

GREEN RIDGEWOOD MEETING

March 6, 2025, 7:30-9:30 PM

RIDGEWOOD VILLAGE HALL, SENIOR LOUNGE

Attendees: Green Ridgewood: David Refkin – Chair, Joan Hubertus, Peter Jerdee, Jane Rouse, Bill Armbruster, Justin Manger, Pam Perron – Village Council member, Jill Fasano - Village staff liaison, Vicky Van Dyke – Parks & Rec liaison, Vivian Ewell – student liaison; Green Team: Mike Faherty – Chair, Geri Atwood, Luly Melarti, Mark Kaplan, Joe Ferrante, Julia Grant – student liaison; guests: George Wolfson, Kiearan Ozaydire (student), Ariadna Karole (student), Emma Dowman (student), Anika Mukkatira (student)

Administration

1. Welcome, New member introductions and Attendee Introductions
 - New members: Jane Rouse – GR; Geri Atwood – GT; Joe Ferrante – GT; Vicky Van Dyke – Parks & Rec liaison
2. February 6th meeting minutes were unanimously approved

Updates/Discussion/Strategy

3. Village Council Liaison Report (Pam)
 - Tree protection ordinance – At the last Council meeting, the ordinance had to be voted down because the Engineering Department had to make revisions. The revised ordinance will be introduced on March 12, there will be an opportunity to comment over the next few meetings, and it will be voted on at the April 9 public meeting.
 - We are working on 2 grant applications. The Community Energy Planning Grant is already approved, a resolution has to be prepared for the second, a technical assistance grant that dovetails with the Community Energy Planning Grant.
 - Contract with Atlantic Coast Recycling – facility is up and running again.
 - The Health Dep't will extend their current car lease, but the next one will be a hybrid.
 - The sewer control facility has not been updated in 20 years. We are spending over \$1 million on upgrade measures including a wastewater booster system.
 - LED lighting has been installed in Vets Field.
4. Presentation to Village Council Feb. 26 (David)

- This is an opportunity at least once per year to discuss with the Council what GR has accomplished over the past year and areas of focus for this year, but we would like to make it a more regular event.
 - David and Beth spoke for 17 minutes, covering the 20 flooding recommendations from 2024, the Community Energy Planning Grant, leaf blowers, coordination with Parks and Rec, H2Optimize, Reduce Replace Relax, the Columbia recommendations, and the quarterly newsletters, among other things.
 - The presentation was well received, and the Council gave favorable comments about GR's work.
5. Community Energy Planning Grant/Measurement: Green Building/Sustainability Subc. (Pam)
- The Village has been awarded the Sustainable Jersey/PSE&G \$10,000 community energy planning grant for energy conservation and switching to green energy sources. Sustainable Jersey recommended that we also apply for a \$2,500 technical assistance grant to help with collecting the data; they're helping with the application due April 4.
 - Larger grants are available later to execute the Village's plan.
 - We have a total of 50 municipal buildings to gather energy data on.
6. Daffodil Festival/Earth Day Fair – Plan for April 27-Earth Day Subc. (David)
- A subcommittee consisting of Mike, Justin, Joan, Beth, and David has been working on planning for the event.
 - The GR banner has been lost. Justin M. will check whether the printers still have the existing design and can simply reprint it or if a new design should be crafted.
 - Pam, Manpreet, and Joan have been making fundraising visits, which are ongoing. We have flyers, which Pam will circulate to the group.
 - It was decided to use a carnival wheel with categories of questions representing all aspects of GR (one set of questions for adults, one for kids) to engage attendees.
 - The wheel has 18 fields, so we need to come up with at least 36 questions and answers. The subcommittees will work on this. The high school green team will be included for their review and input. Justin M. will set up a shared google doc.
 - The questions and answers will need to be ready for a trial run on April 6.

- It was decided to do a raffle again this year with an electric leaf blower as the prize. Adults can enter the raffle by answering a carnival wheel question correctly AND providing their contact information to receive the GR newsletter.
 - Ideas for kids' prizes included seed bags, water toys, candy, "I'm a winner" stickers, Green Ridgewood badges, and pins with this year's Earth Day event logo.
 - Other logistical planning details for Earth Day were discussed.
 - GR voted unanimously to authorize spending up to \$500 for various items for the Earth Day fair, including the carnival wheel, the replacement banner, a leaf blower, and other giveaways.
7. Leaf Blowers – Meeting with Matt Andreula (Parks), goals, strategy, next steps: Res/Cons. Subc. (Pam, Peter, Mike, Joan, David)
- Pam and David met with Matt from Parks & Rec and reviewed his inventory of leaf blowers. Pam also met with DPW's Streets Division and reviewed their inventory.
 - We want the Village to set an example by transitioning to green leaf blowers, but the need for Village divisions to work efficiently presents challenges.
 - Sustainable Jersey suggests replacing expiring equipment with electric. But Parks & Rec does not anticipate buying any in the next year, and the Streets Division does not for several years. The gas-powered machines last around 4-5 years.
 - 2-stroke gas-powered blowers are the most popular and effective, but are loud, dirty, use a lot of gas and oil, and have bad impacts on anything living on the ground. A study indicates 1 hour of operation generates toxic emissions equivalent to driving a car 1,100 miles.
 - 4-stroke gas-powered engines are better for the environment, but heavier and marginally less noisy. Parks & Rec has already bought several 4-strokes.
 - Some sports fields are mowed up to 3 times per week, due to requirements imposed by sports organizations. Parks & Rec mulch mows the clippings some of the time, but they are often blown. The leaf blowers are also used to blow water out of potholes and sometimes remove snow.
 - The extensive use of gas leaf blowers raises substantial public health concerns, for Village employees as well as residents including children.
 - The American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA, who promotes electric lawn equipment) has sent Pam general advice for the Village, which she will circulate.

- AGZA recommends a town choose one area to use battery operated equipment. It was suggested this could be natural places like the Ridgewood water garden and/or a small high-visibility park like Van Neste.
- Pam would like to bring AGZA's NJ rep to Ridgewood to speak with the Parks Department and help them analyze their fleet and their needs going forward.

8. Ridgewood Schools

a. Students Update (Miles, Vivian, Julia, and other students)

- A bike right of way has been added on Ridgewood Avenue.
- A team is working on tree grants for Stevens Field and Ho-Ho-Kus Brook.
- The High School Green team met with the Board of Education and successfully advocated for inclusion of climate change in biology classes. Teachers now must show proof that they talked to students about it. (NJ mandates climate change education, but nothing specific.)
- They will bring one of their climate change grant projects to the Ramapo College climate change education expo on March 29.

b. Super Science Saturday, March 1 (Bill, Pam, George)

- At least 1,000 people attended the event. Sustainability related stations included a very popular one with wildflower seed bombs.
- Bill, Pam, George, and David attended on behalf of GR. A couple of hundred people stopped by our table. We were primarily promoting Earth Day and. played our flooding poster.
- It was an opportunity to get our message out to the community but also get feedback from the community. There is a heightened community concern about environmental issues and improved perception of GR's work as compared to 5-10 years ago.

c. Art Poster Contest

- Beth is organizing the contest. We will judge the entered posters.

d. GR will schedule time with the Superintendent around the end of school year to discuss sustainability priorities for the schools.

9. Sustainability Day at Schools –April 25 (David)

- GR members should consider whether there is a special project they would like to present on. It would be important to keep it interactive.

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

a. Rutgers MS-4, Affordable Housing

- Rutgers looked at reconciling Ridgewood's stormwater and affordable housing requirements and provided a report listing actual properties not in the flood zone that matched the criteria. It is under review by Chris Rutishauser and will be useful for the Planning Board.
- They are working on a test for rain garden effectiveness that can be used by the high school (among others).
- Landscaper Outreach/Dr. Chris Obropta (Rutgers Cooperative Extension) – targeted for October. Postcards on rain gardens went out to the mailing list of landscapers and lawn irrigation/sprinkler companies.
- Due to funding freezes at Rutgers, we will likely have to reassess plans for Dr. Obropta to visit this fall in a few months.

b. Activities of "Good Trouble Group" – meeting Swain & DePhillips

- The group, currently made up of residents from Ridgewood, Rochelle Park and Saddle River, is meeting with Reps. DePhillips (Dist. 40) and Swain (Dist. 38) on March 13. They asked for help with what legislation can be leveraged to help with flooding projects. We put together a profile of the towns in their districts -- all but 1 town has active flood plains. Most of the towns that have storm water ordinances we found use the model ordinance designed for rural counties. Most towns do not have a community rating from FEMA and DEP which makes residents eligible for a flood insurance discount. (Ridgewood's rating of 6 is the lowest found; getting lower is very hard)

c. Hackensack River Nation Summit: Feb. 25th at FDU

- The event got moved to April 22. David and Bill will attend. It could be relevant for the Saddle River project.

d. Other key topics

- The subcommittee discussed having a booth at the Baseball Parade and Family Fun Day on Saturday, April 26 (Vets Field, 10:00 am to 2:00 p.m.) promoting the sale of rain barrels. GR volunteers are needed.
- A forum on natural grass as an alternative to artificial turf sports fields is planned for April 17 from 7:00-9:00 p.m. at Ridgewood Village Hall.
- We should send questions in advance.

11. Green Team Report (Mike)

- GT discussed the kind of effort to put into Sustainable Jersey certification this year. It was decided to do the minimum needed to keep the bronze certification until next year, taking into account the substantial documentation requirements and effort it imposes on Village departments.
- We will probably find out over the next month or so whether Columbia University Sustainability School approves our application for the Saddle River Park project. If so, it would take place over this summer and other communities would be involved.

12. Communications Subc. – New Website, other strategies (Justin, Manpreet, Mike)

- The quarterly newsletter has gone out. It got top billing on Carol's email blast and also went directly to our around 300 subscribers.
 - The next newsletter is planned for just before the Earth Day Festival.
- GR voted to approve expenditure of up to \$900 for development and merger of the GR and 1,000 Acres websites. The yearly maintenance fee will increase to approximately \$170, depending on the pages we end up with. The single URL will not change. The plan includes adding a calendar of upcoming events and focusing thematically on what residents can do today to help Ridgewood become greener.
 - The Sustainable Ridgewood website is not being merged in (at least for now).
 - The Communications subcommittee members plus David, Bill, Mark K., and Pam will review the draft website contents as they come in.

13. Parks & Recreation/Green Ridgewood Update (Joan)

- A rain barrel is in place at Hawes elementary school. We want to see how it works. Mary Micali (Board of Ed liaison) will get back to us on whether to have barrels in the other schools.

- Relaunch of the rain barrel initiative is planned for late March/early April.
- Grass seed testing at RHS – Miles is awaiting funding to purchase the supply.
- We will see how Pearls Premium and American Meadow seeds compare. Pearls Premium costs \$80 with shipping for 500 sq ft, but it won't need water or treatment once established, and it stays green all year round.
- Joan and Pam met with Keith K. on planting grass on the former Town Garage site for a 2-year interim period. Once this is approved, consideration will be given to using Pearls Premium and erecting a sign, subject to a cost analysis.
- We will work on planting the new, sustainable grass in several Village parks this year.

Other

14. Future Meeting Dates 2025: April 3, (later changed to April 10), Daffodil Festival/Earth Day Fair – April 27th, May 1, June 5, July 10

15. Other/New Business

- ANJEC training – Luly, Manpreet, Joe, Jerry, Jane, Bill, and Justin J. as slated to attend.

Submitted by Peter Jerdee