

BOROUGH OF WOODCLIFF LAKE
LAND USE BOARD MEETING
June 23rd, 2026
MINUTES

Call to Order:

This meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. at Borough Hall by Chairman Belgiovine.

Adequate Notice Statement:

Chairman Belgiovine announced that the Meeting was in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Law, P.L. 1975, Chapter 231. Notice of this meeting was posted in two newspapers, The Record and The Ridgewood News. The public was advised of the Land Use Board's rule that the meetings will be concluded by 10:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call:

Corrado Belgiovine: *Present*

Jared Shapiro: *Present*

Lynda Picinic: *Absent*

Michael Kaufman: *Present*

Nilufer DeScherer: *Present*

Robert Friedberg: *Present*

Nicole Marsh: *Present*

Evan Lazerowitz: *Absent*

Brian DiStefano: *Absent*

Gerald Barbara: *Absent*

Sanjeev Dhawan: *Present*

Thomas Panso: *Present*

Carlos Rendo: *Absent*

Ariel Mazor: *Absent*

Gary Giannantonio, Attorney

Present

Anthony Kurus, Engineer

Not Requested

Francis Reiner, Redevelopment Planner

Present

David Troast, Planner

Not Requested

Clairese Aquilino, Secretary

Present

MINUTES

The minutes from May 12th, 2026, were approved on a motion from Mr. Shapiro, seconded by Mr. Kaufman. All members voted favorably. Mr. Friedberg and Ms. DeScherer were recused.

RESOLUTION OF APPROVAL

The resolution for 199 Chestnut Ridge Road was approved on a motion from Mr. Shapiro, seconded by Mr. Kaufman. On a roll call, Mr. Kaufman, Mr. Shapiro, Councilwoman Marsh, Mr. Panso, and Chairman Belgiovine.

OLD BUSINESS

300 Chestnut Ridge Road

The application came back to the board to present an updated landscaping plan. Mr. Leibman, the applicant's attorney, was present and the landscape architect, Mr. Thomas Carmen. Mr. Carmen was sworn in by board attorney, Mr. Giannantonio, Esq. Mr. Carmen stated there was a ten-page plan to take the board through. He stated back in May some tree removal was taking place on site. The site contractor removed more trees than were supposed to be removed.

The trees that were removed were within the area shown on the first exhibit that showed the overall berm plan, the townhome berm area. The berm area has been broken into three zones, the retail berm zone, the townhome berm zone, and the multifamily berm zone. The top portion of the plan shown to the board was the original plan that was approved back in December 2025. The plan below is the amended/ proposed plan, listing the trees that were removed. The original plan consisted of a total of 210 trees, 167 proposed and 43 trees to remain on site. The new proposal is for 257 trees, with 225 proposed and 32 to remain. Mr. Carman stated if the board recalled, the redevelopment plan superceded the tree replacement ordinance, meaning the applicant is not necessarily bound to it but they utilized the calculations to generate the original 167 trees proposed. The retail zone, on the corner Chestnut Ridge Road and Glen Road, some species revisions were made after the land use board approval working with the Shade Tree Commission and added in three shade trees, now proposing 54 trees. The townhome zone is where the 14 trees were removed that were to remain. Originally, proposing 56 trees, but now they are proposing 87 trees, adding a significant amount to compensate for the trees lost. Now there will be 23 shade trees, 36 evergreen and 28 ornamental trees. During the original meeting, the board heard testimony about a below grade detention basin, but now with additional engineering, soil perc tests, and compliance with NJDEP they have proposed an above ground detention basin. The multifamily zone now proposes an additional 6 trees to be saved after the engineer reviewed the grade again. The original proposed was 103, but now proposing 116, with three trees found, one crab apple tree being dead and two spruce trees in very poor condition to be removed.

Back to the townhome berm zone, Mr. Carman stated the original plan, showing the existing vegetation above the existing berm and the originally proposed vegetation. The existing berm is 5ft above Chestnut Ridge Road. In the new proposal you'll see they are increasing the tree proposal; the new largest shade tree will be a dozen trees to five- and six-foot caliber. They can modify and increase the berm height with an additional 3-4ft, making the height of the trees greater. The middle section of the townhome berm zone showed the location of the detention basin. Originally a below grade basin, limited the number of plantings to be placed in this area. Now proposing an above grade basin, there will be retaining walls and fencing for safety, and it will allow for planting in by the basin. It is referred to a bio- retention basin.

By utilizing the Borough's tree replacement ordinance to look at what was originally proposed, removing 91 trees they would have had to replant 167 trees. With 14 trees being removed that were not originally proposed, they went back and looked at the math again to see they needed to remove another 3 trees and manage to save 6 trees. One of the 14 trees was 5" in caliber, the ordinance does not require for replanting for anything that is under 6" in caliber, making the requirement 191 trees but have proposed to have a total of 257 trees. They stated they have a good mix of variety of the trees they have newly proposed. Originally there were 52 shade trees proposed, now it will be 67. They increased some of the calibers of the trees they are now proposing. The evergreens were originally proposed to be 79, now being 111. The ornamental trees were upsized as well, originally being 36 and now 79. Mr. Caman sated they acknowledge they made a mistake and they hope this plan helps to address this matter.

Chairman Belgiovine asked for Mr. Carman to address the rough idea of the berm with the new plantings.

Mr. Carman stated they have an extra 2ft on the berm where the 14 trees were removed.

Chairman Belgiovine stated the board engineer, had reviewed the new detention basin and there will be additional plantings in the basin.

Mr. Carman stated its specialized plantings within the basin.

Vice Chairman Dhawan questioned the species that can be planted within the basin.

Mr. Carman stated that a Red Maple can be planted here, and River Birch. They are added some perennial material, meadow and shrub material.

Vice Chairman Dhawan asked if it would be accessible to the public based from the driveway show.

Mr. Carman stated the driveway is simply for access for maintenance.

Chairman Belgiovine asked if all the site work is being done by the developer.

Mr. Santos, from Russo Development, stated they will be doing all the site work.

Councilwoman Marsh stated mistakes happen, but the developer has gone above and beyond to rectify this issue. She stated the town really does appreciate the time they developer took to ensure the berm will look the way it should if not nicer. She asked about raising the height of the berm, if the height of the trees will be lower to start.

Mr. Carman stated the height would be a little lower to start, the trees that were out there, mature trees, but the new plantings will grow higher.

Mr. Shapiro asked if they were worried about mosquito breeding in the wetland area of the basin.

Mr. Carman stated he did not believe there would be any issues of mosquito breeding. There are guidelines from the NJDEP to follow for this basin.

Mr. Shapiro asked if there would be emergency access if somehow someone got into the area of the basin.

Mr. Carman stated they would coordinate to make sure there is emergency access.

Mr. Shapiro asked about the height of the fence, the drop from the fence to the basin from the Chestnut Ridge Road side and any other protections around the fence.

Mr. Carman stated there will be a 4ft fence and there will be shrubs and plantings around the fence. The lowest part of the basin is 8ft down.

Mr. Friedberg asked about the type of fencing.

Mr. Carman stated the fence will be 4ft high aluminum, black fence.

Ms. DeScherer stated the board would like to hear from Mr. Reiner, the board planner. She stated she had heard from a lot of the public they were very unhappy with the removal of the trees.

Chairman Belgiovine asked for a timeline of the plantings.

Mr. Carman stated he could not testify to the timeline.

Chairman Belgiovine stated they would swear in Mr. Santos from Russo to discuss the timeline.

Ms. DeScherer asked for a rendering of the ornamental plantings to show how beautiful this site will be and keep the character that Chestnut Ridge Road is known for.

Mr. Carman showed the board a rendering specifically of the berm, they will be utilizing a variety of species and heights of the trees to keep the character that Chestnut Ridge Road is known to have. He stated they will be adding in some Red Bud and Magnolia trees, but they can add in some more native cherry trees as well.

Mr. Fran Reiner, Board planner, asked Mr. Carman to speak of the maintenance of the basin for the board. He asked if it will be maintained with someone from the Borough. He also asked about the irrigation. He asked what the timeframe is from installation to establishment, because after will the Borough have the opportunity to walk the site and if there are any issues, will the developer take care of the issues. He asked if 2 years after installation, is a good time frame for this. Mr. Reiner stated based off his conversations, trees and plantings have already been tagged at nurseries. Will the new proposal be submitted for review? He asked if it was a fair statement there is a significant cost between what they originally proposed and are now proposing after the 14 trees were removed. When will the berms be replanted and is there a commitment to them? Have there been any conversations with the Shade Tree Committee since the revisions? Can you speak to the varieties of the plantings from Spring to Summer, to Fall to the Winter?

Mr. Carman stated there is a whole manual that has been submitted to the borough engineer that must meet the NJDEP requirements. The planting around it will create a buffer but it is not left to naturalize it, it will be highly maintained. He stated the Borough gets manual is a part of the maintenance process. He stated that the berm irrigation is still proposed. He stated the Borough will be able to walk to property and the developer will work with the Borough to make the site look its very best. Mr. Carman stated that some trees and plantings have started to be tagged. The revision can be submitted. He stated there is a significant increase in cost between what was proposed and what is now being proposed, about 15% increase. Mr. Carman stated he has to defer to the developer for the berm replanting. There has not been contact with the Shade Tree, but they can submit the revised plan to them for their review. Mr. Carman stated when they design the berm, buffering is one of the main strategies, they locate the evergreens first, they have three different types, American holly, Norway Spruce and Eastern Cedar. They all have a

slightly different green to them and then they work in the shade trees. They have a different variety of shade trees, the Red Maple gets bright red in the Fall. The Honey Locusts have a very different leaf, smaller with a yellow color. The Sweet Gum grows tall and has yellow to purple colors. Also providing Pin Oak, Red Oak and Willow Hook, trees that are a great addition, adding a red fall color. They use smaller scale trees, the River Birch in the basin, have multi-trunk an exfoliating bark. They have Dogwood and Redbud. The Redbud gets very small flowers in the spring and so do the Dogwoods. The Magnolias get white flowers, and the crab apples provide a variety of colors. The Cherry trees flower in a pink color and all the ornamental trees provide all different shapes and heights. They review the placement with their team to figure out what would look best. He stated they go out while all plantings are being installed to ensure they are achieving the goal they and the community are looking for.

Chairman Belgiovine asked if there are any Ash trees on site.

Mr. Carman stated there was one Ash tree that was removed within the 14. He stated he believed it was in decline, but he did not know for certain.

Public Session

A motion to open to the public for comment on Mr. Carman's testimony came from Vice Chairman Dhawan, seconded by Mr. Friedberg. All members were in favor.

With no one from the public, a motion to close to the public came from Mr. Shapiro, seconded by Mr. Kaufman. All members were in favor.

Mr. Leibman stated they had another witness, Mr. Diego Santos from Russo Developers. He was sworn in by Mr. Giannantonio.

Mr. Santos stated there is a lot of site work happening at the moment on site, they have to get the utilities in. Demolition is happening, and they are hoping to have the berm planted by Spring of 2027. They hope to stabilize and protect as soon as possible. He stated the owner will most likely take the 3-4 caliber trees and upsize them, just making the board aware they plan might change again. He stated the owner drives by the site everyday and is distraught this happened. He stated the job will be a three-year project. They will do the sitework for the townhomes, the multifamily building is under design and then hoping to finalize resolution compliance and submit permits to the building department very soon.

Vice Chairman Dhawan asked once the berm is stabilized and have trees on the berm, will they move the perimeter fencing back to give Chestnut Ridge Road a nice clean look.

Mr. Santos stated that is the goal, once all grading is stabilized, they would move the fencing. They would buffer the construction zone, and the public would begin to see what the project would look like.

Mr. Reiner stated the Borough would go out no later than Spring of 2029 to review the landscaping, from the first planting in Spring of 2027.

Mr. Santos stated if there are plantings, that are dying or not working, they would make those changes before the two-year period is up.

Mr. Reiner stated he knows Russo Developers does a wonderful job, their landscaping is immaculate, but he wanted to put it on record, they will ensure the landscaping is always maintained.

Mr. Carman stated the revisions they presented to the board today were similar to what they had discussed with the Shade Tree Committee.

Mr. Reiner stated he thinks it would be a good gesture to submit the revised plan to the Shade Tree Committee and have a conversation with them.

Ms. DeScherer questioned how they protect the trees that are still on site from getting removed so this accident does not happen again.

Mr. Santos stated their contractor for the tree removal is very experienced and does a lot of work for the developer. He stated it was their fault; they should have walked and tagged the trees that were to remain. Going forward the trees to remain will be tagged.

Public Session

A motion to open to the public for comment on Mr. Santos' testimony came from Mr. Shapiro, seconded by Mr. Kaufman. All members were in favor.

With no one from the public, a motion to close to the public came from Mr. Shapiro, seconded by Mr. Kaufman. All members were in favor.

A motion to approve the revised landscape plan for 300 Chestnut Ridge Road came from Mr. Shapiro, seconded by Vice Chairman Dhawan. On a roll call Mr. Lazerowitz, Mr. Shapiro, Councilwoman Marsh, Mr. Panso, Ms. DeScherer, Mr. Friedberg, Vice Chairman Dhawan, Mr. Kaufman, and Chairman Belgiovine all voted favorably.

The meeting was adjourned on a motion from Mr. Shapiro, seconded by Mr. Friedberg. All were in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Clairese Aquilino