



Statement of Purpose

More than 5,000 sports registrants and 400-plus sports teams spent upwards of 20,000 hours on the multipurpose fields owned and operated by the Village of Ridgewood and Ridgewood Board of Education this past year. Five of the major fields experience flooding and, as a result, are frequently rendered unusable during the year. The result: overscheduling of fields, grossly overused grass fields, denied field requests, and the inability for resident athletes of all ages to practice and play in town. This is the reality faced in the Village – and the main reason for the application to develop a portion of the Zabriskie-Schedler property into a multi-use recreational park that includes a multi-sport athletic field. This was the reason the Village purchased the property in 2009.

The Village has been and continues to be committed to providing and maintaining high-quality recreational facilities for residents. However, due to the high demand from organized athletic programs, community events and general public use, and the limited number and capacity of existing fields, the need has far exceeded field availability for many years. *The Zabriskie-Schedler property offers the only viable opportunity to help address this shortfall and benefit residents of all ages.*

Specifically, the Village offers five park facilities with sports fields and another twelve that are owned and operated by the Village Board of Education. Taking into account both Village and Board of Education fields, five of these fields (including all three multipurpose turf fields) are located in the Ho-Ho-Kus Brook floodplain. When the fields flood, which happened three times between October 2023 and January 2024, teams are unable to practice or play home games for weeks due to major cleanup and repairs. *The proposed project at the Zabriskie-Schedler property would be the only full-size multipurpose athletic field NOT situated in a flood zone and not impacted by significant rainstorms. In our densely populated town, there is no other property upon which the Village can build another field. This is our only viable option.*

Many of our fields are used seven days a week, and our grass fields suffer the punishing consequences because they do not have time to “rest” (i.e., taken out of circulation for one season). In the spring of 2022, conditions were so poor from overuse that the Village Parks and Recreation Department was forced to close all municipally owned grass fields from March 7 through May 7 – virtually the entire spring season – to give the grass an opportunity to regenerate. Maintenance of any kind cannot combat the overuse of grass fields. It is simply not possible for Village grounds crews to maintain playable conditions based on the current level of activity.

Artificial turf, on the other hand, allows for continuous, repetitive use. It can be used heavily with little maintenance and often used immediately after rain with no impact on program

schedules. In addition, turf allows a field to be “striped” more effectively and sustainably for multiple sports. This is an important point since the proposed turf field at the Zabriskie-Schedler property would be used for soccer, lacrosse, softball, baseball and football.

Historical Background

The Zabriskie-Schedler property is a seven-acre tract of land that lies between Route 17 and West Saddle River Road in Ridgewood, Bergen County. It was purchased by the Village in 2009 for approximately \$2.8 million, supported by a Bergen County Trust Fund Grant (\$1 million), Bergen County Open Space Trust Fund Grant (\$600,000), Municipal Capital Improvement Fund (\$300,000), and Municipal Bonds and Notes (approximately \$900,000). An adjacent lot also was purchased in 2009 at a cost of \$100,000.

The objective was to conserve open space and prevent the commercial development of the land that sits on Route 17. Neighbors strongly voiced their concern that the site would be turned into a gas station, convenience store, strip mall, etc., which would have adversely affected the local neighborhood. Another objective was to build a multi-use recreational park, including a much-needed athletic field, to serve the needs of residents of all ages. It is important to note that at the time of purchase, all parties involved, including neighborhood residents, agreed that the development of the property would include a full-size turf sports field. In fact, at the time of purchase, the proposed plan included a much larger sports field than is proposed today - with lights.

During the ensuing 15 years, a variety of park development plans were conceptualized and abandoned, all of which included the above recreational features. During this time, the John A.L. Zabriskie House located on the property was designated as a historic site for its 19th-century Dutch Colonial architecture (Criteria C) and was added to both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. As a result, the surrounding acreage that comprises the rest of the site purchased by the Village received the same designation. It should be understood that the sole criterion for the historic designation is the architecture of the Zabriskie House. A response from the State Historic Preservation Office dated December 6, 2023, definitively described the site as not being historically significant in association with the Revolutionary War following the National Register criteria (See Appendix 26). Phase 1 archaeological surveys performed by Richard Grubb and Associates revealed no evidence of Revolutionary War artifacts on the land. Of critical significance in this regard, Ridgewood’s Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously that they have no objection to the development of the Zabriskie-Schedler property according to the current plan submitted to SHPO. It should also be noted that, prior to its acquisition by the Village, the original Zabriskie-Schedler property included areas that are now residential and other mixed uses.

The Village’s reverence for the historical significance of the house located on the property is evidenced by our investment of \$2.6 million in the restoration of the Zabriskie House, which was in terrible disrepair when the property was purchased. A Temporary Certificate of Occupancy was recently issued, and a public Open House will take place on June 8, 2024. Our plans for the park call for a substantial buffer separating the Zabriskie House from the playing field, including a mix of native trees, shrubs, grasses and other plantings. The park, playing field and house will complement one another in a way that is otherwise unachievable. This is extensively discussed in the application.

Conclusion

The Village of Ridgewood is a densely populated suburban community with very little available open space and the largest school system in Bergen County – approximately 5,600 children – as well as a growing population of active adults. There is simply not enough field space for all of our residents to practice and play in town – a problem that has existed for decades and has been documented in previous open space reports and master plans. The last new, full-size multipurpose field built in Ridgewood was Maple Park in 1980 – 44 years ago.

Two recognized state and national benchmarks support the Village's long-held position that it does not offer sufficient active recreational space to meet the needs of residents. According to the New Jersey Balanced Land Use Standard, the Village has a 63.7-acre deficit of active recreational space. And, according to the National Recreation and Park Association, the Village's deficit is greater than 100 acres. (See page 11 of the Independent Assessment of Zabriskie-Schedler Park.)

Development of the Zabriskie-Schedler property is truly a once-in-a-generation opportunity and represents our last-and-only chance to build a multipurpose field that the community so desperately needs. Participation in youth and adult sports programs that require field usage will continue to grow with the introduction of new sports, such as the recently launched Youth Girls Flag Football program.

The Zabriskie-Schedler property is the only open space left in the Village upon which to build a full-size multipurpose playing field to fill the steadily widening demand/supply gap.

Just as important is the fact that the property is situated in a less frequently traveled corner of the Village. Incorporating the Zabriskie House into the design of the proposed park will bring greater awareness to the historical building, which it would not otherwise receive, giving both residents and visitors an opportunity to learn about its architectural significance. With supplemental recreational features like walking trails, a playground and an open-air pavilion, this project will benefit *all* residents of the Village and align with our long-held belief that local parks play a vital role in promoting a healthy community and improving quality of life.

We appreciate your consideration of our application.