

GREEN RIDGEWOOD MEETING

June 5, 2025, 7:30-9:30 PM

RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE

Attendees: Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair, Beth Gould Creller – Vice Chair, Joan Hubertus, Jane Rouse, Peter Jerdee, Justin Manger, Bill Armbruster, Pam Perron – Village Council liaison, Jill Fasano – Village Staff liaison, Saurabh Dani – Board of Education liaison, Vivian Ewell – Student liaison, Miles Luo – RHS Faculty; Green Team: Alina Mordkovich, Joe Ferrante, Manpreet Tyagi, Mark Kaplan, Geri Atwood, Julia Grant – Student liaison; guests: Maeve Schuller (student), Anika Mukkatira (student), Eleanor Leonard (student), Ariadna Karole (student), Emma Donovan (student). Kieran Ozaydin (student), Yuna Kim (student)

Administration

1. Welcome and Attendee Introductions
2. May 1st meeting minutes unanimously approved

Updates/Discussion/Strategy

3. Village Council Liaison Report (Pam)
 - In May, the Engineering Department together with Parks and Grace Church volunteers repaired Graydon and Habernickel rain gardens. Thank you to Joan for organizing this effort.
 - Ridgewood Beautification Team planted flowers in CBD.
 - Met with our Sustainable Jersey rep regarding the energy technical assistance grant.
 - Affordable housing – briefing from consultant next Monday, hearing at Planning Board on June 12. The Rutgers report on balancing affordable housing and sustainability needs and identifying all Ridgewood land available for affordable housing that does not encroach on flood zone will go to all Planning Board members.
 - Leaf blowers – the Council's ordinance working group is discussing a draft landscaper registry ordinance prepared by the Village Attorney and meets again on June 17.
 - Mike Tarleton of TLC Landscaping is giving a presentation at the James Rose Center this Saturday.
 - The Council authorized the acquisition of an underground easement at 535 E. Ridgewood Avenue for Ridgewood Water pipe to PFAS treatment facility.
 - N. Walnut and Franklin Avenue – smoothing over the big dig after successfully removing foundation of old building.

4. Columbia University: Bergen County Saddle River Project (Alina, David, Joan)

a. Project Overview/Columbia Team (Alina)

- A 9-week project partnering with a team of eleven students from Master's Program in Sustainability Management advised by Dr. Nancy Degnan, Chair, Columbia Univ. Water Center. Details contained in previously circulated proposal.
- Three key deliverables are a comprehensive environmental assessment, case studies (from US and abroad), and an implemental road map for transforming Saddle River Park.
- Milestones:
 - May 22 – RFS subcomm discussed data collection, brainstormed and created 6-page document for Columbia with various links to sources.
 - June 4: David and Alina met with Dr. Degnan and student manager and deputy manager, discussed scope, stakeholder engagement, etc.
- July 1 – midterm briefing
- August 11 -- final briefing (hybrid – Columbia in person and Zoom)
- End of August – Final report
- Roles: Alina provides resources for Saddle River Park, coordinates, provides feedback; David coordinates with local officials, agencies, and municipalities.
- Next steps: Data collection; coordinate student visit to the park; media outreach; weekly meetings with students.

b. Key Partners (David)

- Bergen County – working with Lucine Beylerian on data collection.
- DEP – met with Chief Strategy Officer, she is finding POCs to get us data.
- Five other adjoining communities – Glen Rock, Paramus, Fair Lawn, Saddle Brook and Rochelle Park; making progress through their environmental commissions/green teams. Most are now interested and engaged.

c. Data Needs (Joan)

- Already provided students with many base documents and reference materials.
- Need Park fiscal/budget data, information on how problems get reported and resolved and engagement with park users.

- Will run a lot of interviews, similar to last year's Columbia project. Currently developing questionnaires.

5. Sustainable New Jersey Conference – May 9 – Bill and David reported on highlights.

- Panel on expanding recycling –Monroe Township discussed their Center for Hard to Recycle Material, including stretchable plastic; they work with the company NexTrex. Terracycle claims to recycle almost everything, including juice pouches and chip bags. Java's Compost, an exhibitor, offers food scrap drop-off and pickup services for residential and commercial customers – a potential partner for Ridgewood.
- NJ Electrification Coaching Network offers free tutorials and information on electrifying homes with heat pumps, water heaters, dryers, weatherization, EV chargers, solar panels and induction ranges.
- The Garden State Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) Program helps commercial property owners and non-profits obtain low-cost long-term financing for energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation and resiliency improvements on their buildings and repay the investment through an additional charge/assessment similar to their real property tax bill. The municipality must opt in to the program.
- Panel on sustainable business practices included speakers on Wyckoff's certified green business program and DEP's Bureau of Sustainability whose services include small business assistance.
- There was a discussion on how MS4 works and resources for towns to help implement it. In Ridgewood's case, Engineering already has a map.
- Other topics included climate mitigation generally, heat islands, EV adoption (13% of new NJ vehicles sold), climate anxiety, climate education, and New Jersey Green Bank.
- NJ Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin and Sen. Bob Smith attended. Sen. Smith is very engaged in environmental issues. David and others discussed his leaf blower bill S217 as well as the climate change superfund bill, clean energy bill, and importance of solar to meet state climate goals. David and two others from Bergen Hub will meet with Sen. Smith in the coming weeks to discuss strategies for advancing these bills.
- Not all panels could be covered with two GR members in attendance, so we should consider more members attending next time.

6. Resource Management & Conservation Subcommittee

- The subcommittee met last night; had previously met about Columbia project.

a. Leaf Blowers

- The new Board of Education landscaping contract requires 4-stroke engines (bars 2-stroke engines)
- Joe spoke with landscapers in Maplewood (which has a new seasonal ban on gas leaf blowers) that also has a presence here. One uses ECHO, the other uses Stihl equipment. Also discussed equipment cost and cost impact on customers.

b. Skip The Stuff

- Seventeen communities in NJ have passed ordinances – businesses give out plastic utensils etc. only if customer asks for it. Minimal opposition because it saves businesses money and is effective.
 - A draft ordinance based on Maplewood's is being studied. David will inquire with Glen Rock about enforcement issues.

c. NJ Climate Superfund Act

- 3-5 municipalities in NJ passed resolutions in support of the Act, which would require businesses contributing to climate change to pay a portion of damages caused by it. About five states have passed such laws.

d. Schedler property – SHIPO decision

- The Village's plan was scheduled to come before NJ's Historical Sites Council in Trenton on June 19, but the Statewide Historic Preservation Office (SHIPO) had some critiques. No new hearing date has been set yet.
- SHIPO referred to seven items as potential to improve upon in the plan — most importantly, field size and compatibility of natural grass vs. turf. But this does not stop the project (RW was different because artifacts were present there).

e. General discussion on natural grass vs. artificial turf

- For Ben Franklin Middle School field, current plan is to expand the grass field – sports teams said they needed place to play when RHS Stadium and Stevens fields flooded. The design is done and discussions with potential contractors are in process. The sports teams have objected and asked for turf instead of grass. The issue will come to a public vote at the School Board.
- The common assumption that artificial turf is cheaper is false. For example, that does not take into account groundwater contamination caused by turf.

7. Students Update and Planning for BOE meeting (Students, Miles, David/Saurabh)

a. Student Projects Update, Plan for 2025-2026

- Mowed-over RHS wildflower meadow recovered; the one planted last fall is showing little growth. Goals are to share meadow photos every week to show progress and establish consistent signage at meadows throughout town.
- Rain gardens installations – Vets Field in process, Willard and Stevens are done. New native plant garden at Hawes (organized by Pollinator Pathways).
- AP classes are smaller this year, with smaller grants for projects.
- Grass study comparing sustainable (American Meadows and Pearls Premium) and conventional (Scotts) seeds was successful. The sustainable grass looks better. Root length longer in batches without water. Pearls grows a bit taller, but American Meadows a bit thinner looking. Results will be presented to Council and alumni next week. We should consider whether to ask students to continue grass studies into next year, e.g., regarding grass for sports fields.
- Dr. Degnan raised the possibility of including the development of an environmental education center in the Saddle River Park project. This should be considered. Possibilities include locating it at RHS or partnering with James Rose Center.

b. July meeting with BOE and Superintendent

- Sustainability Committee meets July 22 at Environmental Education Center to discuss energy issues and electric school buses, among other things.
- Discussion of plan to create a federated environmental group in the School District, looking for a person to serve as Chair.

8. Resilience, Flooding, Stormwater Subc. Activities (Joan)

a. Rain Gardens/Landscaper Outreach/Rutgers – October

- We want to continue communications with landscapers following up on the postcard about raingardens sent earlier this year, with a focus on ways to add to their business and offering to put their name on the GR website.
- Discussion and planning for follow up calls to landscapers whose email addresses are missing from the existing list. Calls to include mention of rain garden education by Rutgers and gauging interest in hooking up rain barrels to gutters.
- Engineers met with Chris Rutishauser, David and Joan regarding the February Rutgers report reconciling affordable housing and flood mitigation needs.
- The citizens committee on flooding meets in late June, with residents in flood zones giving their perspectives.

b. Other Key topics

- Discussion of moving pile of rocks from rain garden installation away from Habernickel parking lot, re-pitching the Habernickel rain garden, and knot weed infestation at the Graydon rain garden.

9. Community Energy Planning Grant/Measurement: Green Building/Sustainability Subc. (Beth/David)

- We had many questions about how to gather data, among other things. Beth and Mark aim to have recommendations ready by the end of summer. Other members are encouraged to participate.
- Implementation grant of up to \$100,000 and “sandwich grants” with additional money ultimately available.
- In light of PSE&G’s 18% increase in electricity rates on June 1, Pam is in contact with Able Associates (consultants) about revisiting the possibility of Ridgewood getting energy from a third-party supplier.

10. Communications, Web-Site Updates (Justin).

- We put out another GR newsletter in May.
- Website update done; looking for more Ridgewood photos to replace stock photos.
- Columbia project publicity – Bergen Record to be in touch with Justin.

11. Tracking of Volunteer Hours

- Jane is working on spreadsheet tracking volunteer hours; Carol B., Chris R. and Nancy Begos can be sources for input on what information should be included.

Other

12. New Business

- Justin Jonsson (GR) and Luly Melarti (GT) are leaving, creating two openings.
- Two additional members will be needed to take their seats on the Green Building and Sustainability subcommittee.
- Jane Rouse is taking over from Justin Jonsson as chair of Finance subcommittee.

13. Future Meeting Dates 2025: July 10, August 7 (Annual Get together at David’s home), September 4, October 9, November 6, December 4