



Ringwood Environmental Commission 2024 Annual Report

Prepared for the Ringwood Mayor and Borough Council

Thomas Conway | Chair | 12/17/2024



Summary and Overview

The Ringwood Environmental Commission had a slower year in 2024 than 2023. With the pipeline battle over and the Superfund construction limited to finishing the O'Connor Disposal Area, our biggest tasks from 2023 were not much of an issue besides monitoring.

The main focus for the Commission was the completion of the Library Trail. Besides the support to get the project through the proper channels, two commissioners worked on the ground as well. The trail was completed in October and the ribbon cutting was in early November. The trail is very popular with the community.

In all, the two trails behind the library required over 400 total work hours spread over 132 days. The trail was built with no cost to the Borough, although the Borough did provide some excess material and the workers assisted on a few occasions.

The Commission handled its usual duties. Concerning TGP, over a decade has passed since they finished the pipeline upgrade, yet the tubes for plantings litter their right of way. They were not responding to our requests, so the Commission reached out to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to push TGP to clean up the tubes. They said it would be done by the end of the year.

The Commission advised the council on issues with chickens on private property. A compromise solution was advised, but considering the algae problems plaguing lakes across the area, there needs to be controls for chicken manure since it is very high in phosphorus.

The Chair of the Commission worked with Dresdner Robin and the Economic Development Commission to add photographs to the trails report. He is leaving his post and has joined the Economic Development Commission to continue working on trails and helping people discover the beauty of Ringwood.

This is the last annual Report he will author.



Appendices

- Appendix A – Library Trail



Commission Actions

Most Commission actions are presented in the meeting minutes. This section will highlight some of the accomplishments of the Commission.

Vision, Mission, Values, and Objectives

The Commission continues with a set of Vision, Mission, Values and Objectives. These are intended to guide the current and future Commissioners to make sure our actions are aligned to the goals of the Environmental Commission. They can be found on the Borough website. These remain unchanged.

Plan Reviews

Commissioners enjoyed getting applications sent electronically in 2024 and then reviewed in person at our meetings. None of the plans were major enough to report here.

Letters

The Commission sent one letter in 2024 and that was to support a Borough project. The Commission does not receive responses from letters to the NJDEP, so we have stopped writing them and are sending information to the Borough Council to decide on the next steps.



Lessons Learned as Commissioner

This is my fifth and final Annual Report for the Environmental Commission. I hope my actions have benefitted the community and the public knows that I was an agent for the Borough and my actions and words were in relation to that role and not my own personal beliefs.

In my 10 years on the Commission and the last 5 as Chair, I learned a lot about Ringwood and the environment. We had many challenges along the way and some of those will continue for decades.

Lessons

1. We will always have invasive species. The Gypsy Moth will come in waves and 2025 is setting up to be a possible outbreak in early summer. The Spotted Lanternfly debacle was an exercise in the government giving people a pointless task to feel they are in control. I resisted the "stomp it out" campaign as it has never been proven to work and distracted people from real solutions. In the future, the Commission should continue to research these events and look for the best way, with the least intervention, to mitigate the problems.
2. The Superfund site is 100% directed by Ford and the EPA. The Borough has almost no input into the situation. The EPA will not listen to the Borough and constantly seeks to keep Ringwood from uniting. They even have reduced info sharing to handouts to the local community and have rejected multiple attempts by me to work more closely as well as rejected the reforming of a Community Advisory Group.
3. The Peter's Mine Pit is still loaded with the chemicals Ford dumped there. The Record of Decision for OU3 is not out yet, but I can say with certainty that they will take a wait and see approach after plugging the mine. This is a bad course of action.
4. The State disrespects the Highlands Act. When TGP sought to expand their pipeline capacity next to the Reservoir, the DEP approved their exception that they were a necessary utility for the Highlands, despite the gas not being used in New Jersey. A court overruled the DEP and the DEP doubled down and the expansion is now complete.
5. The Borough will assist the Commission in the future and has during my 10 years. They were instrumental in overcoming challenges on the Library Trail, whether it be logistical support or having the DPW remove large couches! They also adopted several resolutions that were put before them by the Commission.



6. Ringwood is a lake town and they were the first Highlands community to accomplish the private-public partnership to get the 2021 Ringwood Lakes Assessment done. This is now used as a model for communities across the Highlands Region.
7. The State's parks are severely underfunded and getting worse. Unless this turns around, the burden to Ringwood and its taxpayers will only increase. Deteriorating roads, decrepit buildings that are prone to fire, overcrowded parking areas and other situations are straining Ringwood's resources. The Borough cannot solve this problem, only the State can.

While environmental problems will come and go, I am proud to leave the Library Trail network as the most lasting contribution to my decade of service. A close second is the Environmental Resource Inventory to help guide our Borough's plans for years to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the community I love. I look forward to continuing that service in my new role.



Ringwood Environmental Commission Annual Report

Appendix – A

RINGWOOD LIBRARY TRAIL

KEY POINTS

- 132 total works days encompassing 404 hours
- 41 bags of garbage or equivalents have been removed in the 5 total years of construction and maintenance
- Zero cost to the Borough besides in-kind contributions by the DPW
- Starts at the playground to encourage kids to get into the woods
- Viewpoint is 0.8-mile hike. One of the shortest hikes to a viewpoint in the area
- The only gas-powered machine used was a chain saw used to remove downed trees
- The trail is accessible via mass transit from the bus route
- It is the only marked trail located in the Skyline business corridor
- No live trees over 2" were cut down
- The two trails total 1.4 miles (0.6 for yellow and 0.8 for red)



692

Ringwood
Park & Ride

B

P

R

Y

CANNIC
DRIVE

RINGWOOD
OPEN SPACE

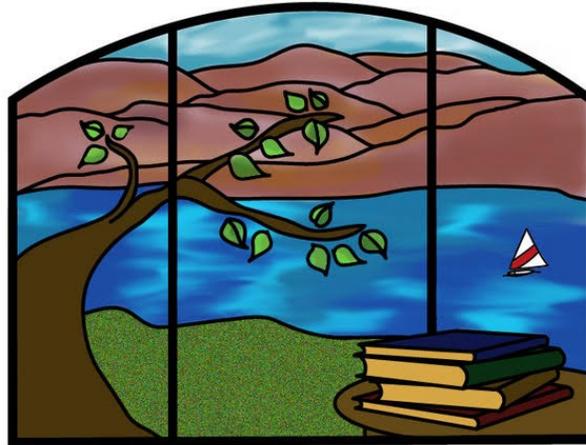
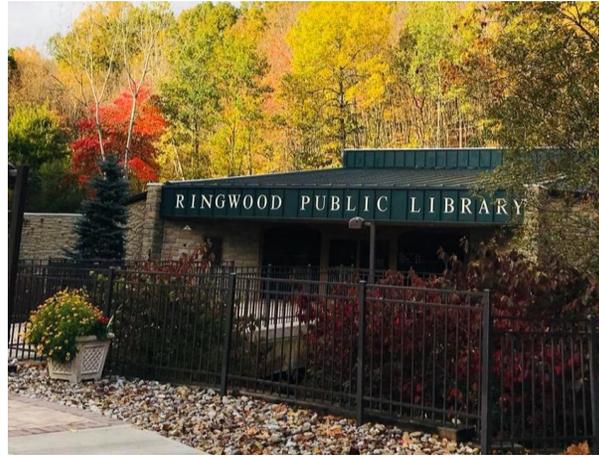
Comm.
Tower

565

Ringwood Library Park Trails



From October through February, the viewpoint offers the best sunset view in Ringwood.



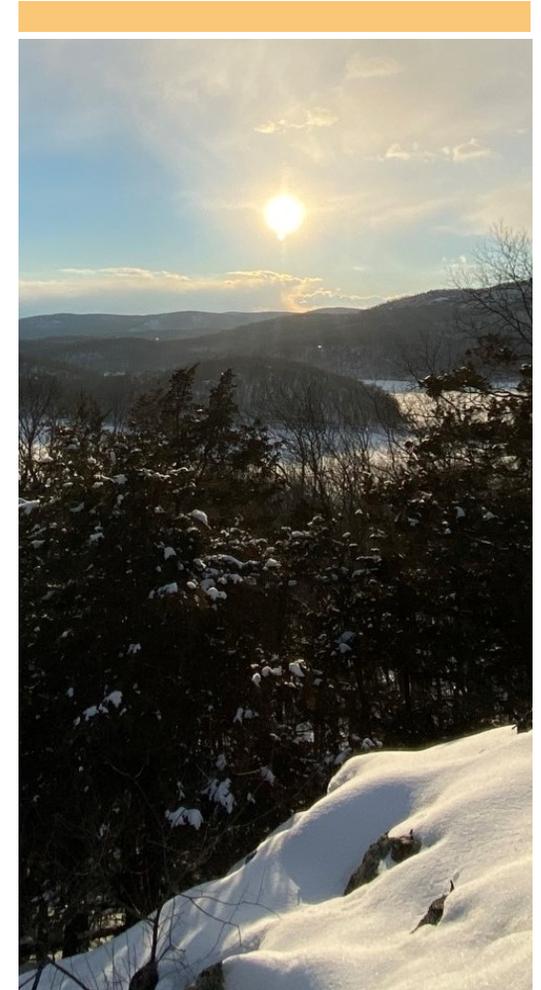
Ringwood Public Library

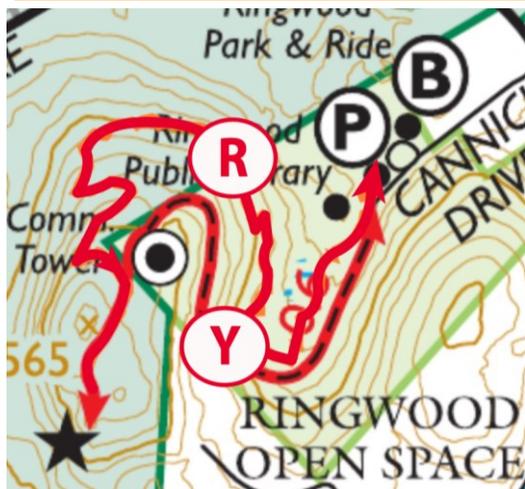
30 Cannici Drive
Ringwood, NJ 07456

(973) 962-6256

ringwoodpl@ringwoodlibrary.org

www.ringwoodlibrary.org





The Trails

The yellow trail starts at the gated woods road by the walkway to the playground. It follows the road uphill for about 500 yards and turns off into the woods.



The red trail starts at the library playground and parallels the road at the beginning before going a bit deeper into the woods. It meets that yellow trail near the top of the hill and then you will follow the yellow trail to the viewpoint.



Be Prepared for Anything

Even on a short hike like this one, people should carry some essentials as conditions can change quickly on the mountaintop. Be sure to wear or pack the following:

- Water
- Sturdy Shoes
- Windbreaker or Jacket
- Flashlight (for sunset hikes)
- Snack (especially for kids)
- Camera
- Bug Repellant (spring through fall)



Beginner's Guide to Trail Signs

The Ringwood Library Trails are the perfect hilly trails to start hiking. For kids, the playground at the beginning offers an attractive destination. Adults can utilize the library or walk down the road to a pair of eateries. It is also conveniently located next to the Ringwood Park and Ride; one of the few trails in the county to be accessible from public transportation.

The first sign for most trails consists of three markers. This indicates the beginning or end of a trail.



The most common marker is a single mark indicating a mostly straight route to the next marker(s).

Two markers in a diagonal position indicate a turn ahead. In this photo, the top is to the left of the bottom marker indicating a left turn coming up.



RINGWOOD LIBRARY TRAIL RIBBON CUTTING SPEACH

The Ringwood Library Trail was first conceived as an official trail in 2018. We started the design by using the existing road and added a 200-yard section to reach a previously unmarked viewpoint. The yellow trail was built in 2020, during the Covid crisis, so it was just my family that worked on it.

I always wanted to make a longer trail that was completely in the woods and in 2022 we received permission to build this trail. For six months, the trail was scouted as the seasons changed and work began on the tread in September, 2023. By the start of 2024, the tread was cleared and we spent the next 8 months stuck in the swamp behind the playground. This was finished and the rest of the trail was done in a matter of weeks.

Key Points:

- By starting at the playground, we hope to encourage a new generation of hikers to explore the woods
- It is a rare viewpoint since it is hike-able in under a mile
- Trail was built at zero cost to the Borough using extra material for the turnpike behind the playground
- Except for chain-sawing downed trees, there was no gas-powered machinery used in construction
- This location is somewhat rare as the trail is accessible to mass transit via the Park and Ride lot

- The trail is one of the few in Ringwood that brings visitors to our business area
- The grade of the trail does not exceed 5% for any distance over 10 yards
- No live trees over 2" were cut to make the trail
- There were 128 work days with 392 total hours
- 41 bags of garbage or equivalents have been removed in the 5 total years of construction and maintenance.

Volunteers:

- First, I have to thank my wife and family. Besides their own work on the trail, they have supported me through the long process and put up with dirt and grime all over our property from cleaning the equipment
- The town DPW has worked with me hand in hand. They were there in 2020, when a sofa had to be removed. They helped solve material problems for the start of the trail. They have been a great help to get this done with guidance and in-kind labor.
- The Environmental Commission has supported me in this for over 6 years! Commissioner Wogish helped clear the trees that littered the trail last fall.
- The NYNJTC has been involved from the beginning. Various volunteers and employees of the TC have given advice and support over the years. We are on their map!
- The Ringwood Library and staff have been behind this project from the start
- Dr. Matt Grossman and his daughter Lilly. They joined the project last winter when we were bogged down in the swamp. Some of the biggest boulders were moved

with their help. Without them, the trail may not have been able to start at the playground.

Finally, the trail is not quite complete. The last step in building a trail is hardening the tread. I am counting on you along with your friends and family to finish this trail by walking it often. The more feet that tramp on the soil, the better this trail will become.

Thank you for coming out today to acknowledge the opening of Ringwood's newest trail. I hope future generations will continue to appreciate the beauty of our town and the forests that make it so special.

Happy Trails Ringwood!



Ringwood Environmental Commission

WARNING

TRAIL WORK AHEAD

For questions or concerns, reach out to:
Thomas Conway, Chair, Ringwood Environmental Commission @ (973) 358-2864



BOROUGH OF RINGWOOD

Waiver of Claims, Release, Indemnification and Consent Form

As a term and condition of participating in a Borough of Ringwood sponsored event or activity, I, _____, acknowledge and understand that the Borough of Ringwood, its agents, servants, and/or employees will not be responsible for any losses, damages, death or injury which _____, his or her heirs or survivors may incur or suffer.

Further, the Borough of Ringwood, its agents, servants, and/or employees will not be responsible for any medical expenses or other expenses of any kind resulting from injury, loss or damage suffered during any event or activity.

I, _____, understand that there may be certain risks of injury inherent in the event or activity and is willing to assume all these risks. It is hereby certified that Student is healthy and has no physical or mental disabilities or infirmities that would restrict full participation in the activity or event.

Further, in consideration of participation in the activity or event described above, I, _____ hereby release with respect to any and all injury, disability, death, loss or damage to person or property, the Borough of Ringwood, its agents, servants, and employees, that student, his or her estate, may suffer or incur as a result of student's participation I the event or activities mentioned above. This release shall be binding to the fullest extent permitted by law. If any provision of this release is found to be unenforceable, the remaining terms shall be enforceable.

By executing this document, I, _____, agree to hold the above named Releases harmless and indemnify them from any loss, liability, damages, fees or costs, incurred or suffered resulting from any injury, disability, death or loss or damage to person or property incurred as a result of my participation in the events and activities mentioned above.

ALL APPLICANTS MUST READ THE ABOVE STATEMENT BEFORE SIGNING.

Student/Person Signature

Date

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Event or Activity