

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE Meeting Notes
January 8th, 2026 - The Stable 7:00 PM

PRESENT: Jim Bostler, Frank Mortimer, Jessica Van Aken, Matt Lindenberg, Nancy Bigos, Jim Van Goor, Paul Cooper-Smith

ABSENT: Ralph Currey, Alex Pastore, Jim Morgan

Summary

The primary focus of the meeting was related to the OSC's increased funding. Of paramount importance, the committee discussed how to balance maintenance, preservation, and acquisition with its heightened budget, noting the importance of accumulating a financial balance for future use.

The committee approved Jessica Van Aken as the new OSC secretary and agreed upon sub-committee assignments for focused tasks under the Open Space umbrella.

Other discussions included progress on Recreation Open Space Inventory (ROSI), development progress at the Schedler property, and Planning Board ordinances.

I. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

II. Approval of November Meeting Notes

The November meeting notes were approved.

III. Team Alignment - New Secretary

Jessica Van Aken was approved as the OSC's new secretary for the upcoming year.

IV. Liaison Reports

- a) Village Council
 - i) Council members and Village staff traveled to Trenton to observe State proceedings to remove the Village's Green Acres Diversion, which was approved. The Village is now actively updating its ROSI to meet Green Acres requirements.
- b) Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board (PRC)
 - i) No formal updates at this meeting, but there is an upcoming PRC meeting soon.
- c) Fields Committee
 - i) Upcoming FIFA World Cup-related events for the U.S. National Team Matches
 - 1) June 12 at 9:00 PM: Van Neste Park watch party for the U.S. opener
 - 2) June 19 at 3:00 PM: U.S. second match at bandshell with food trucks
- d) Planning Board
 - i) Currently reviewing five ordinances related to affordable housing and assisted living while operating within mandated regulations for quotas and density limits

V. Strategic Direction

Committee members assigned sub-committee roles to focus on the three primary points of interest of 2026: stewardship, administrative use of funds, and acquisitions.

OSC funding has doubled with the passage of the 2024 referendum, creating greater flexibility to build savings in the wake of new land acquisition opportunities, and improve existing parks.

VI. Acquisitions

OSC underscored the importance of pacing spending, allowing for future expansion of Open Space lands and curating long-term financial stability. OSC will continue to explore new properties of interest, especially properties which are contiguous to current Open Space lands, while simultaneously working to maintain existing parks.

VII. Administrative Process of Funds

Continued discussion of paced-spending and exploring all options, whilst maintaining financial stability.

VIII. Park Stewardship

Events centered around community engagement with Open Space lands were highlighted, chiefly the Daffodil Festival and Park Walks. The Daffodil Festival is a crucial opportunity to inform Ridgewood residents about accessibility to nearby parks, and an appropriate map will be used to show this. Similarly, the Park Walks are an effective way to engage community members with nature in their own backyard. There was some discussion of placing the Park Walks on temporary hiatus in favor of stewardship days to help clean and maintain the parks which the Village has fallen behind on. Nothing was finalized or formally changed.

Highlighted Trail Maintenance workshop which discussed how to assess park needs and clarified who to contact for maintenance issues. Similarly, the Eyes of a Trail workshop focused on identifying erosion, trail grade problems, and generally assessing the health of the trail itself.

IX. Green Acres Disposal/2025 Progress/Update

As touched on in the Liaison Reports, the State has approved/removed the Village's Green Acres diversion. Now, for the first time since 2012, the Village is eligible for Green Acres Grants.

X. Schedler Property/Update

Schedler Park remediation bids are ongoing. This must be completed before work on the land may commence.

XI. New Business

None currently.

Next meeting: Dual with PRC on Thursday, February 19 at 7 PM in the Youth Lounge at Village Hall. Submitted by: Jessica Van Aken - OSC Committee Secretary/Member