaison. Green Team: Geri Atwood; Joe Ferrante, Rich Krauser, Sean Elliott; Manpreet Tyagi; Julia Grant – Student liaison; Mary Lou Handy – BOE liaison;
Guests: Devyn Letscher and Gia Battaglia - student guest); George Wolfson; Frank Farrell; Carolyn Jacoby; Joan Hubertus (for part of the meeting)

Administration

1. Welcome and Attendee Introductions. Julia Buckley and Frank Farrell introduced themselves. Julia is a nutritionist and longtime Ridgewood resident with four children. Frank is the Environmental Justice chair for the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood, which will be putting on a production of “Rachel Carson Speaks” on April 17-18.
2. We approved the March 5th meeting minutes, incorporating suggestions from Peter Jerdee and Joe Ferrante.

Updates/Discussion/Strategy

3. Chair Report, Green Ridgewood highlights (David) –

Mark Kaplan will be moving to Brooklyn so there will be a vacancy on the Green Team.

4. Village Council Liaison Report (Pam)

Slow Mow May – We suggest that residents mow their lawns every two weeks rather than every week. This is better for the pollinators.

The Village is starting remediation of the soil at the Schedler property. The goal is to have it done by graduation. There was a meeting at Village Hall on Monday evening where residents expressed their views.

The two new food waste bins will be delivered in two weeks. Sean Hamlin, the Village’s recycling director, would like Green Ridgewood’s logo on one of the bins to reflect its financial contribution.

The Village Council approved the 2026 budget. This is the most difficult budget that anyone on staff can remember. It translates to an increase of \$195 a year for the average homeowner. The healthcare expense for staff is astronomical. This was after a 22% increase in healthcare costs last year.

We have a field trip on April 20 for staff members to see Maplewood's electric leaf blowers and to discuss them with Maplewood's DPW staff. The head of the Village's streets division, Mike Junta, will go, along with Matt Andreula from Parks and Recreation, as well as Keith Kazmark, the Village manager, and Pam. (Note: It was subsequently postponed because the Maplewood employees were scheduled for training that day. It will be rescheduled for May.)

The Village received a grant from NJIT thanks to the new chief of engineering, James McGrath. NJIT will send us an engineer at no cost to the Village for two years to work on flooding and stormwater issues.

5. NJ Climate Resiliency Planning Grant/Saddle River Watershed Alliance (David).

Summary of March 14th Meeting hosted by Green Ridgewood - Representatives from 6 towns attended, along with Captain Bill Sheehan and Hugh Carola from Hackensack Riverkeeper, and Laurie Howard from the Passaic River Coalition. We spent three hours in discussion. Topics included feedback from the NJ DEP on the failed application from Bergen County in which the towns participated. We agreed on a consistent framework for the six towns and that this will be an ad hoc group for the time being. Thanks to the mayor of Rochelle Park, David has developed a relationship with Bridget Provost, Gov. Sherrill's senior aide for intergovernmental affairs, in Bergen and Hudson counties. David mentioned that Bill Sheehan brought up the idea of creating a stormwater utility. Rochelle Park has a meeting on it tonight, and Hackensack Riverkeeper will have a meeting next week to discuss rain gardens and stormwater utilities. Pam and David met with Keith Kazmark to discuss strategy. He said we should have a discussion with the county to ask if they want to be the prime sponsor and whether they will work with us and use our expertise. Lodi is interested in joining the coalition. There are 17 towns in this county that are on the Saddle River or one of its tributaries. David said there was a real sense of enthusiasm about the alliance but that it would be a considerable commitment for Ridgewood if we are the prime sponsor.

Next Steps with the County – The Bergen County Hazard Mitigation Study was put together by a consultant who did a very sloppy job. For example, it listed the populations of many towns incorrectly, e.g., Ridgewood was listed as having a population of just 13,000 (instead of 26,000), while Harrington Park was listed as having 44,000 residents, instead of 5,000.

6. Potential New Columbia University Study – The focus will be on emergency preparedness.

7. Super Science Saturday (Miles, Julia, Anika) – Rich, Jane, George, Peter, Joe and David were all there. We thought it was successful. Jane said we need to be more capable of discussing topics that we're highlighting at our table. Miles said the Ridgewood High School table gave away a lot of wildflower seeds.

8. Parks & Recreation Joint Projects

We had an extensive discussion on funding for remediation of the rain gardens at Habernickel Park, Vets Field and Graydon Park. The first two were relatively simple because they are easier and did not involve a substantial expenditure. Graydon is more complicated because a lot of remediation needs to be done due to a new outbreak of knotweed, an invasive plant that is especially difficult to eradicate, either by hand or mechanically, because it grows very rapidly and its roots are very thick. One option is a controlled use of herbicides. The best guess is that it would take two applications of an aquatic herbicide, one per season. Another possibility is goats. Pam has spoken with a woman from [Green Goats Rhinebeck](#). The area would have to be fenced, and humans could not go in. One person argued that goats would just get the top of the knotweed, but not the rhizome. Also, the goats would cost \$7,000 per year. The aquatic herbicide is very specific to water and is not toxic to fish. The Parks department has used it at Kings Pond for a couple of years and said this is the best strategy. If we do nothing about the knotweed, it will just get worse. The aquatic herbicide would cost \$1,200 per application. Some members, however, argued that we should not be supporting the use of any herbicide.

In the end we agreed to hold two votes. The first was on allocating a total of \$560 from Green Ridgewood funds for completing the work at Habernickel and Vets Field. This was approved unanimously. The second motion was on allocating \$1,200 for one application of aquatic herbicide at Graydon. We voted 7-6 in favor of this motion. People not supporting the use of herbicides were concerned about the potential public health impacts and contradictory science.

9. Sports Equipment Recycling– Beth

An organization called [Gear Give](#) would handle this. The goal is to allow teams and families to donate used sports equipment and keep it from going into a landfill. This would be up Sean Hamlin's alley at the Recycling Center. Gear Give would provide a bin where residents and teams could deposit the equipment they no longer need or want. Gear Give would tally up the equipment and write a check.

10. 2026 Daffodil Festival/Earth Day Fair.

It will be Sunday, April 26, from 10:30 to 2:30, rain or shine.

Sean plans to have one of the new composting bins there. We will have four posters there, promoting Sustainable Yards, Project 1,000 Acres, Slow-Mow May and leaf blowers.

Justin and the communications subcommittee are working on spinning wheel questions. There will be a Green Ridgewood scavenger hunt with stops at the tables of 10 organizations that are leaders in sustainability. First prize will be an electric lawn mower. Second prize will be an electric leaf blower. Third prize will be a rake and grass seed. Beth and Jane are working on the tie-in with the schools. David, School Superintendent Mark Schwarz and a local artist will judge the student posters. About half of us will be there in the morning (9 am to noon, including set-up) and the other half from 12 to 3. We have Green Ridgewood T-shirts. Everyone should wear them that day. The Daffy Dog parade will be at 12:30, but the line-up will be at 12 noon.

11. Students Update, Projects & Sustainability Day (Julia, Anika, Miles)

The student table on Earth Day will focus on invasive species and wildflower meadows. Sustainability Day at the high school will be Friday, April 24. Fifty-six students will be involved. Students in Miles's AP Environmental Science class will be going to Stokes State Forest on a field trip. Some of these students will go to Travell School on April 22 (Earth Day), while some others will go to Somerville School.

12. Resource Management & Conservation Subcommittee (Peter, Pam)

A. Leaf-Blower Strategy

As mentioned above there will be the April 20 meeting in Maplewood with municipal employees to discuss their use of electric-powered leaf blowers.

The upcoming issue of our newsletter, the Green Ridgewood Gazette, will have article on the advantages of electric leaf blowers over gas-powered equipment.

B. Food Scrap Program

We approved unanimously a motion to spend up to \$4,000 to supplement whatever the Village budget provides for two 65-gallon food scrap containers. They will be placed at Habernickel Park and behind the Stable. Residents have to apply to the Recycling Department to participate and receive a composting bucket. The goal is to have 800 households participating, up from around 300 now.

C. Skip the Stuff – Public Outreach

Peter and Pam met with the Chamber of Commerce on April 8 and had a good discussion. The Chamber will send a flyer about the initiative, now mandated by a state law that takes

effect Aug. 1, to its members. In addition, the Health Department will send information about the new mandate to every food vendor in the Village. Enforcement will be up to the County.

13. Green Team Meeting and Update (Joe)

Members met recently and talked about Sustainable Jersey. Ridgewood has a bronze certification, but it used to have silver. Five towns have gold medals -- Maplewood, Chatham, Princeton, Hillsborough and Readington.

Towns in our area that have silver include Oakland, Franklin Lakes, Fair Lawn, Paterson, Maywood, Rutherford, Ridgefield Park, and Oradell.

Geri, the Green Team chair, wants each member to take responsibility for three topics. George said we need to prioritize the write-ups. We won't be able to submit until the end of the year. The write-ups will go to Village Manager Keith Kazmark; he will assign them to the appropriate staff members for action. Pam encouraged Green Team members to submit photos with their write-ups.

Pam said Ridgewood can get Sustainable Jersey credits for Frank Farrell's play (Rachel Carson Speaks.)

14. Communications Subcommittee (Justin)

Justin will send the write-up for the GR newsletter to Carol Bialkowski, the Village's communications manager, on Monday (April 13). Hopefully it will go out next Friday.

15. GR Event – Trail Blazing (in conjunction with the NY-NJ Trail Conference) on Sunday, May 3, at Habernickel; Sunday, July 12 at Grove Park; and Sunday, Oct. 4 at Kings Pond.

16. ANJEC Training, Sustainable NJ Conference (David)

Peter attended three of the ANJEC training sessions and David two of them. David thought they were well done. The [New Jersey Sustainability Summit](#) will be Friday, May 15, at the former Bell Works complex in Holmdel from 9 am to 4 pm.

17. Green Building/Sustainability Subcommittee (David, Justin)

Energy Audit/Sustainable NJ Grant status – Carol Bialkowski continues to work with Sustainable New Jersey. We're trying to get info from the Village about energy use at Village buildings.

18. Future Meeting Dates: Daffodil Festival/Earth Day Fair -April 26; May 7, June 4, July 9.