



VILLAGE OF RIDGEWOOD

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July 18, 2025

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

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

**RE: MITIGATIVE MEASURES & DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE
ZABRISKIE-SCHEDLER HOUSE AS THE HISTORY & CULTURAL CENTER OF BERGEN
COUNTY**

Dear Ms. Leynes:

In understanding the proposed park development project at the Zabriskie-Schedler Property, the Village of Ridgewood ("Village") outlined several mitigative measures in its Application for Project Authorization dated April 29, 2025 for consideration.

As referenced in the report, the Village included the following measures and considerations:

1. The Village requested that the \$2.6 million restoration of the Zabriskie-Schedler House completed in 2024 be considered as a major element of the park development project. The purpose was to save the site from demolition due to commercial development pressure.
2. As part of the project process and review with the NJ Historic Preservation Office, several archaeological assessments were conducted. The results of these studies will be reflected in all park improvements and programmatic efforts at the Zabriskie-Schedler Property.
3. The Village intends to develop an Interpretive Plan for the Zabriskie-Schedler Property. This plan will identify key themes and storylines, and provide recommendations for further study, preservation, and interpretation of the house and its Ridgewood history.

4. With uncovered archaeological materials during the current assessments and surveys, the Village will exhibit those materials at key Village facilities such as the administration building, library, and the Zabriskie-Schedler House.
5. The Village will develop informative displays showcasing the site's history and highlighting the work of the archaeologists involved in the project.
6. The history of the Zabriskie-Schedler Property will be developed into 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.
7. The Village will provide the House to be open for public viewing, and programs such as guided tours and lectures several times a year.
8. 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.

As part of its mitigative measures outlined in the submitted Application for Project Authorization, the Village of Ridgewood committed to developing a *Strategic Use Plan for the Zabriskie-Schedler House*. While the restoration of the house has been completed, a permanent use or long-term operational plan for the site had not been established at the time. Recognizing the importance of activating the property to ensure its preservation and relevance, the Village pledged to transform the site into a vibrant space that serves the public interest while honoring its historical legacy. Proposed uses have included a community event space, cultural heritage center, educational facility, museum, or a mixed-use site combining public and private functions. To demonstrate the Village's ongoing commitment to preserving its history and to clearly articulate a long-term vision for the site, this report entitled ***Planning & Development Framework: History & Cultural Center of Bergen County*** has been prepared.

The ***Planning & Development Framework: History & Cultural Center of Bergen County*** report was developed to formally present a vision and strategy for establishing a vibrant center dedicated to local history, culture, and community engagement. The driving force behind this initiative is the urgent need to ensure the long-term preservation and purposeful use of the historic Zabriskie-Schedler House and property. Preservation experts agree that the most effective way to protect historic assets is to ensure they are actively used and integrated into the life of the community. By creating a public-facing cultural center at this site, we not only safeguard the physical structure, but also honor and activate its history. The center will provide meaningful and ongoing use for the house and surrounding landscape, turning preservation into a living, participatory experience. This report serves as a guiding document for stakeholders, outlining the center's mission, public benefits, community partnerships, and operational needs as we prepare to commemorate 250 years of American history and Ridgewood's lasting contributions.

Planning & Development Framework: History & Cultural Center of Bergen County

1. Executive Summary

This Planning & Development Framework presents the vision, purpose, and foundational structure for the creation of the History & Cultural Center of Bergen County, proposed for the Zabriskie-Schedler House in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

Envisioned as a dynamic and inclusive hub, the center will serve as a cornerstone for historical preservation, education, cultural enrichment, and civic engagement. It will honor Ridgewood's deep-rooted heritage while offering a welcoming space for residents, community groups, and organizations from across Bergen County. Through rotating exhibits, educational programs, public events, and artistic showcases, the center will foster intergenerational learning, strengthen community identity, and ensure that the rich legacy of Ridgewood and the region remains active, accessible, and relevant for future generations.

2. Mission & Goals of the Center

The establishment of the History & Cultural Center of Bergen County is guided by a clear and compelling mission:

To preserve, celebrate, and share the rich history, cultural heritage, and evolving narrative of Bergen County and the Village of Ridgewood through inclusive exhibitions, educational programming, and meaningful community engagement.

This mission reflects the recognition that history is not merely a record of the past but a living, shared experience that informs and enriches present and future generations. The center is envisioned as a civic institution that not only protects and interprets historical assets but also provides a vibrant and inclusive space for dialogue, learning, creativity, and connection.

To realize this mission, the center will pursue the following core goals:

1. *Stewardship of Archaeological and Historical Resources*

The center will serve as a responsible steward of the area's historical and archaeological assets, including those uncovered at the Zabriskie-Schedler site. It will ensure that artifacts, structures, and related materials are properly preserved, interpreted, and made accessible to the public through curated exhibitions, scholarly partnerships, and educational programs.

2. *Creation of an Accessible Civic and Cultural Space*

The center will be designed as a welcoming and inclusive environment that encourages participation from all segments of the community. It will offer flexible space for civic,

educational, and artistic programming—ensuring accessibility to schools, nonprofits, cultural groups, and individuals with a shared interest in history and the arts.

3. *Promotion and Awareness of Local History at Local, State, and National Levels*

Through permanent and rotating exhibits, public programs, and digital initiatives, the center will highlight the significant role that Ridgewood and Bergen County have played in the broader context of American history. This includes contributions to agriculture, migration, wartime efforts, industrial development, and civic life over the past 250 years.

4. *Support for Cultural and Artistic Expression*

Recognizing Ridgewood's growing arts community and the ongoing need for exhibition and performance space, the center will dedicate gallery and event space to rotating art exhibits, community-curated installations, and interdisciplinary programs. This will foster creative expression and amplify underrepresented voices across the region.

5. *Development of a Permanent Home for Community Collaboration*

The center will function as a stable and consistent home base for collaborative initiatives involving local organizations such as the Ridgewood Historical Society, the Bergen County Historical Society, youth groups, sports and recreational groups, educational institutions, and civic organizations. It will promote shared use, resource pooling, and long-term programming that deepens public engagement with regional heritage.

Together, these goals will position the History & Cultural Center of Bergen County as a model of inclusive, sustainable, and community-oriented historic preservation—ensuring that the stories, struggles, and achievements of past generations are not only remembered but serve as a foundation for present-day dialogue and future growth.

3. Key Features of the Center

The History & Cultural Center of Bergen County, located at the historic Zabriskie-Schedler property in Ridgewood, will serve as a cornerstone for cultural preservation, community gathering, and educational programming. Each feature of the center has been thoughtfully planned to reflect the rich historical and cultural fabric of the region, while offering practical benefits to residents, organizations, and visitors alike.

a. *Preserving the Zabriskie-Schedler Legacy: Archaeology and Agricultural History*

The cornerstone exhibition of the center will highlight the archaeological discoveries made at the Zabriskie-Schedler House and property, a site that reveals layers of Ridgewood's early history. Excavations conducted under the guidance of professional archaeologists have uncovered artifacts dating back to the 18th century, including ceramic fragments, glassware, hand-forged nails, and domestic tools that provide insight into everyday life during the colonial and early American periods.

In addition to showcasing these artifacts, the exhibition will explore Ridgewood's agricultural roots, particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries when the land was used for subsistence and commercial farming. Visitors will learn about farming practices employed by early Dutch settlers and their interactions with the Lenape people, including tools like scythes, plows, seed drills, and preserved examples of fieldstone foundations uncovered on the property. Interpretive panels will offer context about Bergen County's transformation from agrarian land into suburban development, preserving this critical phase of local history for generations to come.

b. *A Community Gathering Space for Public Engagement*

The center is envisioned as a welcoming public facility with multi-purpose community rooms designed to accommodate a wide range of civic and nonprofit uses. These flexible spaces will be made available to local youth groups, such as Ridgewood Scouts troops and sports teams like Ridgewood Lacrosse, as well as nonprofit organizations across Bergen County that often struggle to find affordable and accessible meeting space.

Partner organizations such as the Bergen County Historical Society, Ridgewood Historic Society, etc. could use the facility to host events including monthly lectures on countywide history, member meetings, and community heritage festivals. The center will also provide space for town hall-style forums, community planning sessions, and public workshops on topics ranging from environmental history to cultural heritage conservation. In doing so, the center will foster dialogue, education, and collaboration among residents and civic leaders.

c. *Partnership with the Bolger Heritage Center for Genealogy and Research*

The Bolger Heritage Center for Local History and Genealogy, located within the Ridgewood Public Library, has been a pillar in local history preservation and genealogical research for years. The History & Cultural Center will strengthen this partnership by co-hosting genealogy workshops, such as "Tracing Your Bergen County Roots," which teaches residents how to use census data, immigration records, and family archives to construct personal histories.

Rotating exhibits created in collaboration with the Bolger Heritage Center may include features such as "Family Ties: Bergen County's Founding Families," and digital archives that highlight early land records, ancestral maps, and oral histories collected from long-time Ridgewood residents. The partnership will also facilitate digitization drives, where members of the public are invited to scan and preserve their family photos and documents as part of a community archive.

d. *Collaboration with the Ridgewood Historical Society*

The Ridgewood Historical Society, which operates the Schoolhouse Museum, will be a vital partner in shaping the interpretive content and public programming of the center. The Society will contribute rotating exhibitions drawn from its extensive collections, such as 19th-century clothing, Civil War-era correspondence, local newspapers, and rare school artifacts from the 1800s.

In addition, the Society will lead school-based programs, including guided walking tours through Ridgewood's historic districts and classroom visits for 4th-grade New Jersey history units. Public lectures—such as “Ridgewood During the Revolutionary War” and “Women of Bergen County: Unsung Contributors to Local History”—will engage adults and students alike. The Society's involvement ensures a high standard of research-based historical interpretation and public access to important local stories.

e. *A Platform for Ridgewood's Growing Arts Community*

Ridgewood is home to a thriving arts community, supported by groups like the Ridgewood Arts Foundation, Stable Gallery, and Arts Council of Glen Rock. The History & Cultural Center will offer dedicated gallery space to showcase rotating exhibitions of local and regional artists, from photography and painting to mixed-media and textile arts.

These exhibitions will be complemented by artist talks, hands-on workshops, and community-curated shows such as “Art Inspired by History,” inviting artists to interpret regional stories through visual media. The center will also provide rehearsal or event space for small-scale performances, spoken word nights, classical music recitals, and cultural storytelling sessions, creating an intersection of history, heritage, and contemporary creative expression.

f. *Community Recreation and Sports Group Engagement*

In addition to its role as a cultural and educational hub, the History & Cultural Center of Bergen County is envisioned as a valuable resource for local recreation and sports organizations serving all ages. Recognizing the importance of physical activity, social connection, and inclusive community space, the center will provide indoor and outdoor accommodations for youth leagues, adult recreation groups, and senior fitness or wellness programs.

Multi-use rooms inside the center will be made available for:

- Team meetings, planning sessions, and award ceremonies for youth sports programs such as Ridgewood Baseball and Softball Association, Ridgewood Soccer Association, and local recreational basketball and lacrosse teams.
- Workshops and events hosted by senior wellness clubs, offering tai chi, low-impact fitness, or social health programming.

- Recreation committee gatherings or neighborhood planning sessions related to local park use, sports league coordination, and public recreation advocacy.

Equally significant is the connection between the center and the proposed public park to be developed on the Zabriskie-Schedler property itself. This park will provide open green space, walking trails, and outdoor recreation areas that complement the mission of the center by encouraging intergenerational gathering and healthy, active lifestyles. With planned amenities such as picnic areas, seating, and nature trails, the site will serve as a multi-functional public destination where history and recreation coexist.

This natural adjacency to the park also opens opportunities for:

- Outdoor fitness classes and walking clubs for seniors and adults, hosted in coordination with the center’s community partners.
- Youth heritage scavenger hunts or nature/history blended learning activities, integrating physical activity with education.
- Cross-programming between the park and the center, such as heritage festivals that combine live sports demonstrations, outdoor games, and cultural exhibits.

By designing the History & Cultural Center to complement and support the broader recreational use of the Zabriskie-Schedler property, the Village of Ridgewood ensures that the site becomes a fully activated community asset—one that blends wellness, engagement, and education in service to all ages.

g. *Commemorating 250 Years of American History: Ridgewood and America250*

The center will take an active role in commemorating the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States as part of the national America250 initiative. In alignment with New Jersey’s state plans for the semiquincentennial, the center will produce a year-long anchor exhibition titled “Ridgewood: 250 Years in the American Story.”

This exhibition will trace Ridgewood’s evolution from a colonial-era settlement to its participation in defining moments of American history, including:

- The American Revolution, where Ridgewood residents supported Continental Army efforts.
- Shaping Communities, highlighting Ridgewood's growth and diversity.
- The World Wars, with artifacts, letters, and uniforms from local veterans.
- The Suburban Expansion Era, examining postwar development, racial integration, and civic growth.

Youth engagement will be a centerpiece of this commemoration, with school partnerships to produce student-led exhibits, living history programs, and community storytelling

projects that allow today's students to reflect on the legacy of freedom, change, and civic responsibility in their hometown.

4. Programming and Public Calendar

Based on the uses identified in Section 3 of this report, programming at the History & Cultural Center of Bergen County will be designed to attract repeat visitation, support educational advancement, and foster broad community engagement throughout the year. By offering a variety of interdisciplinary programs, the center will serve as both a cultural destination and a platform for community well-being. A core schedule of offerings will include:

- **Rotating quarterly exhibitions** that highlight local and regional history, art, and cultural themes—bringing new narratives and visual experiences to the public on a seasonal basis.
- **A monthly lecture and workshop series** exploring topics such as genealogy, local preservation, storytelling, folk traditions, and the arts—offering opportunities for learning and intergenerational conversation.
- **Summer youth camps**, where children and teens will participate in immersive, hands-on experiences including archaeology simulations, artifact handling, storytelling projects, and historical games.
- **Artist residencies and community showcases**, supporting Ridgewood's vibrant creative community and connecting contemporary expression to historical themes through visual art, performance, and multimedia exhibits.
- **Nutritional education programs** in collaboration with local health and wellness organizations, featuring workshops on historical foodways, sustainable agriculture, and family wellness—bringing together history, culture, and healthy living.
- **Recreational and sports-based programming**, coordinated in partnership with local youth leagues and adult fitness groups, offering space for team planning, wellness seminars, and outdoor activities that connect physical health with community history and use of the historic landscape.
- **Inclusivity and accessibility-focused programming**, including events and educational opportunities designed specifically for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and underserved populations—ensuring that all members of the community can engage meaningfully with the center's mission.

This robust calendar of programs will not only activate the physical space of the center and adjacent parkland but will also reflect the diversity, dynamism, and evolving needs of Ridgewood and Bergen County's communities.

5. Impact Analysis and Public Benefit

The development of the History & Cultural Center of Bergen County promises significant and multifaceted benefits that will resonate throughout the educational, social, cultural, economic, and preservation spheres of Ridgewood and the broader Bergen County region.

Educational Impact – The center will serve as a vital educational resource, enriching local school curricula by providing a tangible connection to Ridgewood’s unique history within the larger context of New Jersey and American history. It will offer students and educators a dynamic destination for field trips, hands-on learning experiences, and youth-focused programming that deepens understanding and engagement with history and heritage. Furthermore, by partnering with institutions such as the Bolger Heritage Center, the center will make genealogy and archival research more accessible to students, families, and community members interested in tracing their personal and local histories, thereby fostering a lifelong appreciation for historical inquiry and scholarship.

Social and Cultural Impact – Beyond its educational role, the center will be a catalyst for strengthening civic identity by fostering a shared sense of public memory and community heritage. It will encourage diverse storytelling and active community participation, providing a platform for voices across generations and cultural backgrounds to engage in meaningful dialogue about Ridgewood’s past and present. The center’s inclusive spaces will promote intergenerational and cross-cultural engagement, serving as a welcoming hub where residents from all walks of life can come together to celebrate, reflect, and collaborate. Through exhibitions, programs, and events, the center will nurture a stronger, more connected community that values its heritage as a foundation for its future.

Historic Preservation Impact – A foundational impact of the center lies in its commitment to historic preservation. By revitalizing and repurposing the Zabriskie-Schedler House and surrounding property, the center ensures the long-term protection and sustainable use of a significant historic asset in the Village and County. This adaptive reuse exemplifies best practices in preservation, where the ongoing utilization of the historic sites is recognized as the most effective means to safeguard their physical integrity. The center will serve as a living model demonstrating how historic structures can be preserved through active community engagement, education, and programmatic use, thus preventing neglect or deterioration. Moreover, by raising public awareness about preservation’s value, the center will inspire further conservation efforts throughout Bergen County and beyond, strengthening the region’s cultural landscape.

Economic and Tourism Impact – Economically, the center is expected to be a significant asset for downtown Ridgewood and Bergen County as a whole. By attracting visitors interested in heritage tourism, the center will increase foot traffic to local businesses such as restaurants, shops, and hotels, thereby boosting the local economy. Its presence will position Ridgewood as a prominent destination within New Jersey’s heritage tourism circuit, drawing visitors who seek authentic historical and cultural experiences. Moreover, the center will generate employment opportunities in areas such as museum operations, educational programming, event management, and facility maintenance, contributing to the region’s job market and economic vitality.

6. SWOT Analysis

The History & Cultural Center of Bergen County benefits from several key strengths that position it well for success. It enjoys strong community support and widespread interest in local history, bolstered by access to unique artifacts from the Zabriskie-Schedler archaeological studies and robust partnerships with respected institutions such as the Ridgewood Historical Society and the Bolger Heritage Center. Additionally, the center’s central and accessible location in Ridgewood makes it a convenient destination for residents and visitors alike.

However, the project also faces challenges. The initial phases will require significant funding and dedicated staffing to establish sustainable operations. A clear long-term programming and management strategy must be developed to ensure continued community engagement. Furthermore, the site’s parking capacity and potential zoning restrictions could present logistical obstacles that require careful planning.

There are substantial opportunities for the center to thrive, particularly through its alignment with national initiatives like the America250 celebration, which can amplify public interest and attract funding. The center’s diverse offerings, from genealogy workshops to arts programming, provide a platform for broad community engagement and education. Growing public fascination with local history and genealogy further supports the center’s mission and outreach potential.

Conversely, the center must remain vigilant to external threats, including fluctuations in municipal and county funding priorities that could impact operational budgets. It may also face competition or overlap with other cultural venues in the region, necessitating strategic collaboration rather than duplication. Additionally, ongoing maintenance and sustainability costs pose a long-term financial challenge that must be managed to preserve the historic site and program quality.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Strong community support and historical interest	Initial funding and staffing requirements
Unique local artifacts and institutional partnerships	Need for long-term programming strategy
Central, accessible location in Ridgewood	Potential parking limitations or zoning restrictions
Opportunities	Threats
Aligns with national America250 celebrations	Changes in municipal or county funding priorities

Community engagement through diverse programs	Overlap or competition with existing venues
Growing interest in genealogy and local history	Maintenance and sustainability costs over time

6. Operations and Management Plan

The success and sustainability of the History & Cultural Center of Bergen County will be guided by a comprehensive operations and management plan that ensures responsible governance, effective staffing, proper facility care, robust programming and a diversified funding model. The structure will reflect best practices in museum and cultural institution management, emphasizing community collaboration, educational outreach and fiscal responsibility.

Governance – The center will need be overseen by a department or office within the Village administration, composed of community leaders, historians, educators and representatives from key partner organizations. The Village administration will provide strategic guidance, support fundraising efforts, and ensure that the center’s mission and programs remain responsive to community needs. Critical institutional partnerships will include the Bergen County Historical Society, the Ridgewood Historical Society, the Ridgewood Public Library—through the Bolger Heritage Center—and local school districts and arts organizations. These partnerships will help shape programming, contribute resources and expertise and strengthen community ownership of the center.

Staffing – Day-to-day operations will be led by a professional staff, who will oversee administration, fundraising and strategic vision. As growth continues, supporting this role will be an Education and Outreach Coordinator, responsible for school partnerships, public programming, and community engagement initiatives; a Curator and Collections Manager, who will handle exhibition planning, artifact care, and interpretive content; and a Facilities and Events Coordinator, who will manage site logistics, rentals and event support.¹

Facilities and Maintenance – The center will be housed in the restored Zabriskie-Schedler House and surrounding property, configured to support a variety of uses. The site will feature exhibition and program spaces, including a rotating gallery, a lecture and event room. The site plan will also incorporate on-site parking and a connection to the adjacent park and green space, allowing for indoor-outdoor programming and seamless integration with recreational uses.

¹ Staffing levels will be scaled appropriately in response to the growth and development of the site. Initial personnel may begin with core roles essential to operations and program delivery, with additional positions added as community use expands, funding becomes available, and programming demands increase. This phased approach ensures responsible resource management while supporting the long-term sustainability of the center.

7. Funding and Sustainability Strategy

To ensure the long-term success and financial sustainability of the History & Cultural Center of Bergen County, a comprehensive, multi-tiered funding model will be implemented. The initial phase of development—including capital improvements to the Zabriskie-Schedler House and site infrastructure—will be supported through a coordinated capital campaign, the pursuit of targeted public grants, and foundational assistance from municipal resources.

As the center becomes operational, ongoing revenue will be generated through a diversified mix of funding sources. These will include annual memberships, tiered donor programs, and event-based income from lectures, workshops and exhibitions. The center will also offer its facilities for private event rentals, community meetings and nonprofit programming, providing an additional stream of revenue while fostering broader public use of the space.

To support long-term growth and reduce reliance on any single funding source, the center will actively engage in grant writing and diversified fundraising efforts, pursuing support from a broad range of public and private funders. This includes major cultural and humanities organizations such as the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, and the New Jersey Historic Commission (NJHC), as well as regional and national philanthropic foundations dedicated to advancing the arts, education, preservation, and civic engagement.

In addition, the center will pursue funding opportunities through recreation, health, and wellness grant programs, recognizing the center's commitment to inclusive, community-centered wellness initiatives. These may include grants focused on active aging, youth fitness and recreation, nutrition education, and accessible public spaces—ensuring the integration of physical, social, and emotional well-being into the cultural mission of the site.

This comprehensive and strategic funding approach will support the center's financial resilience, allow for continued innovation in programming, and ensure its role as a dynamic and responsive public resource for generations to come.

Report Summary

The History & Cultural Center of Bergen County is a forward-looking, community-led initiative dedicated to preserving Ridgewood's historic legacy while creating a dynamic public space for education, culture, wellness and civic engagement. Anchored by the restored Zabriskie-Schedler House and supported by strong institutional partnerships, the center will serve as a vital resource for residents across Bergen County—celebrating the region's contributions to local, state, and national history.

Best Regards,

Keith Kazmark
Village Manager
Village of Ridgewood
