

April 28, 2025

Jennifer B. Leynes, M.H.P.
Historic Preservation Office

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

**RE: PARK DEVELOPMENT OF ZABRISKIE-SCHEDLER PROPERTY
VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD, BERGEN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY
PROJECT AUTHORIZATION APPLICATION**

Dear Ms. Leynes:

Since 2020, the Village of Ridgewood (“Village”) has coordinated with the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office (“HPO”) on the development of the Zabriskie-Schedler Property for recreational use. The project includes the development of a multi-sport turf athletic field, a surrounding walking and hiking trail, a playground, restrooms, parking facilities, and curated landscaping throughout the site.

In a letter dated March 22, 2024, the HPO responded to the Village’s Application for Project Authorization (hereafter referred to as “APA”), originally submitted February 16, 2024. The HPO outlined a series of deficiencies and deemed the application technically and professionally incomplete. The Village’s first response to the HPO letter, dated May 14, 2024, addressed outstanding issues, such as a statement of purpose, need, and ongoing archaeological assessments at the site. The purpose of this renewed APA submission is to provide a more comprehensive response in supplement to the Village’s initial project reviews of the Zabriskie-Schedler Property. The Village looks forward to the application being deemed technically complete and advanced in the review process, allowing it to proceed with the next critical steps toward completing the project.

Background & Project History

For background and context, the following statements are provided:

- Definitions – The Zabriskie-Schedler property has been referred to by various names, leading to some inconsistency in terminology. For example, the Zabriskie House is alternatively referred to as the John A.L. Zabriskie House, the Zabriskie House, or the Zabriskie-Schedler House. Similarly, the surrounding land has been referenced as both the Schedler Property and the Zabriskie-Schedler Property.

For consistency in this narrative and in conjunction with how the HPO office has referenced the property, the structure will be referred to as Zabriskie-Schedler House (herein referred to as “House”) and the land and overall park property will be referenced as Zabriskie-Schedler Property (herein referred to as “Property”).

- The John A.L. Zabriskie House (“the House”) is a 19th-century Dutch-American wood-frame structure set on a brownstone masonry foundation. The building reflects its early 19th-century

origins, complemented by a substantial mid-19th-century addition in the same Dutch vernacular style, along with modest renovations from the early to mid-20th century. It is located on the west side of West Saddle River Road, situated on a triangular parcel of land that extends to the edge of New Jersey Route 17. The property currently spans approximately seven acres, much of which remains undeveloped. However, the landscape has been significantly altered from its original state due to the development of the Village of Ridgewood and the construction of the highway. In particular, Route 17 had a direct impact on the former Zabriskie-Schedler Property by effectively splitting the property in two, isolating it from Ridgewood's central business district and altering its connection to the surrounding community.

- The Zabriskie-Schedler Property, a structure and roughly seven (7) acres of land, was listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places in 2019 and as such the Village of Ridgewood is obligated to submit an Application for Project Authorization for HPO review as per N.J.S.A. 13:1B-15.128 et seq.; N.J.A.C.7:4-7.1 et seq.
- The Village of Ridgewood purchased the Property at the end of 2009 for approximately \$2.8 million, with funding provided by the Bergen County Trust Grant Program, Bergen County Open Space Trust Fund Grant, and the Village's capital improvement fund. An adjacent lot was acquired shortly thereafter pursuant to similar funding. The primary goal of the acquisitions was twofold: (1) to preserve open space and prevent commercial development along Route 17, and (2) to create a multi-use recreational park that would serve residents and visitors. At the time, constituents of the Village raised strong concerns about the possibility of a gas station, convenience store, or strip mall being developed on these sites that would negatively impact the surrounding residential neighborhood.
- The original purpose and intent of the Property acquisition by the Village always included the construction of a full-size, multi-use athletic field as a main feature of the development vision. In fact, at the time of purchase, all stakeholders, understood and agreed that an artificial turf sports field would be a major part of the planned recreational development. The initial plan was even more ambitious than what is currently proposed, featuring a larger field with lighting.
- Correspondence by the HPO on May 28, 2020 advised the Village that the:

“HPO understands that the subject property was purchased to provide recreational facilities to residents in an underserved area of the Village. We believe that this goal may be achieved while minimizing the effects on the historic property through a redesign, and perhaps some scaling back of the proposed recreational facilities. Specifically, we recommend that the Village explore moving all of the proposed development to the northern portion of the property and creating a vegetative buffer that would separate the historic house from the park. With a buffer of evergreen trees and shrubs separating the house from the parking, athletic fields, and other amenities, the historic setting of the Zabriskie-Schedler House could be protected and the municipality could achieve its goals of providing recreational space for local residents.”

To date, the Village has revised the site plan with this statement in mind to achieve the stated goals to offer a neutral, supportive, and appropriate space for the House while also providing

for the community's outdoor recreation project goals.

- Since the purchase of the Property, the Village was obligated to undertake several environmental investigations and prescribed remediation work. A summary is provided herein under additional comments.

This notice serves to submit an APA in accordance with the NJ Register of Historic Places Act. Enclosed are various supporting documents, plans, studies, and reports related to this project as called for by the application requirements. This cover letter includes notes and comments, as well as responses and additional information for sections A, B, C, D, E, and F of the APA form where space constraints of the form did not allow for full details.

Section A: Required Documentation

Part I: Consulting Parties

- Local Historic Societies / Organizations

- **Ridgewood Historical Society**, 650 East Glen Ave., Ridgewood NJ, 07450
- **Bergen County Historic Society**, Historic New Bridge Landing, 1201-1209 Main Street, River Edge, NJ 07661
- **Bergen County Division of Cultural & Historic Affairs**, One Bergen County Plaza, 4th Floor, Hackensack, NJ 07601-7076
- Ellie Gruber, **Friends of Historic Zabriskie-Schedler, Inc.**, P.O. Box 1572, Ridgewood NJ 07450
- **Capt. Abraham Godwin Chapter NJ Society, Sons of the American Revolution** - gwright@wright-associate.com and 201-739-9076
- **Preservation New Jersey**, PO Box 7815, West Trenton 08628¹

- Local Historic Preservation Commissions

- Stacey Tsapatsaris, Chair, **Ridgewood Historic Preservation Commission**, 131 N Maple Avenue, Ridgewood, NJ 07450

- **Public & Private Property Owners** – All public and private property owners of registered property directly affected by the project. N.J.A.C. 7:4-7.1(d) stipulates that this list shall be the list of all private and public property owners (including right-of-way owners) named in the official municipal tax records and maps as of the date of the application's submission and shall be notarized by the appropriate municipal official. This list is *not* the list of property

¹ As the author of this Application for Project Authorization, I am serving as an independent contractor for Preservation New Jersey. The views expressed herein are my own and do not reflect the official positions or actions of the Preservation New Jersey Board.

owners within 200 feet of the project; (although submission of that list would be acceptable) it is the list of owners of registered properties which are directly physically impacted by the project.

- **Village of Ridgewood**, 131 N Maple Avenue, Ridgewood, NJ 07450
- **New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection**, Brownfield Enforcement Unit
- **Local Government Units / Agencies** - All affected local government units, any agencies or instrumentalities thereof concerned with historic preservation, and any statewide organization and local organization specifically concerned with historic preservation in the area of the undertaking's potential impact.
 - **Village of Ridgewood**, 131 N Maple Avenue, Ridgewood, NJ 07450
 - **County of Bergen**, Thomas J. Duch, Esq. Administrator, One Bergen County Plaza, 5th Floor, Hackensack, NJ 07601-7076
 - **Parks, Recreation & Conservation Board**, 131 N Maple Avenue, Ridgewood, NJ 07450
 - **Ridgewood Open Space Committee**, 131 N Maple Avenue, Ridgewood, NJ 07450
- **Maps** - Several maps are included. Three (3) general location identification maps were included. Within the *Phase IA Historic and Archaeological Survey* USGS, Road and Aerial maps were provided.
- **Photographs** – attached.
- **Complete architectural or engineering plans** – Concept plan is provided as an attachment.
- **Specifications** – This work has not been completed or provided for this review.
- **Proposed agreements (easements, lease, deed, covenant etc.) applicable to the undertaking.** – Not applicable for this project.
- **If the application proposes demolition of all or a substantial portion of a property, the application shall include a structural assessment and an evaluation of whether the property could be reasonably repaired, to be prepared by an architect or engineer with demonstrated experience with historic properties.** – Not applicable for this project.
- **If the application proposes relocation of a New Jersey Register listed property, information and documentation required in N.J.A.C. 7:4-3.2(c) must also be submitted.** – Not applicable for this project.

Section B: Project Description – *Development of a public park at the Zabriskie-Schedler Property*

The proposed project involves the development of a multi-functional public park at the Property. This seven-acre parcel, acquired by the Village of Ridgewood in 2009, is currently underutilized and offers significant potential for transforming the area into a valuable community recreational resource.

The proposed development plan includes the construction of several key features:

1. **Multi-Sport Artificial Turf Athletic Field:** A full-size, multi-sport field designed for soccer, lacrosse, softball, baseball, and football. This artificial turf field provides a durable, low-maintenance, and weather-resistant space for organized sports and recreational activities. It will address the critical shortage of athletic fields in the community and reduce the overuse and flooding issues faced by other existing fields. The expected heavy use of this field by the community indicates that artificial turf is the best option available for its durability and maintenance.
2. **Walking and Hiking Trail:** A perimeter walking and hiking trail will be integrated into the park design, offering a natural, scenic path for residents of all ages to enjoy outdoor exercise and leisure. The trail will connect various areas of the park, providing accessibility and encouraging physical activity in a peaceful environment.
3. **Playground:** A modern, safe, and inclusive playground will be installed to cater to children and families. The playground will include age-appropriate equipment and accessible features to ensure that children of all abilities can access, use and enjoy the amenities provided.
4. **Restrooms and Parking:** The park will feature necessary support amenities, including restrooms and ample parking to accommodate visitors both to the park and the House. These facilities will be strategically placed to ensure easy access and convenience for park users as well as Zabriskie-Schedler House visitors.
5. **Landscaping and Green Space:** The proposed landscape of the overall property will include native plantings, shade trees, green infrastructure and other landscaping elements to promote environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and aesthetic appeal. Open green spaces will provide areas for passive recreation and relaxation for all ages and abilities.
6. **Support for adaptive reuse and public awareness of the Zabriskie-Schedler House:** The Village views the House as a significant public asset and part of the proposed project. The landscaping work around the House will focus on creating a distinct, segregated setting that preserves the historic integrity of the property while enhancing public engagement and use. This will involve several key elements:
 - a) **Segregated Setting** – The landscaping will feature carefully planned plantings, hedges, and fencing to establish a visual divide between the House and the multi-use field, preserving the historic integrity of the space. A parking lot, positioned away from the

house, will be designated exclusively for visitors, offering easy access while safeguarding the house's historic setting.

The plantings and physical alterations included in the design are thoughtfully planned to enhance the views from the multi-use fields, ensuring the House remains visually prominent while blending with the surrounding landscape. The careful placement of plantings will frame the Zabriskie-Schedler House, fostering a sense of enclosure. As the plantings mature, they will gradually obscure the view of the multi-use field from the rear of the House.

- b) **Signage** – Informational signage will be positioned throughout the property to guide visitors and offer context on the House's history and significance. Wayside markers will emphasize key features of the site, providing educational insights into the Zabriskie family, the house, and the surrounding landscape. These signs will be designed to harmonize with the historic character of the site while delivering meaningful interpretive content. Further details of this approach can be found in the proposed mitigative measures section.
- c) **Pathways** – A network of clearly marked, accessible pathways will be created to guide visitors through the grounds, offering safe and direct access to key areas of interest. These paths will be constructed from materials that complement the historic character of the Property. Designed to connect the House with the surrounding areas, the pathways will allow visitors to explore the site in an organized way.
- d) **Strategic Use Plan** – A plan for the occupancy of the House will be developed as part of a Strategic Use Plan. This plan will outline the hours the public can visit the interior of the house, explore the potential for a dedicated website, and identify organizations that could be suitable for programming the space. Further details of this approach are provided under the proposed mitigative measures section.

The project is designed to serve a wide range of community needs, supporting recreational activities for athletes, families, and residents of all ages. The development of this park aligns with the Village's commitment to maintaining high-quality, accessible public spaces and promoting outdoor recreation in a healthy and sustainable environment.

Section C: Statement of Purpose

The purpose of developing a park at the Zabriskie-Schedler Property is to transform this underutilized, seven-acre parcel into a vibrant, multi-use public space that meets the growing recreational and environmental needs of the Village of Ridgewood. Originally acquired in 2009 to preserve open space, promote community health and recreation, and prevent commercial development, the property presents a unique and long-anticipated opportunity to provide much-needed recreational amenities for Village residents of all ages.

The proposed park will include a full-size, multi-sport artificial turf athletic field—critically important for easing the burden on the Village's overused and flood-prone fields—as well as a walking and hiking trail, playground, restrooms, parking, and natural landscaping. The project

supports the Village's long-standing commitment to expanding access to high-quality recreational facilities, preserving green space, and enhancing the community's quality of life.

Through thoughtful planning and sustainable design, the development of the Property into a public park will also honor the site's historical context while serving the current and future needs of Ridgewood's residents.

General Need for the Project

- **Village Audience & Diversity** – The Village of Ridgewood, nestled in northeastern New Jersey, is a vibrant suburban community home to approximately 26,194 residents living in 8,816 households. Spanning just 5.8 square miles, Ridgewood has a population density of roughly 4,524 residents per square mile, making it a densely populated and well-established municipality.

The community is characterized by a strong family presence, with nearly 28.1% of residents under the age of 18. At the same time, 13.6% of the population is aged 65 or older, reflecting a balanced age distribution that contributes to a dynamic, multigenerational environment.

The Village is also diverse in its racial and ethnic makeup. The majority of residents identify as White (69.9%), while a significant portion of the population is Asian (16.4%). Hispanic or Latino residents make up 10.2% of the community, followed by individuals identifying as two or more races (9.7%), and Black or African American (2.3%). This diversity contributes to the rich cultural fabric and inclusive character of the Village.

- **Current State of Athletic Fields** – The Village currently provides *only* five (5) park facilities with sports fields. Of these fields two (2) are located within the Ho-Ho-Kus Brook floodplain.² As a result, these fields are vulnerable to flooding, which significantly disrupts athletic programs. Between October 2023 and January 2024 alone, the fields flooded three times, rendering them unusable for weeks due to the extensive cleanup and repair efforts required.

The proposed project at the Zabriskie-Schedler Property would establish the only full-size multipurpose athletic field in the Village that is not located within a flood zone and is resilient to heavy rain events. Given the Village's high level of development and lack of remaining open land, there are no other viable locations for new field construction. The Zabriskie-Schedler Property represents the Village's only feasible opportunity to expand its recreational infrastructure and meet growing community needs.

- **Use of Fields** – The Village of Ridgewood's athletic fields are a vital community asset, supporting a wide range of youth and adult sports programs, school activities, and community events. With high participation rates across sports such as soccer, lacrosse, football, and field hockey, the demand for field space consistently exceeds availability.

² The Village owns five (5) park facilities with sports fields. Within the Village however there are another twelve (12) that are owned and operated by the Village Board of Education.

This issue is further compounded by seasonal overlaps, limited daylight hours, and weather-related disruptions—particularly at fields located within flood-prone areas, which are frequently rendered unusable.

The addition of a full-size, multipurpose field at the Zabriskie-Schedler Property would significantly alleviate scheduling pressures, reduce field overuse, and provide a reliable facility not subject to flooding. As the only viable location left for such development, this project represents a critical opportunity to expand recreational capacity, support the health and well-being of residents, and meet the growing needs of the Village’s active population. The project delivers a clear and measurable public benefit by enhancing access to safe, dependable, and well-maintained outdoor recreational space for current and future generations.

Numerous community organizations involved in youth and adult athletics have expressed their support for the proposed project. These groups recognize the critical need for expanded and improved recreational space to meet growing demand. Organizations supporting the project include, but are not limited to:

- Ridgewood Parks, Recreation, and Conservation Department
- Village of Ridgewood Fields Committee
- Ridgewood Baseball Softball Association (RBSA)
- Ridgewood Soccer Association (RSA)
- Maroons Travel Soccer
- Ridgewood Junior Football Association (RJFA)
- Ridgewood Lacrosse (RLax)

These organizations play an essential role in providing structured athletic opportunities for residents and have collectively acknowledged the benefits this project would bring to the community.

Section D: Alternatives/Mitigation

1. **Alternatives** - Before engaging a preservation consultant, the Village, in collaboration with the HPO, discussed the project and concerns regarding the site's cultural and historic resources. The planning and development of the park have undergone review for nearly sixteen (16) years. Over that time, the Village, with the assistance of various consultants, presented seven (7) different alternatives to the HPO. However, many of these alternatives lacked clear direction or failed to appropriately address preservation priorities.

At present, the following four (4) alternatives are considered viable for further evaluation:

a) Alternative No. 1 – No Build

This alternative is not considered feasible due to the critical and well-documented need for a community park and athletic field, as consistently expressed by local schools, youth organizations, and community sports groups since 2017. Over the years, a combination of public input sessions, planning studies, and recreational needs

assessments confirmed a significant and growing demand for accessible open space and active recreational facilities within the Village. Addressing this need was the primary reason the Village—supported by funding and partnership with the County of Bergen—acquired the Zabriskie-Schedler Property.

There are no viable or available alternative sites within the Village that can accommodate such a development without incurring substantial environmental, logistical, or financial obstacles. The Zabriskie-Schedler Property remains the only undeveloped open space of sufficient size to support a park and athletic field. As highlighted in the National Register nomination for the property, the Village of Ridgewood has experienced significant growth and land use changes over the years, particularly in residential and commercial sectors, leaving few opportunities for the creation of new community green spaces.

Additionally, because the property was privately owned and had come to the market for sale, it was inevitable that it would become part of the commercial corridor of Route 17. The development pressure presented by such a large open space with direct automobile access to Route 17 would have resulted in a large-scale commercial development imposing on the existing residential neighborhood and likewise would have threatened possible demolition of the Zabriskie-Schedler House. These outcomes were not in the best interest of the Village, and the positive outcomes presented by the acquisition of the site for recreational use greatly outweighed the negative impacts of commercial development on the public interest.

Given these considerations, this alternative fails to support the Village's long-term goals of enhancing quality of life, supporting youth and community athletics, and preserving meaningful public access to open space. It does not align with the demonstrated priorities of Ridgewood's residents or the strategic vision for the Village's future.

b) Alternative No. 2 – Alternative Design

Since 2009, the Village has developed and presented numerous design proposals for the property—internally, publicly, and in consultation with the HPO. Early design concepts, created before the nomination and formal recognition of the Zabriskie-Schedler House as a historic resource, included the potential demolition of the house, construction of a 90-foot baseball diamond and a soccer field, a large parking area on the southern end of the site, and the clearing of a significant portion of the property. Access to the park was proposed via a small-radius entrance from Route 17, which posed safety concerns due to pedestrian traffic crossing both the entrance and exit lanes.

This initial concept was withdrawn, primarily due to concerns over the removal of the historic house and other elements that conflicted with both the original intent of the property's acquisition and the broader public interest. The plan lacked sensitivity to the site's cultural and historical significance, as well as to community priorities.

The Village then undertook a more collaborative and inclusive planning process. An

Ad-hoc committee was established by the Village Council, and meetings with various stakeholders and interested parties were convened to ensure community voices were included. These discussions became even more focused following the Property's historic designation in 2019, with HPO becoming formally involved in the process beginning in 2020. Since then, the Village has made substantial and continued efforts to evaluate and refine alternative park designs in a manner consistent with historic preservation best practices and community concerns.

The most recent iterations of the park plan include key guidance provided by the HPO. One foundational recommendation was to shift active recreational development to the northern end of the property and establish a vegetative buffer to protect the historic integrity of the Zabriskie-Schedler House and its grounds. This buffer, composed of evergreen trees and dense shrubs, serves to visually and physically separate the House from the athletic fields, parking, and other park amenities, thereby preserving what still remains of the site's historic setting and grounds, as well as potential archaeological deposits. This approach has been integrated across all current and proposed alternative designs, illustrating the Village's commitment to a balanced solution that honors both the recreational needs of the community and the site's historic value.

Among the various design alternatives presented, the only remaining consideration that has not yet been fully addressed pertains to materiality. Specifically, the Village is actively pursuing the installation of a synthetic turf field. A natural grass field *was not* proposed in any of the previous design concepts circulated and informally presented to the HPO due to the intended multipurpose nature of the space. The field is expected to accommodate a variety of year-round sports and recreational activities, which place substantial wear and tear on the surface. Natural grass, under these conditions, and a natural field would not withstand continuous use without rapid degradation and failure. Like other existing grass fields in the Village, a natural turf field would quickly become unplayable and require costly and frequent maintenance to restore it to an acceptable condition.

In contrast, synthetic turf offers a more durable, low-maintenance solution that can withstand the high volume of activity anticipated at the park. The synthetic surface ensures consistent compatibility across multiple sports, with minimal downtime for field recovery. This makes it the most viable option for meeting the Village's goal of providing a high-quality, multi-use facility that serves the diverse needs of its residents on a year-round basis.

Given these practical considerations, the alternative of using natural grass does not align with the Village's long-term priorities for a sustainable, multi-sport facility. It fails to support the goal of maximizing the field's usability and cannot meet the demands of a space intended for continuous use. Therefore, the decision to pursue synthetic turf remains the most appropriate and effective solution to fulfill the project's goals.

c) Alternative No. 3 – Another Build Location

For many years, the Village has actively pursued the acquisition of land for recreational use, as documented in the *2003 Open Space Plan* and the *2007 Comprehensive Recreational Master Plan*. These plans identified several potential properties for acquisition, with two of the largest ultimately purchased by the Village. The first of these acquisitions became Irene Habernickel Family Park, which now serves as a space for both active and passive recreation. The second major acquisition was the Zabriskie-Schedler Property.

Other properties identified in the plans were ultimately deemed unsuitable due to size constraints or location within designated floodplains, limiting their potential for development or recreational use. More recently, the Village's Affordable Housing Planner completed a *Housing Element and Fair Share Plan* in 2020, which included an in-depth analysis of vacant land for potential development. The findings of that study confirmed the scarcity of available vacant land within the Village, underscoring that the community is nearly fully developed, as also concluded in the Master Plan.

In addition, the Village conducted a review to assess whether the proposed project could be accommodated within existing parks. This evaluation determined that none of the current parks could support the project without significant drawbacks: either the available space was insufficient, or utilizing the space would require the removal or reconfiguration of existing recreational fields, thereby diminishing current community resources.

The Village has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to expanding and preserving open space, as reflected in its planning efforts over the past two decades. While key acquisitions like Irene Habernickel Family Park and the Zabriskie-Schedler Property represent significant progress, further land acquisition and development have been constrained by limited available space, floodplain restrictions, and the near-complete build-out of the Village. Comprehensive reviews have shown that existing parks cannot accommodate additional projects without compromising current recreational facilities.

d) Alternative No. 4 – Separation of Zabriskie-Schedler House & Park Amenities

The project proposes development of a multi-functional public park on the Zabriskie-Schedler Property while deliberately segregating recreational improvements and supporting amenities from the immediate setting of the Zabriskie-Schedler House. Detailed plans are included as part of this application. For additional context and specifics, please refer to the *Project Description* section above.

The overall concept emphasizes a thoughtful and deliberate separation between the historic House and the active areas of the park. This preserves the historic character of the House's setting. At the same time, the plan includes carefully integrated amenities and access points designed to integrate public awareness, education and use of the House as an additional park amenity. This includes pathways, dedicated parking,

signage, and utilities that enable the house to function independently while remaining a meaningful part of the larger park environment. This balanced approach ensures that both the historic integrity of the House and the recreational needs of the community are respected and accommodated.

This represents the **Village's recommended alternative** for the park project, developed after extensive planning, community input, and consultation with preservation and design professionals. It reflects a balanced approach that seeks to meet the recreational needs of residents while respecting the historical significance of the Property. This proposed alternative incorporates key feedback from stakeholders and regulatory agencies and is considered the most feasible and sustainable solution to move the project forward.

2. **Mitigation** - Since the park development project on the Property will be deemed as an encroachment to cultural and historic resources, the Village is including the following mitigative measures:

- a) The Village requests that the \$2.6 million ***restoration of the Zabriskie-Schedler House completed in 2024*** be considered as a major element of mitigation. The purpose was to save the site from demolition due to commercial development pressure. These efforts also led to the completion of listing the property on the State and National Register of Historic Places in 2019.³
- b) Since the restoration of the House was completed, the Village has not provided a permanent use or long-standing plan for the operations of the site. The Village will prepare and provide a ***Strategic Use Plan for the Zabriksie-Schedler House***. This initiative will aim to evaluate and define viable, sustainable long-term uses for the House that balance historic preservation with community needs and financial sustainability. The goal is to transform the property into a vibrant space that serves the public interest while honoring and preserving its legacy and history. Possible uses may include community event space, a cultural heritage center, educational facility, museum, or a mixed-use site combining public and private functions.
- c) In parallel with this initiative and other efforts related to the completion of the Use Plan, the Village will develop an ***Interpretive Plan for the Zabriskie-Schedler Property***. This plan will identify key historic and cultural resources and provide recommendations for further study, preservation, and interpretation of the house and its significance within Bergen County.

Additionally, with the support of an interpretive plan, the Village will incorporate the following activities to bring awareness of the site's history and importance to the municipality by:

- Archaeological materials uncovered during the current assessments and surveys

³ The Village began restoration efforts as early as 2020. On April 24, 2024, the Village received a Certificate of Occupancy and is currently working on grant close-outs and final punch list items with Connolly & Hickey Historical Architects.

will be exhibited at the Village's administration building, library, and potentially the Zabriskie-Schedler House. The Village will develop informative displays showcasing the site's history and highlighting the work of the archaeologists involved in the project.

- Including the history of the Zabriskie-Schedler Property in a digital exhibition that will be published on the Village's website and local library, together with printed materials permanently held at the library, historical society and at the state museum and library memorializing the historic research, archaeological investigations and physical rehabilitation of the building that have been funded to date by the Village.
 - Define a reasonable schedule and conditions for the House to be open for public viewing, and possibly a guided talk and tour provided several times a year.
- d) As part of the project design, there will be at least three (3) interpretive panels fabricated and installed in the park, illustrating the history of the site and Ridgewood.

Additional Considerations and Comments:

Based on prior evaluations conducted through the Application for Project Authorization (APA) process, it was determined that much of the information previously submitted was inconsistent, incomplete, or lacked appropriate preservation context. To address these issues and ensure a more accurate and comprehensive submission, the Village retained a new preservation consultant to review the project and provide expert input. The following are the general comments and observations regarding the Zabriskie-Schedler Property as part of this revised evaluation:

1. **Summary of Environmental Investigation Activities at the Zabriskie-Schedler Property:**
On December 11, 2023, the NJDEP Bureau of Solid Waste Compliance & Enforcement (BSWCE) raised concerns about the quality and origin of approximately 10,000 cubic yards of fill material used to construct a berm at the Property. In response, the Village of Ridgewood retained Matrix to investigate and prepare a Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP), which NJDEP conditionally approved in April 2024.

Matrix conducted a series of soil investigations beginning in May 2024. Initial sampling from the berm (AOC-1) revealed exceedances of NJDEP Soil Remediation Standards (SRS) for benzo(a)pyrene, benzo(a)anthracene, lead, and mercury. These findings were reported to NJDEP, and the site was assigned a case number. A Licensed Site Remediation Professional (LSRP) was designated, and site-specific Alternative Remediation Standards (ARS) were developed using Synthetic Precipitation Leaching Procedure (SPLP) testing, which showed concentrations below the calculated ARS thresholds.

In June 2024, NJDEP conditionally approved additional grid sampling to assess the remainder of the site (AOC-2). Matrix collected 28 soil samples, identifying further exceedances of NJDEP standards for SVOCs and metals, including benzo(a)pyrene, benzo(a)anthracene, and mercury. A resample was also collected and tested for VOCs.

To further delineate contamination, Matrix submitted a follow-up workplan in November 2024, which NJDEP conditionally approved. The plan includes additional sampling, further characterization of areas with suspected fill, and pesticide resampling at previously tested locations. Following the November 2024 Remedial Investigation (RI) at the Property, Matrix confirmed delineation boundaries at grid locations GRID-16, GRID-18, and GRID-26. Excavation and offsite disposal of contaminated soil in these areas were recommended.

To reduce the overall volume of soil requiring removal, Matrix advised further delineation of contaminants at grid locations GRID-10A, GRID-11, GRID-20, GRID-21, and GRID-28 due to exceedances of benzo(a)pyrene, benzo(a)anthracene, and/or mercury. Additional sampling was also recommended at GRID-4R (pesticide exceedance) and GRID-31 and GRID-34 (benzo(a)pyrene exceedance). According to NJDEP's *Groundwater Technical Guidance*, the current soil sampling results do not warrant a groundwater investigation.

Matrix will continue to work with the Village to develop a detailed scope of work and move toward creating a formal Remedial Action Plan for submission to the NJDEP, which will be incorporated into the overall development's construction phase. Should soil stripping be required in the vicinity of the House as part of the Remedial Action Plan approved and required by the NJDEP, the Village will amend this application should additional consideration be required for areas of archaeological sensitivity.

2. **Cultural & Archeological Studies:** With respect to the relationship between historic preservation and the need to provide a clear understanding of cultural impacts, the Village funded several research-intensive studies to mitigate and understand possible adverse effects to the Zabriskie-Schedler Property:
 - a) Completion of the National Register Nomination of the *John A.L. Zabriskie House aka Zabriskie-Schedler House* prepared and submitted by Connolly & Hickey Historical Architects (2018). The property received State and National Register status November 2019.
 - b) Completion of a Phase IA Historic and Archaeological Assessment Zabriskie-Schedler House and Property performed and reports submitted to Historic Preservation Office by Hunter Research, Inc. (February 2019).
 - c) Completion of a Phase IB Archaeological Survey Zabriskie-Schedler House and Property performed and reports submitted to Historic Preservation Office by Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. (December 2019).
 - d) Completion of a Geophysical Survey Using Ground-Penetrating Radar of Zabriskie-Schedler House performed and reports submitted to Historic Preservation Office by Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. (December 2023).
 - e) Completion of Phase II Archaeological Survey Zabriskie-Schedler House and Property performed. Final report will be submitted to Historic Preservation Office by Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. by June 2025. *A Management Summary Management Summary, Phase II Archaeological Survey, John A.L. Zabriskie House Site (28-Be-*

232), *Village of Ridgewood, Bergen County, New Jersey completed in April 2025 is included within the APA.*

- 3. Summary of Archeological Phase II:** Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. (RGA) has completed the fieldwork component of the Phase II archaeological survey at the Zabriskie House (site reference 28-Be-232). Excavations were carried out in accordance with the approved Phase II archaeological survey work plan and research design, dated June 20, 2024, and authorized by the HPO via an email memorandum on July 24, 2024. Fieldwork concluded on November 13, 2024.

Site 28-Be-232 is a multicomponent archaeological site containing deposits dating from the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries, primarily composed of domestic and architectural artifacts. In addition, three pre-Contact artifacts were recovered. Within the site boundary, two areas—designated Site Core 1 and Site Core 2—were identified as having concentrations of historic cultural material with potential significance.

RGA is currently conducting post-fieldwork tasks related to the Phase II survey. These tasks include artifact processing and analysis, specialized lithic analysis, and preparation of a technical report detailing the excavation findings, interpretations, and recommendations. The report is being prepared for submission in support of this APA. (Refer to attachment *A Management Summary Management Summary, Phase II Archaeological Survey, John A.L. Zabriskie House Site (28-Be-232), Village of Ridgewood, Bergen County, New Jersey in Archaeology documents*).

- 4. Local HPC Review** – The HPO takes into account the support of local jurisdictions during its evaluations. Pursuant to the Village of Ridgewood’s Land Use & Development Ordinance (Article II, Chapter 190-6) the Village created a Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to review permit applications and advise the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment on matters involving historic property designation and development. On September 14, 2023, the Ridgewood HPC reviewed and unanimously approved the proposed park development plans for the Zabriskie-Schedler Property, demonstrating local support for the project. (*Reference in Historic Preservation Commission Review documents*).
- 5. Public Engagement:** Since acquiring the property in 2009, the Village engaged the public through a variety of methods, including meetings, discussions, door-to-door outreach, and ad-hoc gatherings. This ensured an inclusive process for soliciting input from constituents and residents about the future development and use of the property. These public engagement efforts focused on gathering feedback, fostering collaboration, and creating a shared vision for the park’s development. While outreach efforts began as early as 2003, prior to the property’s purchase by the Village, 2017 marked a pivotal moment in the process. On June 6, 2017, Ridgewood Council proposed an Ad Hoc Committee, which was formally established on July 12th. The Ad Hoc Committee of residents presented their findings and recommendations for the property’s use to the Ridgewood Council during a meeting held on December 6, 2017. This presentation was a key milestone in aligning the project with the Village’s broader planning goals. Since then, ongoing updates about the project’s progress have been regularly communicated to the public through Council meetings and the project website. (*Reference and presentation in Public Engagement documents*).

Numerous concerns were raised about the park development over the years, covering a range of issues related to environmental, cultural, and community impacts. Many residents and stakeholders voiced concerns over the environmental effects of the project, particularly regarding the use of synthetic materials, water runoff, and the impact of new infrastructure on the surrounding green spaces. From a cultural perspective, there are concerns on how the park's development could compromise or overshadow the historic significance of the site, potentially diminishing its integrity. Community members have expressed concerns about accessibility, increased traffic, and potential impacts on nearby residential areas. Many worry the new park could lead to overcrowding, noise, and added strain on public services, ultimately diminishing quality of life. Additionally, some feel the planning process has lacked inclusiveness, with their input not fully acknowledged in shaping the final design.

In response to public opposition from a small minority of residents, the Village demonstrated a commitment to an open and transparent process throughout the acquisition and design process of the Zabriskie-Schedler Property into a park. Since the acquisition of the property in 2009, the Village engaged with the community, held numerous public meetings and implemented outreach initiatives to solicit input and ensure a broad range of community members. Public participation has been a cornerstone of the planning process, with efforts made to accommodate various viewpoints through door-to-door outreach, Council meetings and workshops, as well as dedicated meetings with stakeholders, local organizations, and historic preservation groups.⁴ These initiatives underscore the Village's commitment to creating an inclusive process.

Considering these extensive outreach efforts, some concerns raised by critics appear to be based on misconceptions or a lack of understanding of the planning process. For example, while there have been concerns about potential environmental impacts, the Village worked closely with environmental experts to ensure that the development adheres to best practices in sustainability, minimizing ecological disruption, and includes plans for proper stormwater management and site/soil remediation as required by State regulations. Additionally, the project incorporates elements designed to maintain the natural aesthetics of the area, such as strategic landscaping and preservation of the House and its surroundings.

Cultural concerns regarding the integrity of the Zabriskie-Schedler Property are addressed in the planning process. The design incorporates a thoughtful balance between community use and preservation. The Village consulted with the local HPC and the HPO throughout the development. This ensures that the park complements the character of the property while providing a space for public recreation. The proposed design enhances the overall visitor experience, celebrating the property's history and once completed, will offer educational opportunities for the community.

In terms of community impact, the Village has taken steps to mitigate potential issues such as

⁴ It is important to note that the project was first conceived during the property acquisition process as early as 2008, with references to park use appearing in planning documents as far back as 2003. Between 2008 and 2024, the Village experienced several changes in administration, each bringing different priorities and approaches. These shifts have influenced the planning process and should be considered when evaluating the extent and consistency of public involvement over time.

traffic, noise, and overcrowding – bearing in mind the property is bounded by Route 17, a major congested highway. Through careful planning and consultation with traffic engineers and urban planners, the project aims to enhance accessibility while minimizing negative effects on surrounding neighborhoods. The designated parking areas and the park’s layout are designed to alleviate potential congestion, ensuring that the park remains a local asset without imposing undue strain on nearby residents.

Although concerns were raised, the Village’s proactive engagement and careful consideration of them suggest that many of the objections have been addressed or are based on misunderstandings of the project’s goals and scope. The open, transparent, and inclusive process employed by the Village demonstrates a genuine effort to meet the needs of the community while ensuring the preservation of both the environment and the cultural heritage of the Zabriskie-Schedler Property. Therefore, many of the concerns could be considered abated or just overstated considering the thorough planning and responsive adjustments made throughout the process.

The Village is committed to continuing the involvement of the community and stakeholders throughout the final process to ensure that the park meets the needs and desires of its users while preserving the site's historic and cultural significance.

- 6. Landscape Changes & Context:** The Village secured dedicated funding with the explicit intent of acquiring land for the creation of a new public park, ensuring long-term access to green space and recreational opportunities for the community. This investment reflected a broader vision for sustainable development and public well-being. However, since the initial acquisition of the park parcels, various site preparation activities—necessary for both the envisioned recreational uses and for compliance with environmental regulations—led to substantial modifications of the property’s original landscape. These changes include regrading, vegetation removal, drainage improvements, and other interventions that have altered the site's preexisting conditions.

In parallel, the ongoing development within Ridgewood—especially in adjacent residential neighborhoods and nearby commercial areas—gradually eroded the historic and rural qualities that once defined the Zabriskie-Schedler Property and its surroundings. Once part of a contiguous agricultural landscape tied to Ridgewood’s early farming heritage, the site is now visually and functionally segmented by roads, suburban development, and other urban infrastructure – including the major construction project for Route 17. This evolution highlights the challenges of preserving historic context in a rapidly modernizing and densely populated environment. It also reinforces the importance of integrating historic preservation with adaptive planning to maintain the cultural significance of the site while meeting contemporary community needs.

Due to these cumulative changes, the historic landscape surrounding the Zabriskie-Schedler Property has already suffered a cumulative loss of contextual and interpretive value. The broader agrarian environment that once framed and gave additional context to the site—marked by open fields, farm structures, and unbroken visual connections to rural surroundings—was largely disrupted prior to the park development proposal. Defining landscape features such as historic tree lines, field boundaries, and long-range sightlines were

degraded or eliminated. The encroachment of surrounding development has not only physically transformed the area but also diminished the property's ability to convey its historical narrative. This ongoing loss of significance highlights the need for a thoughtful and adaptive approach—one that respects what remains of the site's heritage while supporting public access and community use through the proposed park development.

7. **Precedent:** There is both historical and legal precedent for the use of artificial turf on athletic fields at SR/NR (State Register/National Register) properties, which helps to establish the legitimacy and viability of incorporating such surfaces into these historically significant areas. Historically, the use of artificial turf in athletic facilities has evolved over decades as a practical solution for dedicated fields that face heavy use, environmental challenges, and financial and maintenance concerns. The adoption of synthetic turf in such settings is not new; in fact, it has been implemented successfully in numerous historic and registered properties, balancing contemporary needs.

While recognizing that synthetic turf may not be suitable for all situations, the HPO has approved its use in parks of greater cultural significance, particularly those designed by the Olmsted Brothers firm. In evaluating the integrity and materials for the Zabriskie-Schedler Property park development project, it is clear that this property does not possess the same level of historic significance, integrity or sensitivity as other designed landscapes, which renders the application of synthetic turf more so acceptable in this case.

In closing, we appreciate the opportunity to review the Village of Ridgewood's Application for Project Authorization regarding the Zabriskie-Schedler Park Project. We recognize the community's commitment to enhancing public spaces while adding value to the preserved historic Zabriskie-Schedler House. We look forward to continued collaboration to ensure that the project moves forward in a manner that aligns with regulatory requirements and the Village's project goals. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Kelly C. Ruffel
*Preservation Consultant on Behalf of
the Village of Ridgewood*