



VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD

131 N. MAPLE AVENUE, RIDGEWOOD, NJ 07450

Keith Kazmark

Village Manager

Village of Ridgewood

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MEMORANDUM

To: Village of Ridgewood Residents
From: Keith Kazmark, Village Manager
Date: December 9, 2024
Re: 2023/2024 – Years in Review

Since July of 2023, the Village of Ridgewood has seen significant progress while taking on multiple challenges. Under the leadership of the Village Council, we have made major investments in our infrastructure, improved our financial outlook, continued to provide outstanding services to our residents, and received a number of awards and national rankings. Below are some of the highlights of the past nearly eighteen (18) months here in Ridgewood:

Administration, Personnel, and Finance:

- Maintained AAA bond rating by Standard & Poor's
- Maintained a 99.8% property tax collection rate
- Increased new ratables by \$17 million
- Increased budget surplus by \$3 million over 3 years ago
- Adopted a 2024 budget with an increase of 2.74% - well below the rate of inflation
- Implemented a new time and attendance system to better record and monitor employee hours
- Updated and signed previously negotiated contracts with the FMBA; FMBA Officers; United Public Service Employees Union, UPSEU (White Collar Unit); and United Public Service Employees Union, UPSEU (Blue Collar Unit)
- Successfully negotiated and signed a contract with United Service Workers, IUJAT, Local 1N (Supervisors Group)
- Currently negotiating new contracts with both United Public Service Employees Union, UPSEU (White Collar Unit) and United Public Service Employees Union, UPSEU (Blue Collar Unit)

- Updated and reissued the Employee Manual to all Village employees
- Modified drug and alcohol testing policies to require notification to Directors of any DWI arrest or related violations
- Hosted formal Civil Service Training for Department Directors and Supervisors, provided by Grace Kelley, former Deputy CEO of the NJ Civil Service Commission
- Implemented a required annual employee evaluation for all Village employees and provided evaluation training for Department Directors and Supervisors, provided by Jennifer McCarthy, President of 579 Solutions
- Launched a robust Intern Program, providing Departments throughout the Village with support and assistance with special projects
- Approved a Bike Lane Study project, proposed by Ridgewood High School seniors for marked bike lanes connecting three Village schools
- Authorized and received a study undertaken by Columbia University graduate students addressing sustainability and flooding
- Worked with the New Jersey Department of Transportation to make needed improvement at the Route 17 Park & Ride, including resurfacing the lot, striping, and additional signage and plantings
- Made the required ceiling repairs to the Village Hall offices on the 3rd floor
- Awarded a contract to Top Floor Elevated Services for elevator inspections in the Building Department, resulting in a revenue stream of approximately \$10,000 annually
- Promoted and grew the Senior Bus program, providing transportation for essential needs to our aging population
- Reinstated the Employee Holiday Party, held in December 2023
- Reinstated the Employee Summer Picnic at Graydon Pool, held on August 23, 2024

Legal & Ordinances:

- Settled Town Garage condemnation proceedings, resulting in the pending removal of the building and remediation by the prior owner of the property
- Met with and heavily communicated with the Grandview Circle residents in an effort to relieve the Village of Lot 20, a landlocked piece of public property with no public purpose or use
- Introduced and adopted ordinances relative to Exclusionary Zoning, Blade Signs, Anti-Nepotism, Stormwater and Microbreweries, among others

Communications & Public Outreach:

- Hosted a “Meet the Manager” Town Hall meeting with in-person and hybrid access on September 19, 2023
- Restructured a position in the Manager’s office and onboarded a Director of Communications & Special Projects
- Implemented a resident response policy whereby employees are required to return phone calls, emails and in-person resident inquiries in a timely fashion
- Began sending weekly E-Notices to nearly 7,600 email subscribers
- Redesigned the Village website, making it more navigable and providing faster speed
 - Relunched Online Search for Recycling, Solid Waste & Yard Waste Collections
 - Added a Parking Map & Commuter Parking Page
- Rebranded the Village with a new logo, included on letterhead, Village vehicles, and on all communications
- Hosted an Open House for the public at the Zabriskie-Schedler House
- Launched the “My Ridgewood” app in the fall of 2024, providing easy access to Village information, schedules and services

- Established an Instagram presence, reaching a younger demographic, particularly the 35 to 44 age group. Followers increase each month, with a current total of more than 1,600.
- Added approximately 3,400 residents to the Village's reverse 911 emergency notifications platform
- Mailed a flyer to every household in the Village in October 2024, giving residents the opportunity to sign up for multiple notifications on one website page

Ridgewood Water:

- Broke ground on the Ravine PFAS Treatment Facility, the second project recipient in all of USEPA Region 2 to complete the grant process and receive a \$2.8 million federal grant
- Recipient of the first-in-the-state New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection "Our Water's Worth It" Award, recognizing Ridgewood Water's work on water conservation and PFAS initiatives
- Completed a public relations work plan for water conservation with Raftelis and launched a messaging campaign with Director of Communications, including a direct mail piece to all customers
- Secured adoption of uniform ordinance for permanent two-day watering schedule for all four municipalities, and received authorization from the Borough of Glen Rock to extend enforcement of the rules beyond the Village of Ridgewood
- Secured a new communication lease on the Glen Tank for \$441,600 in new annual revenue to the utility
- Secured approval and authorization for the first IBANK project award for the Prospect PFAS Treatment Facility, with \$1 million in principal forgiveness and 50% interest-free loan
- Secured approval and authorization for five other IBANK PFAS project awards, with another \$4 million in principal forgiveness and up to 75% interest-free loan
- Broke ground on Ames, West End, East Ridgewood and Wortendyke PFAS Treatment Facilities, and completed installation of 11,150 linear feet of PFAS raw water main to connect satellite wells to the new facilities
- Completed floodproofing of East Saddle River and Linwood Avenue well houses
- Installed 7,350 linear feet of new water main to replace aging infrastructure
- Achieved final approval on ordinances and shared service agreements with all four municipalities for the Lead Service Line Replacement Program (LSLR)
- Launched lead service line replacement program for customers and secured 552 Opt-Ins to date, including 158 homeowners replacing the lines on their own
- Completed the design of a comprehensive Lead Service Line Replacement Plan and Website Landing Page
- Replaced 152 lead service lines in 2023, and 200 to date in 2024
- Held two public Open House events in October 2023, showcasing operations, PFAS and LSLR to consumers
- Completed Main Treatment Facility connection to PVWC and Southside Tank to blend water and reduce PFAS concentration
- Completed 10-year budget forecast, with the assistance of hired rate expert
- Installed new Lab Equipment, completed training and began split sampling to support certification by NJDEP
- Continued to support the legal complaint and insurance recovery for PFAS contamination.
- Continued work on public policy, to give Ridgewood Water a larger voice in challenging regulation, so that we are positioned to comply. Realized significant gains from our work with passage of the Green Acres water improvements bill, signed into law by the Governor
- Launched a new Vehicle Tracking System to reduce costs and offer a more user-friendly platform for the Village and Ridgewood Water

- Secured truck rental agreement and capital for bolstering Sanitation fleet, ensuring safe collection of garbage and recycling

Public Works & Engineering:

- Invested \$2 million in road resurfacing, curbing and sidewalk projects in 2023, resulting in 32-plus miles of roads being resurfaced
- Resurfaced Oak Street, Cottage Place, Chestnut Street, South Walnut Street, North Walnut Street and Dayton Street (part) in the Central Business District (CBD) in the spring of 2024
- Invested an additional \$2 million in road resurfacing, curbing and sidewalk projects in 2024, including paving West Saddle River Road, Downs Street, Union Street, Grant Street, Ferris Place, Demarest Street, Albin Court, Lynn Street and North Monroe Street* (*New Jersey Department of Transportation grant funded)
- Installed sidewalks on East Glen Avenue, Clinton Avenue and West Glen Avenue* (*pending County and NJDEP approvals to complete West Glen Avenue)
- Worked with Bergen County to resurface Godwin Avenue and Linwood Avenue in 2023, and Ackerman Avenue in 2024; Maple Avenue (from Glen Rock border to Ho-Ho-Kus border) is scheduled to be paved in 2025.
- Awarded \$455,820 bid for the repairs of the Kingsbridge Lane Pedestrian Bridge, which began this month
- Presented concept designs for the beautification of the Train Station Pedestrian Tunnel and have started to engage community members to fundraise for murals in the tunnel and around the station
- Received \$157,000 in Safe Route to Schools funding from the NJDOT and an additional \$178,000 in federal funding
- Installed Pedestrian Activated Crosswalks at Linwood Avenue and Fairfield Avenue, and East Ridgewood Avenue and North/South Irving Avenue to heighten pedestrian safety
- Saved \$500,000 to \$800,000 in land purchasing by building Ridgewood Water's Prospect PFAS Treatment Facility on the grounds of the Water Pollution Control Facility.
- Adding cell phone towers at Village Hall to increase service from the CBD to the old Valley Hospital area
- Redesigned the annual Leaf Collection flyer from the Streets Division for easier use
- Took delivery of a new Hook Truck for the Streets Division
- Made upgrades to aged equipment at the Water Pollution Control Facility
- Launched a street sign purchase project with Ridgewood High School to allow families to purchase street signs in an effort to reduce the number of missing signs.
- Completed the removal of deadhead meters in Commercial Business District
- Constructed the footing and helped to install the Gold Star Monument in Memorial Park at Van Neste Square

Parks & Recreation/Shade Tree:

- Demolished and removed the barn structure at Habernickel Park
- Added \$50,000 in capital budget funds to the sinking fund for Maple Field
- Secured capital funds of \$416,000 for a new pavilion structure at Habernickel Park, to be placed between the playground and the baseball field
- Allocated \$700,000 to upgrade the field lighting at Veterans Field
- Received \$68,000 in grant funding from the State of New Jersey for ADA playground upgrades at Habernickel Park
- Re-established the 5th and 8th Grade end-of-year celebrations at Graydon Pool
- Implemented the Master Library scheduling system in the Parks & Recreation Department

- Made significant enhancements to the parks information on Village website
- Planted 120 new trees in residential neighborhoods and 37 in the CBD in 2023
- Planted 200 new trees in residential neighborhoods and 12 in the CBD in 2024
- Launched “Mulch Mondays” to beautify the tree wells in the CBD
- Designed and implemented the volunteer “Adopt a Sapling” program planting in the Orchard and Somerville districts
- Announced the Big Tree Nomination program in collaboration with the NJDEP
- Layered GIS mapping system with shade tree locations, tree species and scientific details
- Contracted for the removal of ash trees and performed second treatment of the 171 remaining ash trees through a local vendor
- Hosted a Summer Job Open House to recruit seasonal employees
- Installed “smart” irrigation systems at Veterans Field, Village Hall lawn, the Stable property and Hawes Field
- Held multiple meetings with the residents of Crest Road and Hillcrest Road regarding concerns about The View, resulting in increased patrols, removal of dangerous trees, and new plantings to increase a buffer zone for the properties below
- Increased HILT senior membership, while expanding programs
- Expanded Community Center rentals to community groups, while improving the facility
- Hired a new Laborer within the Parks Division and a Recreation Program Specialist within the Recreation Division
- Worked with Age Friendly Ridgewood to enhance programs and community improvements for seniors, including planning meetings with each Village Department
- Received the prestigious Daniel M. Gasalberti Award for Program Excellence in recognition of the annual Elder Dinner
- Accepted donations from the Ridgewood Baseball & Softball Association to refurbish the baseball field at Habernickel Park, with Citizens and Hawes scheduled for 2025
- Worked with adult soccer players to coordinate field time for a 55-plus group

Ridgewood Police Department:

- Hired one (1) new police officer in 2023 and three (3) new officers in 2024
- Added three (3) Class III Special Police Officers through a shared services agreement with the Ridgewood Public Schools
- Pursuing accreditation of the Ridgewood Police Department by the New Jersey State Chiefs of Police Association
- Filled out the RPD Table of organization with the promotions of Sgt. Tarino and Lt. Lembo
- Continued to host the Chief Michael Feeney Junior Police Academy for 5th, 6th and 7th grade students
- Funded the first phase of hand-held radio replacement, with phase two and final in 2025
- Participated in the ten (10) mandatory police trainings, along with twenty-seven (27) additional training opportunities
- Have begun and are well under way in completing the first full evidence audit and purge in more than 22 years.
- Conducted special needs training sessions for police officers in partnership with JoyDew
- Awarded the AAA Traffic Safety Hero Award for Operation Bright Idea – Lt. Jay Chuck
- Responded to more than 20,000 response calls in 2023 and more than 22,000 in 2024

Ridgewood Fire Department:

- Hired two (2) new firefighters in 2024, replacing one retirement and one pending retirement

- Launched Operation Blue Angel, a lock box program for seniors in collaboration with Age Friendly Ridgewood
- Fully implemented the RFD, assuming 24/7/365 EMS response
- Added \$250,000 in capital budget funds to the sinking fund for new fire apparatus
- Received \$400,630.45 in grants in 2023-2024: \$32,000 American Rescue Plan (APR) 2023, \$75,000 ARP 2024, \$29,905 Firehouse Subs, and \$263,725.45 Assistance to Firefighters Grant
- Established Autism and Special Needs Awareness programs. Conducted Autism Shield Training for staff, held a T-shirt fundraiser, and bought sensory kits for ambulances and fire engines with these funds.
- Hosted a sensory-friendly BBQ for the community
- Established a 9-1-1 Alert Form for the special needs community
- Continued the Car Seat Installation Program. RFD has two certified installers who installed 29 car seats in 2023 and 2024 year to date.
- Conducted JIF Site Safety Inspections at Fire HQ and Engine 31
- Fully implemented a new EMS billing company, Coronis Health, improving revenues
- 100% completion for Annual, State-Mandated, Right-to-Know Surveys for all Village Departments (70 surveys submitted in 2024)
- Filled out the RFD Table of organization with the promotion of Lt. Corcoran
- Took delivery of the new ambulance
- Provided CPR and defibrillator training to 55 Village staff and residents in 2024
- Expanded the placement of AEDs in Village facilities
- Developed and issued an E-Bike safety notice to the community
- Updated the Fire Watch ordinance with revised administrative fees
- Presented to more than 200 Ridgewood High School seniors about fire safety in preparation for college living
- Reduced the RFD operating budget by \$75,000 in training costs due to more efficient scheduling
- Implemented Mental Health First Aid training, Hazardous Materials Incident Management training, and NJ Transit Rail Safety and Incident training
- Conducted 2,989 Fire Prevention inspections in 2023 and 2,529 so far in 2024
- Responded to 2,645 fire calls and 1,175 EMS calls in 2023, and 2,685 fire calls and 1,294 EMS calls in 2024 to date

Office of Emergency Management:

- Revised/updated our Emergency Operations Plan and submitted more than two months before the deadline to Bergen County OEM, then to NJ OEM, which allows the Village to remain eligible to receive FEMA reimbursement and other grants. Ridgewood was the only Bergen County municipality to submit its plan early.
- Successfully assisted in managing the Valley Hospital move from the Ridgewood campus to the new location in Paramus
- Collaborated with the Valley Hospital's Emergency Management team in designing and conducting a disaster drill for hospital employees based on several scenarios suggested by the Department of Homeland Security
- Conducted two annual joint disaster exercises with Ridgewood Manor and Family of Caring Nursing Home
- Posted and electronically redistributed the Emergency Planning Guide
- Continued to update the Special Needs Registry registration form and registered an additional 25 residents.

- Conducted a “File of Life” program and distributed packets to seniors at Ridge Crest Apartments to assist First Responders in locating medical information when responding to EMS calls, with assistance from Teens in Emergency Services volunteers

Health Department:

- Implemented Employee Wellness Days, which included healthy eating sessions, chair massages, wellness roundtable discussions and more
- Entered into a shared services agreement with Mahwah for Health Officer services
- Continued to received funding for public outreach and social worker services through three grants: Strengthening Local Public Health Capacity, Sustaining Local Public Health Infrastructure and Enhancing Local Public Health Infrastructure through the New Jersey Department of Health
- Partnered with Ridgewood Public Schools on various mental health programs, all of which were grant funded
- Entered into a contract with Intervention Strategies for the new Employee Assistance Program
- Launched a wildlife feeding PSA program to educate the community
- Complied with the new Lead Paint Law, through contracting with an outside vendor
- Implemented the use of credit cards for payment in the Health Department
- Revised the Cat License ordinance
- Continued the Cards of Joy program

Recycling & Sanitation:

- Expanded the number of Shred Days in response to resident demand
- Expanded the Vegetable Oil Collection program at the Recycling Center
- Expanded the use of the EPS (Styrofoam) Densifier through shared service agreements, which now include the following municipalities: Fair Lawn, Garfield, Glen Rock, Ho-Ho-Kus, Oradell and Washington Township
- Added the first electric vehicle to the Sanitation and Recycling fleet
- Negotiated the lease-to-buy of new sanitation collection trucks
- Took delivery of new sanitation collection trucks
- Johanna Luttrell named the Association of New Jersey Recyclers’ “Member of the Year”

Commercial Business District:

- Conducted a Special Improvement District study in conjunction with CBD business owners to assess viability
- Continued the dining corral program for downtown restaurants
- Leased Village-owned assets, including the Pease Library space to Bohler Engineering, the train station concession to Box Car, and the taxi stand space to Tri-Plex
- Actively engaged stakeholders after the closing of the Warner Movie Theater to advocate for a Performing Arts Center in the theater space
- Launched an informative “Opening a Business in Ridgewood” checklist to assist prospective new business owners
- Evaluated the condition of the downtown bus station as Van Neste Square, which determined the need to remove the structure
- Expanded the Veterans Banner program in coordination with the American Legion and Veteran advocates in the community
- Returned the kissing balls to the lamp posts in the CBD during the holiday season with assistance from the Ridgewood Guild

- Supported the many events and programs that are held downtown by the Chamber of Commerce, the Ridgewood Guild and other community organizations

Schedler Property:

- Submitted a revised plan for the Schedler property to the State Historic Preservation Office including a full-sized, multipurpose athletic field, playground, walking paths and parking area
- Authorized and began the Phase II Archeological Study at the Schedler property
- Retained Matrix New World Engineering to conduct the required soil testing and develop a comprehensive remediation plan for the Schedler property

Flood Mitigation:

- Following three consecutive floods in September 2023, December 2023 and January 2024, the Village engaged the United States Army Corps of Engineers with the assistance of Congressman Gottheimer.
- Launched a data collection flood portal through the GIS Division at Ridgewood Water with more than 100 residential submissions
- Hosted a Town Hall meeting on June 17, 2024 with the United States Army Corps of Engineers and more than 150 participants to discuss federal programming to assist with flood mitigation
- Responded to downed trees in the Ho-Ho-Kus Brook, Saddle River and tributaries
- Performed clean out of the drainage channel and culvert between the PSE&G right-of-way and the homes on North Irving Street
- Shared information regarding the New Jersey Blue Acres program to flood-impacted residents
- Sent preparatory communications to residents prior to potential flooding events

ACCESS:

- Supported the expansion of Access Weekend to Access Week
- Supported the hosting of Sensory-Friendly Dinners
- Assisted with the design of a new Access Ridgewood logo
- Received donations to purchase a new beach wheelchair for Graydon Pool

Ridgewood Public Library:

- Launched a new Passport Service program
- Made significant renovations and infrastructure improvements including: the teen room, art studio, patio area, a new roof, exterior painting, landscaping and gutter repair
- Issued a bid for the connection of the generator to the library, which is shared with Ridgewood Water
- Supported Ridgewood Library Friends and Foundation activities to continue raising private funds to carry renovation to the auditorium and second level
- Cosponsored Access Week in October with Access Ridgewood
- Hosted class visits from Ridge, Orchard, Travell, and Somerville Schools where students attended tours, learned local history, and were issued library cards
- Hosted multiple community forums and more than 3,600 programs
- Library statistics:
 - 30,551 attendees
 - 6,873 cardholders
 - 172,931 visits
 - 376,004 checkouts
 - 11,728 reference questions answered

- 501 museum passes borrowed
- 35,588 databases accessed
- 55,248 items borrowed from other libraries
- 1,600+ digital items in collection
- 112,365 physical items in collection
- 46,329 items loaned to other libraries
- 73,206 E-materials downloaded
- 16,228 WiFi sessions
- 9,139 public computer sessions
- 470,814 webpage hits
- 427 Library of Things items borrowed
- 396 attended 162 tech classes
- 150 meeting room rentals
- 600+ book group attendees
- \$4,484,645 total value of all materials loaned and borrowed
- \$833 average value to patrons

Awards, Recognitions & Focus Articles:

- Bergen Joint Insurance Fund (JIF) Bronze Safety Award
- Sustainable New Jersey Bronze Award for our 2023 certification
- Rated Best Downtown by *(201)* Magazine once again in 2024
- Rated #106 nationally as Best Place to Live and #55 Best Suburb to Raise a Family in America by Niche
- Rated Top 10 Best Places to Live in New Jersey (#5) by *Travel and Leisure* Magazine
- Rated third Hottest Zip Code for Buying a Home by Realtor.com
- *Downtown with the Ridgewood Guild* Magazine Article – December 2023
- *Ridgewood Living* Magazine Article – July 2024

I hope the entire community can be proud of these many accomplishments that our team has achieved in Ridgewood. I personally have very much enjoyed becoming a part of the Ridgewood community. During the past year and a half in the Village, I have attended more than 210 community events, programs, and meetings. It has been a pleasure to work here with an incredible staff and volunteers. I look forward to continuing the work we have started. Thank you for your continued support.



 Keith Kazmark, Village Manager