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MAYOR

## VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD

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NJDEP

Office of Local Government Assistance

ATTN: Keiona Miller

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Mail Code 401-04

PO Box 420

Trenton, NJ 08625

Re: Questions Raised Regarding the Schedler Property

Dear Ms. Miller:

Thank you for reaching out to me regarding the inquiries you have received about the proposed park on the Schedler property in Ridgewood. As we discussed, there is an incredible amount of misinformation being disseminated. Some neighborhood residents are very opposed to the construction of a full sized turf field at the park and have contacted governmental agencies throughout the county and state in an attempt to delay or stop this project.

So that you will be in a better position to address these inquiries, I have set forth the facts surrounding this property, all of which will be fully documented.

First and foremost, let's keep in mind the objective at hand: Ridgewood wants to build a park. It will have a full sized playing field, a playground, a walking path, lots of trees and so much more. It will serve our children, our athletes, our seniors and all the residents of our Village. Currently, many of our youth and senior athletic teams are forced to play out of town because we simply do not have enough fields to accommodate all of our residents who want and need to use them. The Village has owned this property for 15 years and prior administrations have been unable to turn the property into the facility our Village needs and deserves.

### ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF THE SCHEDLER PROPERTY

The Schedler property is a seven acre tract of land that straddles Route 17N and West Saddle River Road in Ridgewood. When it became available for possible sale in 2008, residents of the West Saddle River Road neighborhood urged the Village of Ridgewood to purchase the site because they were concerned that a developer would purchase it and, because of its commercial location on the Rt. 17 side of the property, could become a gas station, convenience store, strip mall or apartment complex that backed up to their neighborhood on the West Saddle River Road side.

At that time, the Village Council, agreed to purchase the property on behalf of the Village. Because Ridgewood and much of northern Bergen County are so densely populated, and because of the lack of

available open space for sports fields, it was agreed by all parties involved-including the neighborhood residents-that when developed, the Village would build a park with full sized sports fields on the property. In the minutes of the Village Council meeting dated October 22, 2008, page 12, it states:

Although the members of the Schedler Committee believe, the primary objective at this time, is the preservation of open space. They have also discussed in detail and approved the conceptual plan for the improvement of the property, which includes a baseball diamond, and overlay multi-purpose field, an ADA compliant walking trail, a wooded area, and a parking lot...(Exhibit A).

The minutes continue to reflect the intent of the Village Council-and the agreement by the neighborhood residents to this plan-on page 13, wherein it states:

Significantly, the representatives of the West Saddle River Road Neighborhood Association have assured the Committee that the neighbors support the conceptual plan, including the installation of permanent lighting for athletic fields and will not disappear down the manhole cover to use it as soon as the property is acquired (Exhibit B).

In this regard, it is important to note that the proposed plan-that was agreed to by all parties involved-included significantly larger playing fields (as well as permanent lighting not included in the current plan) than the plan approved by the Village Council in September of this year. The original plan, dated September 2008 (Exhibit C), included a 75x110 yard multi-purpose field, a varsity sized 90' baseball diamond and permanent lighting. The current plan, approved by the Village Council in September 2023, includes an ADA compliant walking trail, several wooded areas, a rain garden, a children's playground, a parking area, the same size multi-purpose field as originally proposed in 2008 but a much smaller baseball diamond-known as a 40'/60' diamond-suitable for softball and little league but not varsity baseball. Notably, this 40'/60' diamond is small enough to fit within the confines of the proposed multi-purpose field (Exhibit D).

At the Village Council meeting of December 3, 2008, the minutes state:

Mayor (David) Pfund said if the Schedler property is purchased, the residents need to remember that it will be utilized in the future and he does not want anyone to come to the Council in the future complaining about building a field there. (Exhibit E).

Unfortunately, residents of the neighborhood have not heeded Mayor Pfund's admonition.

In 2015, the Village Council, under then Mayor Paul Aronsohn, approved a resolution to build a park according to the September 2008 plan (Exhibit F).

#### ALLEGATION: REVOLUTIONARY WAR SITE

In 2016 the Village Council, under then Mayor Susan Knudsen, rescinded the 2015 resolution and made successful application to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to have the house located on the property placed on the National Historic Sites list. Notably, the application by the Village recognized the historic value of the property for the sole reason of the Dutch colonial architecture of the house located

on the property only (Exhibits G). No other reason to place the property and the house was applied for, or recognized, other than the architecture of the home.

Of particular significance in this regard, are the four categories set forth in Exhibit G delineating National Register Criteria, as follows:

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. **Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction**
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Section C, above, the criteria related to architecture, is the ONLY box checked regarding the significance of the property. All boxes related to the historical significance of the property are left blank, indicating that there is no historical significance to the property other than its architecture. Exhibit G, above, recognizing the property for its architectural significance, is the actual document that sits in the Library of Congress stating that the property is on the National Historic Sites Registry, National Registry Reference # SG 100004648, for its architectural significance.

And while it is widely accepted by all that Revolutionary War activities took place in the region, there is absolutely no evidence that any historically significant Revolutionary War activities ever took place on the Schedler property. All historically significant activity took place at the church located on the other side of Rt. 17, not on the Schedler property. There was no battle, no encampment, no headquarters, no structure, and no canon on the Schedler property. And, as is apparent from Exhibit G, neither the Village, SHPO nor the Historic Sites Council has ever recognized, or seen evidence of, any Revolutionary War activities on the property.

In this regard, it is important to note that the Village has retained the services of a certified archaeological surveyor, Grubb and Associates, to perform an archaeological survey of the property to ensure that there is no evidence of historically significant Revolutionary War activity on the property (Exhibit H), which was also requested by the residents.

Further to this point, Ridgewood's Historic Preservation Commission has, in recognition of the fact that there is no evidence of Revolutionary War activity on the Schedler property, voted unanimously that they have no objection to the development of the Schedler property according to the 2023 plan (Exhibit I).

All allegations that the Schedler property has any relevant connection to the Revolutionary War are unsubstantiated. Most importantly, the documentation regarding the application to SHPO and the placement of the property on the Historic Sites list clearly show that no evidence was ever presented to SHPO in this regard. The property is only on the Historic Sites list based upon the Dutch colonial architecture of the house situated on the property.

#### ALLEGATION: CONTAMINATED SOIL

The Village Council, under then Mayor Susan Knudsen, constructed a clean soil berm on the Rt. 17 side of the property to create a safety barrier between the park and the busy highway (Exhibit J). That berm is approximately 28 ft. wide, 8 ft. high and 1100 ft. long. An allegation has been made to the DEP, without any substantiation, that the soil in the berm is contaminated. Thomas Farrell, Bureau Chief-Solid Waste Compliance & Enforcement, discussed the matter with our Village Engineer, Christopher Rutishauser, P.E. Mr. Rutishauser shared the records of soil testing with Mr. Farrell, showing the soil to be clean and free of contamination (Exhibit K). Mr. Farrell discussed the possibility of additional soil testing-none of which is required by law or regulation-in order to ensure that the soil is clean. The matter is presently under review by the DEP. The Village has agreed to conduct any additional testing the DEP may recommend.

#### ALLEGATION: WETLANDS

An allegation has been made to the DEP, without any substantiation, that the property contains wetlands. A review of the wetlands maps (Exhibit L) shows that this property does not contain wetlands.

#### ALLEGATION: DESTRUCTION OF TREES

The vast majority of the trees that will need to be taken down for the construction of the park at Schedler have already been removed by the prior council. Additionally, it is anticipated that another 222 trees will be taken down in order to complete construction of the park. In this regard, it is important to note the following:

1. 96 of the 222 trees scheduled to be taken down are of an invasive species and, for this reason, need to be removed regardless of how the park is laid out or the size of the field.
2. The size and composition of the field, which are the only issues of concern related to the construction of the park, will have little, if any, effect on the number of trees to be taken down.
3. The Village's plan for the park includes the planting of over 319 trees to replace those taken down, in addition to a variety of shrubs and other plant life. In this regard, all such plantings will be of native/indigenous species, which is not necessarily the case today.

The Village's tree canopy is part of our infrastructure and is a major priority throughout the Village of Ridgewood. Last year the Village passed a \$500,000 bond ordinance for the re-planting of trees to support that beautiful tree canopy. Let there be no doubt, the Village intends to fill this park with trees. Going forward, the construction of a full sized field on the Schedler property will have little, if any, effect on the number of trees in the park.

#### THE NECESSITY OF AN ARTIFICIAL TURF FIELD BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF ADEQUATE FIELD SPACE

As has been previously stated herein, Ridgewood is a densely populated suburban community that has a higher than average ratio of school age children per household than most other communities. As a result, field space is in great demand while available land to build new fields is non-existent. The last full sized multi-purpose field that was brought online in Ridgewood was Maple Park in 1980. Building this field is truly a once-in-a-generation opportunity. And, because of the lack of available land in the community, it may be our last such opportunity.

As a result, the existing fields in our Village are in constant use. This heavy use results in very little down time for our fields which leads to overuse of our existing grass fields. Grass, by its very nature, requires periods of rest in order for it to remain healthy. Our lack of adequate field space has pushed our athletic organizations to over-schedule our grass fields in order to accommodate youth and adult sports in our community. This heavy scheduling has had an extremely deleterious effect on the surfaces of those grass fields.

In the Spring of 2022, Ridgewood's municipal grass surface fields were in such poor condition as a result of overuse, that our Parks Department closed all municipal grass fields from March 7th through May 7th-virtually the entire spring season-in an effort to allow the grass an opportunity to regenerate.

Even when all of our fields are online, many of our local sports teams are unable to schedule practices-or even games-in town and are forced to find field space out of town. We simply do not have enough fields.

Artificial turf, by its very nature, allows for continuous repetitive use by the many sports organizations in town that desperately need available playing space. It can be used every day with little, if any, maintenance thereby shouldering a far more significant proportion of the load required in a town with such limited field space. Today, there are more than 10,000 artificial turf fields in the U.S. (Exhibit M). The reasons for this are twofold, both of which center upon durability. First, as was just mentioned, artificial turf fields are durable enough to withstand the daily use demands placed upon them. Second, and just as importantly, the cost to maintain a town's many grass fields in playable condition is cost prohibitive. It is just not possible to have the equivalent of the Yankee Stadium grounds crew maintain high use fields in playable condition day after day, season after season. Which explains why there are so many artificial turf fields across the country. Sure, grass would be nice. But, where necessary, turf is absolutely necessary to get the job done.

In 2017 the Village Council formed an ad hoc committee to make recommendations regarding the future of the property (Exhibit N). That committee, comprised of many neighborhood residents, recommended the construction of a park with a small-sided 50x75 yard turf field and no baseball diamond. Notably, that recommendation included a specific brand of turf field called Field Turf CoolPlay, wherein it states, at page 10:

Committee has considered the costs and benefits of multiple field surface options and preliminarily recommends Field Turf CoolPlay artificial grass surface that allows for significantly more use; has no exposed rubber; remains significantly cooler than other artificial grass surfaces; maintains a green, manicured appearance; and is economically sensible.

Consequently, many of the same residents who object to the use of an artificial turf field today agreed, at that time, that artificial turf was necessary and acceptable.

#### FLOODING IMPACT

Five of Ridgewood's main full sized fields are in a flood zone (Exhibit O). When there is a major flood event, all of those fields are underwater and taken offline for up to a month while repairs are made and fields are given an opportunity to dry out. When this occurs, the playing seasons of thousands of athletes of all ages is crippled. A community that doesn't have enough fields for its children on a good

day is virtually incapacitated when a flood event occurs. This area has experienced significant flooding events many times, the most significant of which occurred on the following dates.

October 2023  
April 2022  
September 2021  
August 2014  
March 2014  
August 2011  
April 2007  
March 2007

On October 7, 2023, the Village of Ridgewood experienced its most recent flood event when 4 of our 5 major full-sized fields were underwater in the storm that affected northern New Jersey (Exhibit P).

Unfortunately, climate change has made these super storm-flooding events more frequent as the years have gone by. We anticipate this pace will only accelerate in the future.

#### UNAUTHORIZED HERITAGE TREE NOMINATION TO THE DEP

Most recently, on September 19, 2023, an attorney working with one of the residents of the Schedler neighborhood, nominated a large Sugar Maple tree located on the Schedler property for Big Tree/Heritage Tree status with the DEP (Exhibit Q). In addition to making unsubstantiated claims of its historical status on the form, the attorney misrepresented that the owner of the tree had completed a Right of Access Agreement, which is required for this nomination with the DEP. As a result of this filing and misrepresentation, the DEP issued a certificate granting the Sugar Maple Heritage Tree status (Exhibit R). All of this was done without the knowledge or consent of any official of the Village of Ridgewood.

Upon learning of this unauthorized action, Village Attorney Matthew S. Rogers contacted the DEP to inform them that this filing was done without the authority or consent of the Village of Ridgewood (Exhibit S). When the DEP received Mr. Rogers' letter informing them of the misrepresentation and unauthorized filing, Joseph C. Bennett, Assistant Regional Forester in the State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites Division of the DEP, revoked the Heritage Tree status of the Sugar Maple based upon the aforementioned misrepresentation and unauthorized filing (Exhibit T).

#### CONCLUSIONS

At this time, the Village Council is preparing an application to SHPO to build a park and a full sized 75x110 yard multi-purpose turf field on the property. We anticipate the application will be filed within the next 30 days.

The Schedler property was purchased to alleviate the strain on the Village's sports fields. Local residents living in the neighborhood of the proposed park do not want the Village to build a larger field on the property and have made unsubstantiated claims of issues surrounding the park in an effort to delay or stop its construction. It is our hope that the documents attached hereto address all of those unsubstantiated claims and will assist you in addressing any issues arising in the future.

It is important to note that the opposition by some of the neighborhood residents is far from unanimous. Chuck Handy, of 695 Kingsbridge Lane, writes:

I would like to voice my endorsement for the proposed full sided multi-sports field slated for the Zabriskie-Schedler house property on West Saddle River Road. Being a neighbor less than a block away I strongly endorse it as being presented. Being the past president of the Maroons Soccer Club for 5 years while coaching...for over 10 years I am more than aware how desperately Ridgewood needs this (Exhibit U).

And Jin Lee, of 561 Bennington Terrace, writes:

Even when my children were playing, I remember the difficulty of getting field time for the older kids. I could share story after story about dangerous fields, "fields" crafted out of makeshift plots, and canceled practices. I do not need to be convinced that our youth athletes need another full-sized field. I also support turf. If we are going to build a field there, we should get as much use out of it as possible (Exhibit V).

We are building a park with a field and we hope you will help us get the job done now. We need the park and the field for our youth sports leagues, so our children will have a place to play in a town that doesn't have enough room for them now. We need the park and the field for our senior leagues, so we will have a place for our seniors to play and age in place. We need the park and the field for our residents, because in this part of the state open space is in short supply.

We are building a park with a field and Ridgewood cannot wait another 15 years.

Should you have any questions in this regard, or have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,



Paul Vagianos  
Mayor  
Village of Ridgewood