



Our Village, Our Future

VISIONING for RIDGEWOOD'S NEXT MASTER PLAN

Visioning Workshop Recap

With social media being a prevalent form of conversation in social, work, and civic life, do people sit down and talk to one another face-to-face anymore about important things? More than 55 people in Ridgewood did just that last month during the two visioning workshops for the *Our Village, Our Future* master plan visioning process.

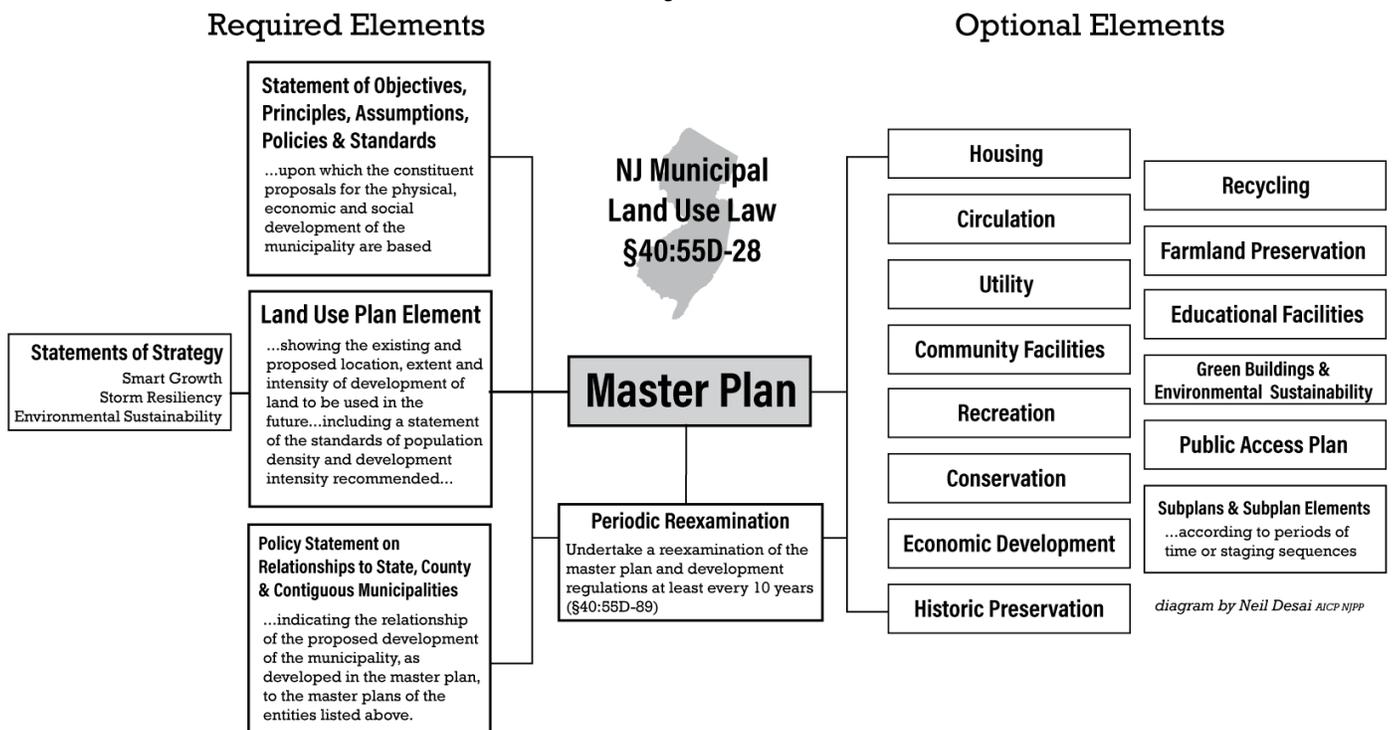
The main objective of the Visioning Workshops was for residents and other Village stakeholders to engage in discussions with each other to identify the levels of priority of topics for the next Master Plan and to evaluate the planning principles that emerged from the [Village Voices](#) discussions.



1. What is a Master Plan?

The workshops started with a brief presentation that reviewed the nature and composition of a master plan. In the broadest sense, a master plan is a policy document that guides the physical development of a community. While a master plan is not a regulatory document, it is the basis of a community's zoning regulations in that zoning must be consistent with (i.e., reflect the land use intentions of) the master plan. Master plans also can ensure that capital improvements are consistent with a community's goals and policies as expressed in the master plan.

Figure 1



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The section of the State of New Jersey’s regulations called the Municipal Land Use Law (a.k.a. “MLUL”) provides specific parameters for the content of master plans, which are shown in the diagram in Figure 1.

Of the required elements, the Land Use Plan Element is a central aspect of every master plan in New Jersey. Virtually all of the optional elements could be important aspects of any community. However, given the time, staff, public process, and funding a master plan typically requires, each community needs to determine which aspects need the policy direction that a master plan process can provide. Furthermore, a community does not have to produce and adopt the desired optional elements all at once or at the same time as a new Land Use Plan Element.

Optional elements of a master plan also can focus on a specific geography, such as a downtown. A Downtown Plan Element would provide direction on a range of topics appropriate to a downtown area, such as land use, circulation, and economic development.

Municipalities are required to undertake a periodic reexamination of their master plans at least every 10 years (in Figure 1, see the box under “Master Plan”). Ridgewood reexamined its Master Plan in 2016. The MLUL include five aspects that the reexamination must address, among them to identify any specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations. [Ridgewood’s Master Plan Reexamination Report](#) (*click to download*) describes all of the amendments to the Master Plan and zoning regulations that have taken place since the previous reexamination in 2006 and also recommends corrections and future changes to both.

2. Visioning Questionnaire Results & Discussion Assignments

The presentation then reviewed some of the key [results of the Visioning Questionnaire](#) (*click to download*). The results revealed sentiments about a wide range of topics in Ridgewood today and into the future, and these sentiments were generally consistent across various “demographic” groups (e.g., younger residents, long-time residents, new residents, etc.). The results also revealed one of the core values shared by many in the community: to “keep a small town/village feel.”

Then, in preparation for the discussion assignments, participants were asked to arrange themselves into groups of approximately 4 to 6 people and then provided with instructions about two group discussion assignments. The first assignment asked groups to evaluate the principles that emerged from the Village Voices discussions. The second assignment asked groups to determine the level of priority of each topic—the same list of topics that was in the Visioning Questionnaire—that could be addressed in the Village’s next Master Plan. Each group received a set of large worksheets to record their responses and other comments. The participants had approximately one hour in total to discuss both assignments. At the end of this hour, a member of each group presented the results of their discussions.



3. Outcomes of the Discussion about Priorities

For this assignment, the groups were asked to rate each topic as “low,” “medium,” or “high” priority—and also to indicate if group members were not able to come to an agreement on any topic(s). Groups were informed that assigning a topic a “low” priority does not necessarily mean that it is not important to the Village. It could mean that a topic does not require the degree of visioning and policy direction that a master planning process can provide. It also could mean that residents are satisfied with a certain topic; it doesn’t require any intervention, rethinking, and/or reinvestment.

Table 1 represents the composite results of all of the groups’ ratings of topics by level of priority for the Village’s next Master Plan.

Table 1: Priority Level of Topics

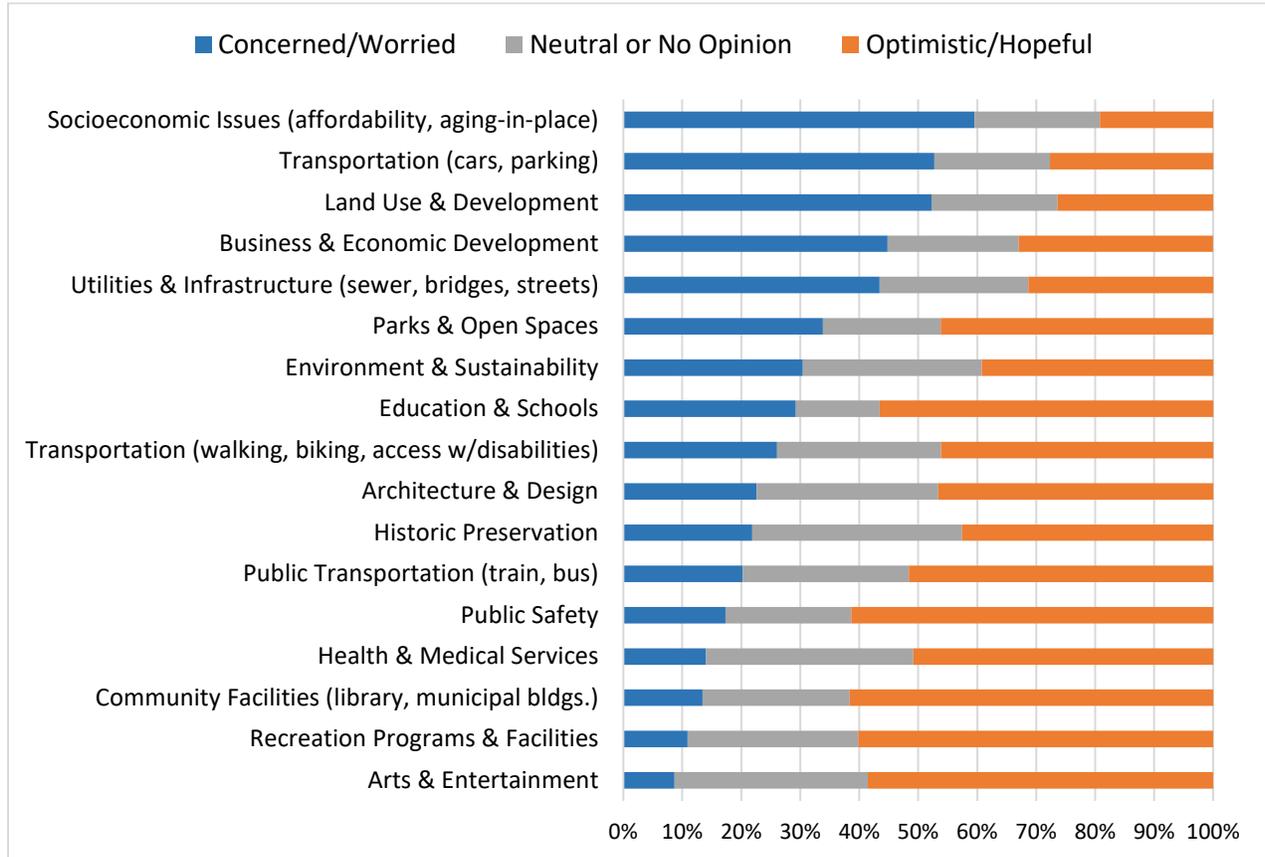
HIGH	HIGH-MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM-LOW	LOW
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business & Economic Development • Land Use & Development • Socio-economic Issues (affordability, aging-in-place) • Transportation (traffic, parking) • Transportation (walking, biking) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Sustainability • Utilities & Infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks & Open Space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts & Entertainment • Community Facilities • Education & Schools • Historic Preservation • Public Transportation • Recreation Facilities & Programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health & Medical Services • Public Safety Services

The level of priority of each of the topics is generally consistent with the sentiments expressed in the Visioning Questionnaire about the level of concern or worry about various aspects of the Village 5, 10, or 20 years from now (see Figure 2 on the next page). However, the two sets of results cannot necessarily be compared “apples to apples.” Table 1 showcases topics by priority level for a master planning process while the Figure 2 showcases sentiments/feelings about topics that contribute to quality-of-life in a place. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the top four topics in terms of level of concern/worry for the future in Figure 2 are indicated as “High” priority in Table 1.

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Figure 2: Responses to the question in the Visioning Questionnaire: "Thinking about the Village 5, 10, 20 years into the future, how do you feel about each of the topics listed."



It is important to note that the topics of **Business & Economic Development** and **Transportation** (traffic & parking) are integral to Downtown. Furthermore, while the Visioning Questionnaire results indicate significant interest in a safer environment for walking and biking throughout the Village, residents are especially interested in experiencing a more pedestrian-friendly Downtown. Also, Downtown is one of the areas where issues of **Land Use & Development** still need to be envisioned and resolved. Several participants noted that having a commercially-thriving Downtown is one of the ways the Village can reduce the tax burden on residents.

As such, Downtown should be a focus of the Village’s next Master Plan. This could be in the form of a “Downtown Plan Element” in which all aspects of Downtown (land use, transportation, etc.) can be considered in tandem. Another high-priority topic identified by the groups at the Visioning Workshops is **Socio-economic Issues**, especially to provide affordable housing options for seniors.

4. Outcomes of the Discussions about Principles

This is a good place to bring in results of the groups’ discussions about principles because they provide more insight into the nature of the high-priority topics and also foreshadow more detailed discussions that will take place during the process of creating the Village’s next Master Plan.

The first two rows in Table 2 are **Principles Regarding Affordability** and **Principles Regarding Downtown** that were identified during the Village Voices discussions that took place over the past year. During the Visioning Workshops, groups were asked to evaluate all those principles.

Naturally, groups agreed with the **Principles Regarding Affordability** with their focus on seniors. Groups suggested a number of additional principles, methods, and ideas which are reflected in the third column.

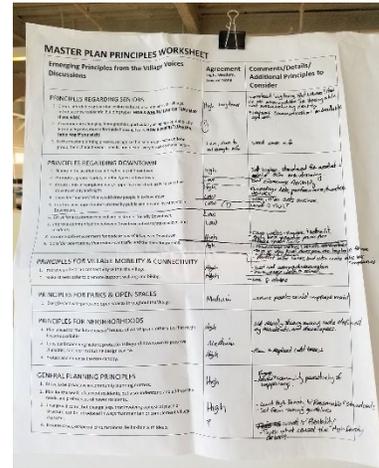


Table 2

Topic	Principles	Evaluation + Comments about Principles
<p>Principles Regarding Affordability</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create affordable options for seniors to be able to remain in the Village. Introduce new residential building types. 2. Accommodate changing demographics, particularly an aging population, by introducing new, more affordable housing types. 3. In the master planning process, recognize that seniors are not a uniform group; their characteristics, needs, and desires vary based on many factors. 	<p>Groups agreed with all of the principles. One group also desired more information to be able to fully evaluate principle #3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow accessory apartments (don’t necessarily need to create more multi-family buildings). Age-restricted zoning area (e.g., Town Garage area). Adapt existing buildings for seniors. • Important in the long-term, but where to locate it? How do we accommodate senior housing without overwhelming density? Make sure current developments are “digested” first. • More share-type housing. • Not necessarily new buildings and high-density housing. Low density preferred. However, exclusively senior housing could be a bit higher. • Consider Maple Ave near Ho-Ho-Kus for senior housing, Valley Hospital property, and Franklin Ave in Downtown. Also consider continuum of care (condos/townhouses and assisted-living facility) • Senior housing should be within walking distance to Downtown. • Consider an assisted-living facility also. • Need to attract people; high housing costs are a barrier to entry.

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Topic	Principles	Evaluation + Comments about Principles
<p>Principles Regarding Downtown</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain the aesthetic qualities/feeling of Downtown. 2. Promote a greater variety of retail types in Downtown. 3. Create a mix of complementary/supportive uses that leads to an active downtown day and night. 4. Consider “anchors” that would draw people in to Downtown. 5. Capture new opportunities created by public and private investments in Downtown. 6. Strive for a customer-focused and customer-friendly Downtown. 7. Improve communication between Downtown interests/stakeholders and residents. 8. Create a safe environment for pedestrians of all ages in Downtown. 9. Consider alternatives that reduce car traffic and the need for parking. 	<p>Groups generally agreed with all of the principles except for #4 and #5. With respect to #4, participants do not feel that Downtown needs an “anchor” in a traditional retail sense. The character and feel of Downtown is the anchor that draws people. Furthermore, an “anchor” often can generate significant traffic and require a significant amount of parking. With respect to #5, groups were not sure what this principle intends to convey. #5 was intended to mean that Downtown stakeholders should leverage opportunities that current private investments (i.e., new apartment developments) and public investments (e.g., Van Neste Square Lighting Project, new parking garage) might create for enhancing commerce in Downtown.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should have a more business-friendly government. Trees. Responsibility. Variety of services. Pedestrian mall. • Too many empty stores. Better mix of businesses. Set higher standard for aesthetics, but encourage flexibility. Encourage the arts, performance theater venue, which could be another type of anchor. Improve crosswalks and lighting. Enforce speed limits. • Encourage pedestrian usage/walking. • Improving Downtown is a potential path to tax relief. • Improving walking and biking and encouraging both can reduce the demand for parking.
<p>Principles for Village Mobility & Connectivity</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve pedestrian connectivity within the Village. 2. Make streets safer to promote/support walking and biking. 	<p>Groups generally agreed with these principles, rating #2 especially high.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve pedestrian and traffic flow in downtown. More bicycle lanes. • Need a comprehensive plan. Encourage walking to school. • Create “backwalks,” or walking paths between properties; add bike lanes; and take care of sidewalks – they are not as safe as they should be. • Make a multi-use path within the PSEG utility right-of-way. • Improve lighting for traffic and pedestrian safety • Consider protected bike lanes, but also make the bicycle system comprehensive

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Topic	Principles	Evaluation + Comments about Principles
<p>Principles for Parks & Open Spaces</p>	<p>1. Energize/activate parks and open spaces throughout the Village.</p>	<p>Groups generally agreed with this principle, but did not rate it as critical as ones under the previous topics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a natural resources inventory. • Some parks could use improved maintenance. • Work on parks aimed at passive recreation. Build more awareness (e.g., maps, etc.). Create a multi-use path out of the PSEG right-of-way. • They are nice now. Maintain them well. • Maintain the tree canopy. Trees can help to mitigate climate change.
<p>Principles for Neighborhoods</p>	<p>1. Plan ahead for the future uses of houses of worship and other sites that might become available.</p> <p>2. Consider broadening historic protections beyond downtown to preserve character; consider instituting design review.</p> <p>3. Protect and enhance the tree canopy.</p>	<p>Groups were generally mixed in terms of #1 and #2. All groups readily agreed with #3, feeling that protecting and enhancing the tree canopy is critical today and for future of the Village.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning protections until buildings need to be repurposed. Also depends on location (downtown vs. residential) • Need strong zoning code defined by residents, not developers. Plan to replant lost trees. • Historic tree canopy. • Don't take away houses of worship. • Historic preservation is important, but it shouldn't be too limiting. • What is the future of Valley Hospital? • Water quality is especially important. Protect water sources and well locations. Improve stormwater management. • Fix pot-holed streets.
<p>General Planning Principles</p>	<p>1. Strive to be proactive in community planning matters.</p> <p>2. Plan for the needs of current residents, but also understand and address the needs and preferences of newer residents.</p> <p>3. Change will come, but change (esp. that involving a physical place or structure) can be introduced in ways that maintain or complement Village character.</p> <p>4. In some cases, or special circumstances, be flexible with ideals.</p>	<p>Groups generally agreed with these principles, <u>except #4</u>. Most participants felt that #4 contradicts the intent of a master plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have concerns about the language presented. Need to have governance issues addressed and defined. Develop a strong communication system (e.g. website). • Engage community proactively of happenings. • Limit high-density develop to reasonable standards. Set firm zoning guidelines. What does "flexible" mean [see principle #4] – that's what caused the high-density debacle. • Solar panels on light poles used to be a controversial issue, but now they're generally accepted. Flexibility to accommodate change is important.

5. Your Feedback + Next Steps

If you have any comments or questions about the outcomes of the Visioning Workshop as reported in this summary, please use the form on the [Contact](#) page of the *Our Village, Our Future* website. The next step is to produce a draft of the Vision Plan, which, in its final form, will represent the final product of this visioning process.