

Volume 46, No. 7 January 22, 2002

Index of Journals | Town Office | Home | Email Town Hall Staff

Local Election Lowdown

Voters Will Select Mayor, Two Councilmembers April 1

Election Day for the Town of Somerset is **Monday, April 1**, for Mayor and two Councilmembers. Incumbents Walter Behr and Peter Gubser have stated they plan to run again. Anne Proctor is considering another run. At the Town Council meeting on **March 4**, nominations will be accepted for the two-year terms. Additional nominations may be made by petition of 20 registered voters filed with the Clerk-Treasurer no later than 4:30 p.m.

March 11.

The Town Charter requires its elected officials to be:

- Citizens of the United States;
- Residents of Somerset for at least 18 months preceding the election; and
- Qualified voters in the State of Maryland.

>Registration Day Is March 4

A member of the Board of Elections will be at the Town Hall **Monday, March 4**, from 7:30 - 9:00 p.m. to register new voters. In addition, Town residents may register at the Town Hall Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or by mail (call Tom Carter, 301-657-3211, to mail the registration form to you). The deadline to register for the April 1 election is 4:30 p.m. on **March 15**. If you are currently registered in Montgomery County, you are eligible to vote in Town elections.

In order to vote in Somerset, you must be:

- At least 18 years old by April 1, 2002;
- A resident of Somerset for 14 days preceding the election (actual residency is required except for individuals absent from the Town only

temporarily and intending to return, such as students, military and other overseas government employees);

- A citizen of the United States or an alien legally authorized to reside in the country; and
- Registered to vote in the Town of Somerset and/or Montgomery County.

If you have any questions about whether you are registered in the Town or know former residents who are still registered in Somerset, call Tracy Truman, chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Elections, at 301-652-4596.

Critical Town Survey Coming Soon, *Page 2*

Pros and Cons for Extra Security, *Page 3*

Baseball Practice Cage Proposals, *Page 5*

Next Step in Charting Path = Survey

By Long-Range Planning Committee

A Town survey, one of a number of tools the Long-Range Planning Committee is using to plan for the next 20 years, will be in your mail shortly. It has been professionally designed to meet the following goals:

- Assessing resident satisfaction in the Town and with the ability to get involved in Town processes;
- Identifying strengths and weaknesses of Town processes for meeting resident needs;
- Identifying ways to improve the processes, including the desirability of concepts being considered by the Long-Range Planning Committee; and
- Providing a vehicle for resident involvement in developing the long-range plan.

The survey will be sent to every adult (18 and over) who resides in Town. If you don't receive a copy, or need extras for your household members, the questionnaire will be available via e-mail to

survey@townofsomerset.com < or at Town Hall.

This survey aims for a count of Town residents as regards specifically identified issues. It is a census of Town of Somerset opinions. We hope to hear from everyone. That means each of you! Not just one per household. Your opinion is extremely important!

LRPC Focus Groups -- A Success

Thanks to the 24 Town residents who took 2-1/2 hours of their time on January 13 and 14 to participate in a focus group directed by Ann Bisconti, Town resident, with the assistance of Michela Perrone, our hired consultant. The Long-Range Planning Committee will combine the results of the focus groups with the reports and findings of the committee to produce the questionnaire.

The focus group report will be available on the Town Web site as soon as it is compiled: **<http://www.townofsomerset.com/lrpc/index.html>**. Also on the Web site are the minutes and reports of the committee, as well as a projected budget, which was voted by the Council in January.

If you have any questions, contact Nat Finkelstein, LRPC chairman.

ODE TO OPINION

With apologies and thanks to Isaac Watts and Lewis Carroll

How doth designing government

Improve its shining Town,

And ask opinions for our growth

From residents all round?

How skillfully we build a plan.

How neat we spread the word.

And offer opportunity

For you to be heard.

Influencing growth and change

Takes little of your time.

Return your filled-in-survey--

And we promise - - no more rhyme!

Ready to Hire Off-Duty Police?

A Proposal to Improve Public Safety

By Councilmember Tom Eldridge

In response to the significant number of burglaries and attempted burglaries we had in Somerset in 2001, as well as the unacceptable number of car thefts and vandalisms, I propose the following:

That the Town of Somerset hire off-duty Montgomery County Police officers for from four to eight hours per day, five days per week to patrol the Town. Further, that questions concerning the method of hiring the officers, their schedule, the scope of their duties, and any measuring of their effectiveness be referred for initial consideration to a committee of no more than five Town residents. This committee shall draft a specific proposal for approval by the Council. Finally, that this program be considered a pilot program of one year's duration.

I propose this step, which could cost the Town up to \$80,000 during its year of operation, for the following reasons:

First, it is the highest priority of government to keep its citizens safe. While we live in a safe neighborhood, relatively speaking, criminals visit Somerset with some frequency. This frequency increased from 2000 to 2001, most notably with an increase from two to ten burglaries (attempted or successful). The number of burglaries jumped significantly in the second half of the year, a trend that is consistent with what is happening in the neighborhoods around us. Our "beat" experienced a 69% increase in residential burglaries from 2000 to 2001 (from 59 to 100), with most of the gain in the second half of the year. In light of this trend, I believe the Town should do more to protect its residents from criminals, particularly daytime residential burglars.

Second, I support the hiring of off-duty police because they are the greatest deterrent to criminals who come to Town looking for an easy victim. Nothing says "go away" to a criminal like a police officer on the corner. For

this reason, neighborhoods on three sides of our Town have security personnel (in addition to the Montgomery County Police) who patrol their streets. Kenwood recently doubled their coverage to eight hours per day. I propose hiring off-duty Montgomery County Police - as opposed to unarmed security guards - because I trust them more, and because off-duty police retain their police powers and communications abilities even while off-duty.

Third, I support a program of one year because I want to gather as much data as possible on crime trends in each of the various seasons. While this makes the proposal more expensive, the expense is one we definitely can afford with no change to our fiscal structure (read: no new taxes).

This proposal represents a modest effort to increase public safety and protect the community we care so much about. I hope the Council will adopt it.

Investigate Before Acting

At its last two meetings, the Somerset Town Council discussed the proposed use of off-duty police to patrol the Town in a County police patrol car. (Use of a patrol car has not yet been approved by the County.) The discussion concerned hiring a single officer for up to eight hours a day from Monday through Friday. A motion could be voted at the February Council meeting. Although crime in the Town is an important issue, some who have been contacted in the Town believe evaluation of the problem and potential actions should be studied by a committee appointed by the Council before further action is taken.

The logic of the analysis in last month's *Journal* entitled "Investigate Before Investing" should be followed in the Town's effort to deal with crime.

The Council should not take action on the motion placed before it at its January meeting...to obtain up to 8 hours a day of off-duty police patrol from Monday to Friday (at a cost of about \$80,000 per year)...until accurate crime analysis is made and alternative solutions are identified and evaluated.

Based on the discussion at the January 7 Council meeting, it appears that the Council has not analyzed data on crime in the area, and has not identified and analyzed alternative methods of dealing with crime. For example, citizen participation approaches as well as police patrols should be

evaluated. Even if crime data are presented at the last minute, a committee should evaluate them as well as look at alternative solutions. The Council should appoint a committee to get the facts and provide evaluation before it acts on the existing or any other motion on this issue.

We believe that the above steps, as well as a clear cost benefit analysis, would assist in leading to an appropriate solution to this problem.

Signed by 94 Town residents

names on file in the Town office

Town Safety & Efficacy of Security Patrols

My family and I have lived in Somerset since 1996 and in the greater Chevy Chase area since 1991 and witnessed its increasing urbanization. Greater population densities and more proximate commercial activity increase crime levels permanently. Recession and heavy home renovation increase crime levels cyclically. These four factors converged in 2001 and we experienced 10 burglaries in Somerset, one still unsolved violent daytime murder in the Town of Drummond, and numerous other reported and unreported property crimes (car thefts, vandalization, etc.). The Bethesda beat (of which Somerset is a part) as a whole saw a 60%+/- increase in residential burglaries last year versus 2000.

The recession may recede and the merchant builders may leave us alone but the intense commercial development of Friendship Heights and Bethesda will continue. Clearly, our vulnerability to crime will escalate until we abandon our current non-strategy of dependence upon an under-funded and under-manned County police force and take common sensical steps to mitigate our significant crime risk.

My talks with law enforcement officials and urban planners indicate that the most effective crime deterrent is a police presence, but we currently have none. Tom Eldridge, the prosecutor for our area and a Town Councilman, has prudently put forth a plan whereby the Town would contract on an experimental basis to patrol our Town with off-duty Montgomery County police officers in the midday for about \$100 per year per household.

That's pretty reasonably priced peace of mind. I support this plan. It's plain common sense to deter crime when we can and have reason to believe that it will continue and probably escalate. And the plan is an experiment that we can end if and when we feel it is no longer effective. No doubt there are other good ideas for increasing our safety (neighborhood watch, teleminders, etc.) and we should review these lesser ideas over time, but let's start with the obvious first step.

Mark Geffroy

Essex Avenue

Why the Rush?

At the January 7th Town meeting discussion regarding the hiring of a security officer, a motion was made to act on the proposal at the February meeting, ignoring a previous letter from 11 residents requesting a study of the issue first. The proposal, as now amended, entails obtaining Council approval to hire a security officer for up to eight hours a day for a 6 - 12 month pilot period, and to then establish a committee to look into the need(s) to be addressed (presumably the nature of criminal activity occurring) to determine how best to deploy the officer. The Police Chief has not yet indicated whether off-duty Montgomery County officers, who would be hired, can use County police cars for patrol. This would seem to be critical to crime deterrence. Yet the Council dismissed this as a reason for postponing action.

This seems to be a backwards way of approaching the issue. Why not establish the committee first, determine the nature of criminal activity in Somerset (e.g., types of offenses, time of day, etc.), and THEN, based on the results of the study, determine the appropriate range of responses? These may eventually include hiring a security officer but, if so, we would have a better idea of the nature of the crime problems we would want him/her to address, have a baseline for assessing the officer's effectiveness, and also have explored potential liability.

We would also be able to consider other responses, including: bringing our concerns to the attention of the County Police (and perhaps the Park Police, if problems on the bike path are an issue) regarding the need for additional patrols (despite Mayor Behr's feeling that such contacts with the

police are futile), and establishing a neighborhood-watch or similar community based program. Despite its obvious importance, the "crime" issue was not identified as one that needed to be addressed in the survey for which the Council voted unanimously to appropriate more than \$14,000 at the January 7th meeting. We believe it should be added.

We strongly believe that we need to develop a well-thought out strategy to address this issue, as was urged in the letter signed by 11 residents. Yet the Council ignored that letter. This issue deserves full discussion, once preliminary data has been compiled - not the superficial airing of views that occurred at the January meeting in which no one was allowed to speak more than once on the issue.

Caroline and Howard

Cooper, Cumberland Avenue

Anita and

Morton Mintz, Dorset Avenue

Batter Up!

By Laura Kennedy, Chairman Batting Cage Committee

Spring is right around the corner and that means it's almost time for baseball. Somerset has its own batting cage!

Unless the Town Council objects, we will be conducting a six-month trial from April through September to determine whether residents have sufficient interest in maintaining the batting cage. The facility is located in Capello Park, between the basketball court and the Town Hall. In the past few years, we've had many families support the idea of a batting cage, but actual usage has been limited.

On January 13, the Batting Cage Committee met to discuss ways to enhance usage by simplifying the rules and set-up process, and by increasing awareness of the cage. We have drafted simplified rules which give residents greater flexibility in the use of the equipment. We plan to temporarily house the ball-throwing apparatus in the cage itself to obviate the need to drag the heavy equipment in and out of the storage closet for each use. In April we will have a kick-off opening day event at the batting

cage with refreshments and demonstrations on the use of the cage. Be on the lookout for more details!

Discussion of the batting cage is scheduled for 9 p.m. at the February 4 Town Council meeting.

Swim Team Rep Never Sleeps

By Sarah Morse, Swim Team Representative

The sleds are out (maybe) and no one's running around in bathing suits, the smell of chlorine replaced by wet wool - but your team rep never sleeps. Swim season planning is already underway. Coaches have been contacted and it looks like all will return. Ben Graham and Tara Zimmerman will be head coaching and Rachel Benjamin is returning from the University of Michigan just so she can coach for us again. TK (Tristan Kessler) will be around, helping when he can.

As always, we are looking for teenagers to coach the mini team. If you coached last year, let me know if you want to coach again. If you're interested in coaching for the first time, let me know, too.

The season schedule is set. We were M Division champions last year (all right, tied for the championship, but no less impressive) and have moved up to the K Division (yikes, what happened to L?). We're seeded fourth and swim against Palisades, Fallsmead, Glenmont, Ashton and Quail Valley. We open with a home meet against Palisades on Saturday, June 22. There are four more Saturday meets before Divisionals on July 27. We have also joined a B-league and will be having Wednesday night meets with Eastgate, Wildwood and Little Falls. New for this year is a B-league relay carnival. The relay carnival for A-meets has not been scheduled, but must fall between July 2 and July 14. For more County Swim League information, check out their Web site at www.mcsl.org.

It's Not Just About Swimming

The social calendar begins on Friday, May 24, with a welcome-back party and team sign-up. The end of season banquet is Saturday, July 27. Other social events will be scheduled.

Who may join the team? The swim team is Somerset's only Town sponsored sports team. It is open to all swimmers up to age 18, whatever their ability. (No tryouts, but fabulous Speed-o uniforms for boys and girls.)

We practice every weekday from May 28 to July 26. We have meets on Wednesdays and Saturdays starting in late June. There is also a developmental team, the minis, for kids under 8 who can swim at least 15 yards. They practice only three days a week.

So when you're making your summer plans, leave time for the swim team. Whether you're here for three weeks or the whole season, whether you can practice three times a week or everyday, we want you on the team. Call Sarah Morse 301-907-3298 for more information, or visit our home page at swimteam/index.html.

Mayor's Den

By Walter J. Behr

>Bridge, Creek Projects Get Underway

Work to secure the foundation of the swimming pool bridge and to prevent or minimize future erosion in Little Falls Branch is scheduled to begin the week of January 28 and be completed by the end of February, as required by the State in order not to disturb plant and animal life.

Highway and Safety Services, Inc., of Gaithersburg will be doing the work under separate contracts with the Town and Montgomery County. The Town project, which the Town Council authorized at its January 7th meeting, will cost \$39,500, more than half of which is for bolstering the base of the bridge with grout bags filled with concrete. Almost \$7,000 of the total cost will pay for planting 320 live stakes on the creek banks.

The County undertaking will include placement of additional rocks ("riprap") downstream from the bridge. Both the Town and County projects require pumping the creek water around the work sites. Fortunately for Somerset, the County is paying the \$8,500 for the "pump around."

In addition to the \$39,500 contract cost, Somerset is paying \$17,100 to the engineering firm of Rummel, Klepper & Kahl (RK&K) for design and inspection services.

Reminder: Town Will Clear Sidewalks

Whether they wanted the exercise or just hadn't gotten the word, a few residents were shoveling snow from Town sidewalks last Saturday. Indeed, there is no penalty for doing this, but be reminded that it is no longer necessary since the Town has arranged for a contractor to clear all of our public sidewalks after each snowfall.

Residents are still responsible for shoveling their own walkways and driveways. If they want assistance, they are encouraged to call upon Somerset young people listed in every *Town Journal* under the heading "Odd Job Helpers." Employees of the contractor, Mulheron Tree Experts, are not permitted to do private work unless they have completed their assignment on the public sidewalks.

Mulheron is also the company that plows and sands our streets. Their workers cannot do their job if cars are parked in the street. Please do your part. **If there is any way to squeeze your vehicles onto your driveway until the plows have passed, you would make life easier for everyone who drives on your street.**

Let's Cover Those Trash Cans

Please be sure to secure your trash receptacle covers not only when the cans are in your back or side yard, but also if/when they are moved to the curb. If the covers are missing or loose, all kinds of bad things can happen: raccoons, crows, dogs, rats, even foxes - yes, two residents are sure they have seen them in the back yard.

Pool Operating Cost: \$225 per Family

Town swimming pool **operating cost** last summer was \$93,000 or \$225 per each of Somerset's 414 households. This is up from \$85,000 in 2000 or \$205 per household.

Capital costs were high last summer, \$86,000, primarily because we replaced about half of the pool concrete deck. This brought the **total cost** for the season to \$179,000 or \$432 per household.

Income, all from guest fees, was \$11,000. For the third year, all expenses were paid by the Town, in other words, by your State and local taxes, plus the guest fees.

If you would like a copy of the complete pool financial report, call or stop in the Town office.

2002 Tennis ID Cards

Navy blue on white **tennis ID cards** for 2002 are available from Tom at the Town Hall office. Fees are still only \$5 per family for the annual card. Please make your checks out to "Town of Somerset."

Permit Granted

The Mayor issued a permit to **Raphael Daniels**, 4700 Falstone Avenue, to remove a dangerously leaning blue spruce tree along his rear property line.

Town Hall Tidbits

By Tom Carter

Tax Time Again; Remember: 'Town of Somerset'

Somerset's largest source of revenue is a portion of the State income tax paid by Town residents. Unfortunately, Somerset will not get its share of income taxes unless its name appears on the **Maryland income tax form** in the box marked, "City, Town or Taxing Area." Also remember to write "Montgomery" in the "Maryland County" box. A sample of the form appears below. Please don't forget to complete these sections when filing your taxes.

Legislation

At the January 7 meeting, the Town Council:

1. Passed an ordinance amending Section 4-103 of the Town Code to delete the requirement that residents clear **snow and ice from sidewalks** in front, and on the side, of their property.
2. Introduced an amendment to the Town Code setting the **Mayor's honorarium** at \$15,000 (the current salary).

Council Activity

At the January 7 meeting, the Council took the following actions:

1. Heard a report from our **auditor**, Jim Lindsey, on the status of the Town's monthly financial report.
2. Met Long-Range Planning Committee consultants **Ann Bisconti** and **Michela Perrone**.
3. Approved a building permit for **James Berry and Hali Edison**, 4900 Essex Avenue, to add a second story and front porch.
4. Approved demolition, building and tree removal permits for Sandy Spring Builders to construct a new house and attached garage at 4715 Essex Avenue for **Joel Winston and Susan Goda**.
5. Heard the Mayor's explanation of an **emergency expenditure** of \$1,360.34 for repair of the Town one-ton truck.
6. Accepted the swimming **pool financial report** for 2001.
7. Deferred action until February on a proposal by the B-CC Rescue Squad that the Town participate in community **early defibrillation** by purchasing, placing and manning one or two automatic external defibrillators within Town.
8. Approved the bid of \$39,500 from Highway and Safety Services, Inc., of Gaithersburg to **repair the pool bridge** abutment and creek erosion from torrential August storms.
9. Heard an interim **Long-Range Planning Committee** report by Chairman Nat Finkelstein and set \$13,000 for the committee budget in addition to the previously authorized \$1,800.
10. Further discussed the hiring of **off-duty Montgomery County police officers** to patrol Somerset streets and enforce compliance with stop signs and parking restrictions (action scheduled for February).
11. Accepted revised hourly **rates for our Town Attorney**: \$175 for Norman Knopf (up from \$170); \$150 for associate (up from \$135).
12. Authorized Mayor to sign a contract for continuation of cooperative, competitive **procurement of electricity** by the Town.

B-CC High School - A New Century of Possibility

By Dennis Horn

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School is moving back to Bethesda on February 1. While it has been completely renovated, the school needs additional funds to provide technology for a state-of-the-art learning environment. Thanks to contributions from parents, alumni, local business and municipalities - including \$25,000 from the Town of Chevy Chase, \$25,000 from Chevy Chase Bank and \$10,000 from the Village of Chevy Chase - the school is well on its way to meeting its \$200,000 goal. At its February 4th meeting, the Somerset Town Council will consider making a contribution to our neighborhood high school.

The money will be used to build a **community connection center** to engage the community in computer-based learning, put more computers in every classroom, install well-equipped **resource hubs** for small group learning and, eventually, build a **cyber cafe** so students can continue learning while they relax after school. The community connection center will be the first project funded and will include 32 PCs, 2 laser printers, an LCD panel and screen, along with a fully equipped classroom adjacent to the center.

B-CC High School is worth supporting. While it is one of the smallest high schools in the County and has one of the most diverse student populations, the school is one of only two in the County that has raised average SAT scores for the past three years and one of only seven schools that have raised both the percentage of students taking advanced placement courses and their average grade. In addition, this year, the school won three State sports championships, and both the school newspaper and literary magazine won the coveted Columbia Press Gold Crown Award. Principal Katy Harvey and the teachers and students at B-CC accomplished all of this while the high school was located miles from home in a holding facility. With Somerset's help, imagine what they can accomplish in their new home in Bethesda!

Strong schools help our community. First, our property values depend on our schools. Second, our local schools, including Somerset Elementary, Westland and B-CC, contribute to our sense of community. The community connection center, in particular, will be a great resource for Somerset residents who want to sharpen their computer skills or surf the Web. Finally,

our children and grandchildren deserve the best education we can afford to give them.

Modern Town Crier

Keeping up with the latest goings-on in Somerset has never been easier for the 152 resident who have opted into the Town's newest communication vehicle: e-mail.

In the past six months residents have learned of attempted and actual break-ins in Town; received notice of changes in trash pickups; been alerted to tennis round-robins; and even advised of special Town meetings and changes in regular agendas.

E-mail is a happening thing! Join in by sending a request, with your e-mail address, to **clerk@townofsomerset.com** or call Tom at 301-657-3211. It's that easy.

Choosing a Name for Somerset School Gym

Although no funds have yet been allocated by the Montgomery County Council for a gymnasium at Somerset School, Principal Alfred Sklarew has received a proposal from the PTA to consider naming the gym after former County Councilmember Betty Ann Krahnke. A committee has been formed in keeping with Montgomery County Public Schools' regulations to consider this proposal and others, should funds be forthcoming.

The committee is comprised of three individuals from the community, Malini Jadeja (Town of Somerset), Steve Schwat (Village of Drummond), Robert Brewer (Village of Chevy Chase); two members of the Somerset PTA, Margie Bartozzi and Jenny Abrams; two faculty members, Jean Snyder and Win Fox; and two Somerset Elementary School students, Ellen Blackwelder and Crystal Pickar. Mr. Sklarew is non-voting chairman.

Additional proposals, reactions or petitions are welcome, but must be received by February 19. All communications should be written and addressed to Alfred Sklarew, Principal, Somerset Elementary School, 5811 Warwick Place. The committee will reconvene Wednesday, February 20, to review all proposals and correspondence and select a name.

Please call Malini Jadeja at 301-657-1755 if you have any questions.

Obituaries

Margaret Nolte Dies at 91

Margaret E. Nolte, who lived on Warwick Place for 38 years, died there on January 4 at the age of 91. She had a heart ailment and respiratory failure.

A psychiatric social worker, Margaret worked with the parents of black students in Montgomery County following the 1954 decision which outlawed segregated classrooms. During World War II, she was a founder and president of the Silver Spring Cooperative Nursery School. She also did volunteer work in Montgomery county with youths who were not attending school because of physical and mental disabilities.

Margaret was born in Chicago, graduated from DePauw University in Indiana and earned a master's degree in Social Work from Howard University.

Survivors include her husband of 67 years, Walter T. Nolte of Somerset; a son, Robert, of Hartford, Connecticut; a daughter, Carol Nolte, of New York; four grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Former Resident Mildred Pickard

Mildred Pickard, a retired clinical social worker and former resident of Surrey and Trent Streets and Falstone Avenue, died on January 22 in a nursing home in Rockville at the age of 76. She had Alzheimer's disease.

Survivors include a brother, four daughters and then grandchildren.

By Judy Frankel, Vice President of Town Council

Fortunately we suffered no direct consequences from the September 11 disaster. County agencies revised emergency plans after the crashes.

LONG-RANGE PLANNING. The Town Council voted to establish a Long-Range Planning Committee in May and 19 volunteers were named to the committee. Nat Finkelstein was appointed chairman. Four subcommittees are working to review the budget process, governance of the Town including personnel and communications, Town facilities and development both inside

and outside the Town. (There was an interim draft report at the January 2002 Council meeting.)

Two consultants, who will prepare a questionnaire/survey, are working with the committee, and it will be sent to all Town residents for their input. Following open Town meetings to solicit further suggestions, the committee will submit a final report to the Mayor and Council.

FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS. Willard Avenue Towers is almost complete. We hear that there will be two restaurants, among other amenities. The new park on Willard Avenue was dedicated. Plans for the Chevy Chase Land Company project are still being negotiated; parking and traffic continue to be of concern. We are working with a committee of neighbors about commercialization of the "Green Mile," i.e., the section of Wisconsin Avenue between Bradley Boulevard and Dorset Avenue. We also are represented on the County Transportation Task Force for the Friendship Heights area.

CREEK EROSION CONTROL. Both the Town's and the County's work on Little Falls Branch were completed in the spring to the satisfaction of everyone involved. There will be a small duck pond downstream from the bridge.

Unfortunately the downpours of August 13 and 14 caused damage to the bridge supports and sections of the creek where Town and County work had been done. Fortunately the recent erosion control work prevented more serious damage. Corrective action will be taken early in 2002.

COUNCIL ELECTION. A closely contested election for three Council seats drew a near-record 483 voters, following a well-attended Town Hall forum featuring candidates Tom Eldridge, Judy Frankel, Richard Kessler, Rob McGarrah and Jeffrey Slavin. Eldridge, Frankel and Kessler were elected. Judy Frankel was re-elected Vice President of the Council.

BUDGET AND TAXES. A new State law changed the base upon which the tax rate is applied. Previously, the tax rate was applied to 40 percent of assessed value. Starting with FY02 (July 1, 2001), property tax rates are applied to 100 percent of assessed value. The new system and an actual 43 percent reduction resulted in the Town rate dropping from 22 cents per \$100 assessed value to 5 cents per \$100 assessed value. The budget for FY02 was set at just over \$600,000.

SNOW REMOVAL. Last year the Town made arrangements for residents to have their sidewalks cleared/sanded for a fee. Some residents took advantage of the opportunity and the trial was considered a success. For this year, the Council voted to have the Town arrange with the contractor to provide this service on all Town sidewalks at no cost to residents. Individuals will still be responsible for their driveways and walkways.

SWIMMING POOL. Some new amenities at the pool include a tent for major events, tiling in the men's portion of the bathhouse and a portable gas grill. A water aerobics class was available as well as water baby, aquatic tots and private classes. There were many successful social events for both swim team members and adults, including a Mexican fiesta and a welcome party for new residents.

It was a tremendous season for the Somerset swim team, which won its division championship. In addition, 14 swimmers competed in the All-Star competition. The team has advanced two steps to the K division for 2002.

BURGLARIES. A number of burglaries and some vandalism in Town precipitated a desire among many residents for some kind of security patrol. There were discussions, pro and con, at several Council meetings about hiring off-duty police. Annual costs to the Town could be \$41,600 for 20 hours a week, a per-household cost of \$100. A decision is expected in 2002.

DEFIBRILLATORS. The Bethesda-Chevy Chase Rescue Squad spoke to the Council about their project to install defibrillators in local communities. They suggested we purchase one or two for the pool and Town Hall and assured us they would be available to provide information and necessary training. Each defibrillator costs about \$3,000. A small committee is exploring prices and other details. Action is slated for 2002.

UNDERGROUNDING UTILITIES. A committee was established to study the costs of undergrounding and the best way for the Town to proceed. The committee decided to work through the Maryland Municipal League (MML). The MML, at its Legislative Conference, approved our request on burying wires and cables as one of three legislative proposals for the 2002 session of the General Assembly. The proposal is that the General Assembly pass a joint resolution setting up a task force to study and recommend ways to reduce the cost and improve procedures so that established neighborhoods can start removing overhead wires and cables and putting them

underground. This would be in conformity with State policy, which has required undergrounding in new developments since 1968.

SCHOOL MODERNIZATION. The modernized Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School did not open in September as planned due to various delays. It will be opening in February 2002.

Committees of volunteers worked with the County and architects on modernization of Somerset Elementary School and completed preliminary plans. Demolition of the existing building was scheduled for June 2002. A brand new school would be built to open in September 2003. However, economic circumstances and County deficits intervened and the start of the project has been delayed until June 2003, with completion in January 2005.

THIS AND THAT. We had record participation in the flu/pneumonia shot session administered by the MedStar Visiting Nurse Association.

There was special recognition at the 4th of July celebration of residents who have called Somerset home for two generations or more. Town students who graduated from Somerset Elementary School in June were also honored.

A new surface was applied to the tennis courts that is guaranteed against cracking for 15 years and will be easier on legs and knees than the usual hard court. Several successful tennis round robins were held.

We greeted and introduced 14 new residents at the welcome party at the pool.

Several Building Code changes were enacted which require additional information on permit applications for new houses, renovations and additions. The Council modified front and accessory structure setbacks and imposed requirements for a photo of the existing structure and protective fencing around trees.

Agenda

REGULAR MEETING OF TOWN COUNCIL

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2002 – 7:30 P.M.

1. Approval of minutes of January 7 regular meeting – 7:30.
2. Discussion of financial report – 7:35.

3. Recommendation to Historic Preservation Commission and action on building permit application by Jim Regan and Sandra Riley, 5809 Surrey Street, to rebuild their fire-damaged house, finish the attic and add a dormer to the rear of the house – 7:40.
4. Action on building permit application by Alicia and Diego Calderon, 4922 Dorset Avenue, to build an enclosed porch in the rear of their house – 7:45.
5. Mayor's report – 7:50.
6. Developments/plans in the vicinity of Somerset – 8:05.
7. Suggestions and questions from residents – 8:15.
8. Confirmation of reappointment of Norm Schneider as chairman of Swimming Pool Committee for one-year term – 8:25.
9. Action on request of B-CC High School Educational Foundation for \$10,000 to \$15,000 contribution from Town of Somerset for the school's technology initiative, which will give students and others access to computers and the latest technology – 8:30.
10. Action on a proposal by the B-CC Rescue Squad that the Town participate in community early defibrillation by purchasing, placing and manning one or two automatic external defibrillators– 8:45.
11. Action on ordinance setting Mayor's salary at \$15,000 for term beginning in 2002 – 8:55.
12. Discussion of baseball batting cage proposal for six-month trial and revised rules – 9:00.
13. Introduction of amendment to Town Code to require a finished side of any new or replacement back yard fence or wall to face the nearest neighbor unless the fence or wall is not visible from the neighbor's property – 9:15.
14. Action on hiring off-duty Montgomery County police officers to patrol Somerset streets and enforce compliance with stop signs and parking restrictions – 9:20.
15. Action on request of Town of Chevy Chase to support Maryland Municipal League proposal that the General Assembly extend planning and

zoning authority, on an optional basis, to all municipalities in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties – 10:00.

16. Action on purchase of replacement Gravelly tractor from Blackburn Equipment for \$6,740 – 10:10.

17. New business – 10:15.

Are Dog Exercise Areas Needed?

The Montgomery County Planning Board and the Recreation Advisory Board invite the public to a forum to discuss a proposal for dog exercise areas in County Parks. It will be held in the Earl B. Wood Middle School, 14615 Bauer Drive, Rockville, on Tuesday, February 12, from 7 to 9 p.m.

Six locations for the exercise areas have been proposed. The closest to Somerset are in Silver Spring, Wheaton and Gaithersburg.

Classifieds

County Executive Will Discuss Emergency Planning

County Executive Doug Duncan and other officials will conduct a "Community Forum: Coming Together After September 11" on Tuesday, February 5, at 7:30 p.m. in the Kensington Armory, 3710 Mitchell Street. For directions, call 301-949-2424.

Subjects covered will be emergency planning by the County, family preparedness, bio-terrorism, economic impact and what each person can do to help a neighbor

[Index of Journals](#) | [Town Office](#) | [Home](#) | [Email Town Hall Staff](#)