

# **GREEN RIDGEWOOD MINUTES**

**July 10, 2025, 7:30-9:30 PM**

## **RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE**

**Attendees:** Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair, Joan Hubertus, Peter Jerdee, Bill Armbruster, Jane Rouse, Evan Weitz (Village Council, substituting for liaison Pam Perron), Vicky Van Dyke – Parks & Rec liaison, Anika Mukkatira – student liaison; Green Team: Alina Mordkovich; Geri Atwood, Julia Grant – student liaison; guest: Carolyn Jacoby

### **Administration**

1. Welcome and Attendee Introductions
  - Anika Mukkatira, an incoming junior at RHS, is welcomed as the new Green Ridgewood Student Liaison.
2. June 5, 2025, meeting minutes unanimously approved.

### **Updates/Discussion/Strategy**

3. Chair Report, Green Ridgewood highlights (David)
  - The tragic, fatal floods in Texas highlight the importance of the issues around flooding. It is unfathomable how quickly the water can rise when storms stagnate, and infrastructure is not equipped for it. The primary role of government is to protect its citizens. Ridgewood and GR can be proud of the work we've done as leader around this issue, but more work and innovative solutions are still needed.
  - Openings on GT and GR have been posted on the Village website with applications due July 15.
4. Village Council Liaison Report (Evan)
  - The emergency management system was discussed last night at Village Council. Ridgewood has a well-developed and well-funded office of emergency management to supplement the county-level one. This includes the reverse 911 system. We have added substantially to the phone numbers on the in-case-of-emergency auto-dial list and efforts are underway to further update it.
  - Approved ballot initiative to increase tax for open space fund to one penny per \$100 of assessed property value per year, an increase of \$27 a year for the average property. It will be on the ballot this November. The money will create a fund to buy empty land (green space could be turf or non-turf, no conditions can be placed on it).
  - Received \$1 million from the State to assist Ridgewood with PFAS treatment.

- Approved contract for new PFAS facility and some software upgrades.
- Contract awarded for Village Hall roof replacement. The solar panels haven't worked in a long time. They will be removed, TBD whether to put more modern panels on it.
- Pam is working with the Village Attorney on an ordinance to register landscapers.
- Upgrading irrigation system for community gardens.

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

### a. Project Status-Overview: Challenges and Opportunities (Alina)

- Goal is to reimagine Saddle River Park as resilient and accessible green space and model of sustainability.
- Scope changed a bit with focus on flooding, flood mitigation, flood risk, and community engagement.
- Team of students visited Village on June 19.
- Mid-term presentation given July 1 and went very well.
- Final report and presentation at end of August.
- Students are now interviewing various stakeholders, including Assemblywoman Lisa Swain, Lucine Beylerian (Bergen County, about budget and park master plan), Nancy Bigos, Miles Luo, Chris Rutishauser, and representatives from all six of the communities the park goes through, among others.
- David and Pam visited Columbia this week.
- Alina, David, and Joan have almost daily communications with students and attend many interviews with stakeholders (and have themselves been interviewed), more hands on and time consuming than last year's project.
- Highlights for each deliverable (flood mitigation analysis, flood risk analysis, community engagement) were discussed.
- Students have received a lot of data and are reviewing it now. The project appears to now be on track after some initial challenges.

### b. Update on Interactions with Key Partners (David)

- Meetings with the other towns are in process. Paramus' took place today and went well. Saddle Brook is set up. They are working on setting up the others.
- Setup of interviews with Engineers and DEP is in process.

- David would like to see safety issues as part of the report.
  - Joan noted that Rutgers' 2019 master plan prepared for the County already said the park was experiencing neglect. A plan of action is needed before it's too late.
  - There will be a story in the Bergen Record on this project in August or September once the recommendations are out.
  - Nancy gave information on the Saddle River Pond that we did not know (some leading science applied to it) and suggested we should include a tour of the pond in Open Space tours.
  - There was a discussion of the proposal to sell 4 acres in Paramus at Ridgewood Ave and Paramus Rd (close to the Ridgewood Duck Pond) for 40+ unit multi-family housing development and mostly be paved over. Paramus doesn't have a stormwater ordinance, and the developer is seeking many variances. David plans to attend public hearing on Thursday and talk about this project and flooding concerns.
- c. Data Requests/Received (Joan)
- DEP has given lots of information, but mostly data that is generally available. We have asked for specific information not received yet.
  - Joan looked through DEP websites – content is mostly more geared to engineers.
  - The students are putting together a GIS map for us. Some data can be fed from these websites.
- d. Future Milestones/Expectations (Alina, David, Joan)
- There are 2-3 more weeks of work including data set and literature review for flooding mitigation and flood risk analysis.
  - Insurance companies are adjusting rates based on disasters or walking away. State Farm is not writing new umbrella policies and imposed 147% rate hike for existing customers. Rates are going up for sure. Ridgewood has high CRS rating which lowers flood insurance rates (most towns around here don't have CRS). Mitchell (student team leader) is looking at this.
  - A link for the livestream of the final presentation will be circulated.
- e. Potential Environmental Learning Center(s) (Alina, David, Joan)
- The living laboratory idea is modeled after several centers the students identified including Forest Park Living Lab (St. Louis) and Walnut Creek Watershed Learning Network (Raleigh, NC).

- Students are including questions about centers in the stakeholder interviews, developing programming for K-12, and researching additional case studies.
- James Rose Center (across Ridgewood Avenue from the RHS) is under consideration as a venue in possible collaboration with RHS. Other possible locations are Habernickel and Schedler.
- Idea to potentially have one learning center in each of the six communities.

## 6. Resource Management & Conservation Subcommittee (David)

### a. Leaf Blowers

- Sen. Smith has thoughtful pending legislation. Bergen Hub is trying to engage with him. There was a brief discussion of legislative process issues.
- A local ordinance approach is also under consideration. There was a discussion of challenges relative to statewide initiatives.
- Related ongoing work includes raising public awareness on sustainable landscaping practices, developing a landscaper registry, and transitioning toward more sustainable Village equipment.

### b. Skip The Stuff

- Brief discussion of this initiative under which businesses would give out plastic utensils, etc., only on request of the customer.

### c. NJ Climate Superfund Act

- Brief discussion of the Act, which would require businesses contributing to climate change to pay damages, and its uncertain prospects.

### d. Schedler – SHIPO decision

- SHIPO's hearing on the Schedler property takes place July 17 via publicly available Zoom.

### e. Potential Park Clean-up Event

- Pam suggested GR consider a cleanup event at King's Pond or HoHoKus Brook. From a safety perspective, it would involve cleanup of the riparian buffer, not entering water. Decision made to defer, Pam to pitch proposal on her return.

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

### a. Student Projects Update, Plan for 2025-2026

- Volunteer activities include garden days, rain gardens upkeep, and weekly weeding sessions by Vets Field / HoHoKus Brook. Wildflower meadow by RHS tennis courts is doing well, the other one gets moved over.
    - The report on grass seeds research has been released, with Pearls Premium the winner.
    - Tree inventory completed at RHS.
  - b. July 22 meeting with BOE and Superintendent
    - Scheduled special meeting for bigger issues than can be covered at the regular quarterly meetings. It is a major opportunity for GR, given the schools' large footprint and budget. Areas for impact include electric school buses, addressing idling cars waiting for student pickup at elementary schools, and energy/green roofs.
- 8. Resilience, Flooding, Stormwater Subc. Activities (Joan)
  - a. Rain Gardens/Landscaper Outreach/Rutgers – October
    - Rutgers may still go ahead and give rain garden education session this fall. We still need to get email addresses for some of the landscapers on our list.
    - Our list is for education purposes – Pam is creating a draft registry from this list.
    - We also want to put contact information for landscapers who install rain barrels on our website.
- 9. Community Energy Planning Grant/Measurement: Green Building/Sustainability Subc. (Beth/David)
  - Key person from Sustainable Jersey has been on vacation; follow up planned for Monday. The grant ends in October so we need to move expeditiously. This is made more important by the 17% increase in PSE&G rates which will negatively impact the Village budget.
- 10. Parks & Recreation Update (Vicky)
  - Progress has been made in Habernickel Park. The Pavillion is up and looks really nice; it is for individual use in addition to events. Fruit trees have been planted near garden, to eat from. Parks & Rec seeks to have a more ADA accessible playground.

- The new lights were installed on Vets Field earlier this year, July 4<sup>th</sup> was first major event where they got noticed. The lights can be turned off when no longer needed. And the neighbors have less light/glare, despite the lights being more powerful (because they are more focused).
- NY/NJ Trail Conference looks at municipal parks and trails and creates walk-throughs. They have submitted a proposal to the Village for a trail plan and workshops project involving walkthrough and GPS data collection along trails in four of our parks; creating an interactive digital map of park trails; and 3 volunteer training workshops. The hope is to eventually assign volunteers (“trail stewards”) to maintain these trails. It is unclear who would be paying the fee, quoted at \$8,600.

#### 11. Finance – Meeting with Bob Rooney, CFO (Jane)

- Jane and David met with Bob Rooney yesterday. The meeting went well. We got 10 years of GR expenses data. There is no clean P&L. We are trying to work with him to get a cleaner version in spreadsheet form to use for budgeting going forward.
- Will follow up with Bob regarding whether GR has a dedicated bank account.

#### 12. Planning Board – Affordable Housing (David)

- Last night the Village Council approved the 2024 Fourth Round Housing Plan adopted by the Planning Board with some modifications.

#### 13. Future Meeting Dates 2025: August 14 (Unofficial: Annual Get together at David’s home – 401 Wastena Terrace – 7 PM), September 4, October 9, November 6, December 4

Submitted by Peter Jerdee, Secretary