



SOMERSET TOWN JOURNAL



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Mayor's Den

By Walter Behr



Old Days Were Not Always Good

Most of you know that I am not running for another term as Mayor. At this time it is impossible not to reminisce after

eight-plus years as a Council member and 28-plus years as Mayor. What follows are a few of my recollections of activity in Somerset decades ago that, I believe, will be news to many current residents.

Sewer Moratorium

No building permits were being issued for developments in this part of the County because sewer pipes were carrying capacity loads. Exceptions were made for developers who included "package" sewer plants that would handle the job temporarily and then are dismantled when the regular sewer capacity was expanded.

Jerry Goldberg, who was Mayor at that time, got word from someone that Somerset's Town attorney had filed an application with the County to build a package sewer for several developers on what is now Somerset House property overlooking the Town pool site. Our Town attorney had not asked us or even told us. Summoned to meet with the Town Council to explain, the attorney said simply, "*I made a mistake.*" We promptly engaged a new Town attorney.

Water Fountain

Mayor **Jay Warren Vinton** (who preceded Jerry Goldberg) proudly announced at a Council meeting that he had signed a contract for building the Town tennis courts. I asked whether provision had been made for a drinking

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From the editor: (Corrections to Town Directory)

Included with this issue of the *Town Journal* are two adhesive panels. They are corrections to pages 40 and 46 of the 2008 Town Directory. Simply remove the backings and apply to the appropriate sections of pages 40 and 46.

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fountain and was told with finality that water was not necessary (and this was long before people carried water bottles). When I became Mayor, I lost little time arranging for a fountain.

Tax Bills

Property tax bills were calculated and written individually by Clerk-Treasurer **Jim Capello**. As Mayor, I helped him stuff, seal, address and stamp envelopes. When Montgomery County offered to include municipalities in the County tax bill, I proposed that the Town Council authorize the change. The Council rejected the idea (fearing we would lose our identity as a Town). After an election, a new Council approved the change – and we haven't lost our identity.

Town Office

The "Red House," which had been used as a school for autistic children, did not become the Town Hall until **1982**. Prior to that, the Town office was in the home of the Clerk-Treasurer, that is, until Clerk-Treasurer Marty Cline moved out of Somerset from her rented house on Surrey Street. For several years, the office was in the home of first one, then another public-spirited resident who sacrificed a room and some of their privacy for the benefit of the Town government.

Maintenance Staff

Gene Tillman comprised the main-



Calendar

Monday, March 3	Town Council Meeting*
Monday, March 3	Nominations for Mayor and 2 Council Members
Monday, March 3	Somerset Voter Registration
Friday, March 7	Tribute to Mayor Behr, Brown Bag*
Monday, March 10	Deadline for additional nominations by petition
Tuesday, March 11	Town Hall Use Debate*
Friday, March 14	Somerset ES Used Book Fair*
Saturday, March 15	Somerset ES Used Book Fair*
Tuesday, March 18	Deadline for registering to vote in Town elections
Tuesday, March 18	Candidate Forum
Thursday, March 20	Journal deadline, ads and copy
Tuesday, April 1	Somerset's Election Day*
Monday, April 7	Town Council Meeting*

**Related Articles Inside this issue of the "Town Journal"*

Don't forget to check the Town website throughout the month for an up-to-date calendar. Go to www.townofsomerset.com and click on "Town Calendar"

Please Note: The Town Council meeting on Monday, March 3 will take place in the all-purpose room of Somerset Elementary School and will start at 7:00 p.m. The candidate forum will be held on Tuesday, March 18, also in SES. This session will start at 7:30 p.m. Enter the school through the handicap entrance at the front (Warwick Place) side of the building

tenance staff for many years, and the Town pickup truck was kept in a homeowner's garage on Cumberland Avenue. When he was erecting signs or sweeping streets or cutting grass we couldn't make contact because cell phones were not yet in vogue. When he was on leave, we had no maintenance staff in Town.

A Saturday Afternoon Interruption

On a Saturday afternoon in **November 1980**, I interrupted my lawn work to take a surprise phone call from Lieutenant Governor **Samuel Bogley**. He had just reviewed the Town's application to the **Maryland Board of Public Works (BPW)** for **75 percent** of the **\$800,000** purchase price of a 1.79-acre tract at the southwest corner of Dorset and Wisconsin Avenues. The funds were to come from the State allocation of **Program Open Space (POS)** money to the Montgomery County Council. The County Council had delegated its POS authority to the

Montgomery County Planning Board, which had approved our application (as had COG, the **Council of Governments**).

The Board of Public Works, comprised of the Governor, Comptroller and State Treasurer, is the final authority. Their approval of POS funds is normally pro forma since State funds had already been allocated to the counties.

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Mr. Bogley and we in Somerset knew that the BPW would not rubber-stamp the astounding price of **\$800,000** for less than two acres in a residential zone. He was surprised that there was nothing in the voluminous file indicating that the County Council approved. We were well aware of this, but thought it would be superfluous since they had delegated their power to the Planning Board, which had unanimously approved the application.

Promptly on that same Saturday afternoon I called the chair of the County Council, Neil Potter. There wasn't time to write the BPW because action was scheduled for Tuesday morning, so Mr. Potter sent a telegram (*remember telegrams?*) to BPW supporting the application.

In the end, the total cost for the 1.79-acre plot was **\$830,000**, of which the State paid **\$622,500** and Somerset paid 25 percent or **\$207,500**.

The reason for the steep price is that the tract could have been used for a 53-unit residential high-rise.

Acquisition of this property was of tremendous importance because it completed Vinton Park, which preserves the valley of Little Falls Branch in Somerset and serves as a buffer between the intense development south of Somerset and the single-family houses in Somerset and to the north.

Skipping Five-Year Plan

Normally, the Mayor produces a **Five-Year Plan** for the Town in

February. I have decided such a document at this time would be virtually meaningless primarily because the Council has not yet made a decision on improvements in the Town Hall and swimming pool complex and the estimated cost (which has escalated in recent months). I fervently hope that the Council will act on both plans at the March 3 meeting.

A second reason for skipping the **Five-Year Plan** is that, in my opinion, property taxes will have to increase substantially whether the improvements will cost \$4 million or \$6 million. Council members who have expressed an opinion on the subject hope no increase will be necessary. Our rate this year is 4 cents per \$100 assessed value. It has been substantially higher in the past. For example, the rate was 38 cents in Fiscal Year 1996 and 53 cents in 1979. I believe that lenders will



advance Somerset \$3 million or more if property taxes are anything like 4 cents and there are no membership fees for the Town swimming pool.

My proposed budget for FY 09 will appear in summary form in the March *Town Journal* and on the agenda for discussion and possible revision at the April Council meeting. At that time, the Council will include two newly elected members with a new Mayor presiding.

Restrictions on Political Signs

Now that the primaries are over, there should be far fewer political

signs in Somerset until next fall. Political signs in our Town are regulated by Montgomery County law.

Basic rules if you do not have a County permit are that political signs;

- May be displayed only if at least five feet behind the property line, which means at least 19 feet from the curb in Somerset;
- May be up for no more than 30 days (date of installation must be written on each sign);
- Are limited to 10 square feet per property (a 3'x3' sign is nine square feet);
- May not be attached to utility poles, traffic signs or trees in the Town right-of-way.

The rules above are for temporary signs. There are other, more complicated, rules governing limited duration signs for which County permits are required. For details, including fees, call the Department of Permitting Services at 240-777-6240.

Last Chance to Repave

Now, indeed, is the last chance to replace your cracked driveway apron or walkway if you want it done by the Town's curb and sidewalk repair contractor at what might be a bargain price since their men and equipment are still in Town (but about to leave).

As I have advised in previous articles, I strongly suggest getting at least one or two other bids to be certain that the quoted price is actually a bargain.

The Town contractor is **CRH Concrete Service**, 301-343-7140 or 301-887-0353.

Permits Granted



The following permits were issued by the Mayor during the past month. (Building permits are approved by the Town Council.)

Trees:

Gail David and *Steven Heydemann*, 4812 Grantham Avenue, to remove two small “volunteer,” low quality trees in their back yard, a mulberry and a sassafras.

Fences:

Gail David and *Steven Heydemann*, 4812 Grantham Avenue, to erect a 6' high wood fence in their back yard.

Curbs:

Dania Fitzgerald and *Mark London*, 4801 Cumberland Avenue, to replace their driveway apron and sidewalk section.

Jon and *Leslie Bascom*, 4806 Grantham Avenue, to widen their driveway apron, provided it is no closer than 10 feet from the Town tree.



On My Mind

By Council Member Jeffrey Slavin

On primary election day this year, I had the chance to spend the entire day from 7:00 a.m. until after 8:00 p.m. at our Somerset Elementary School polling place. While I have been involved in politics for thirty-five years, and have spent a lot of poll time, this was my first full day here in Town. And I guess I was being punished for that with the extreme cold, rain and ice!

Yet alternating between standing and sitting and inside and out, I was able to speak to hundreds of people of all political flavors and all generations, both voters and poll watchers. There was a lot of expected talk about the hotly contested Democratic presidential race, whether my party could prevail in November, and even the school board election. But for the most part, the day was an opportunity to catch up on people's lives, debate municipal matters and put a name with a face. In general, I would term the experience a series of community bonding moments.

Upon reflection the next day, I thought about my experiences at other polls during my career in many diverse locations in the metro area. And I tried to contrast that with my experience in Somerset.

I realized how fortunate we are that not only do we live in a precinct filled with well-heeled and highly educated people, but they are extraordinary in their politeness, respect and concern for one another. In a positive way, we are kind of homogeneous in that regard. The differences that might seem

major at times, are actually pretty minor, and we appear for the most part to have similar values about education, family, how we treat the less fortunate and in our care for the environment.

At other polls, Election Day often brings out the worst. At Somerset, it brings out the best.

My heart was warmed.

Crime and Police Report



By Council Member Lesley Simmons

Crime

No crime was reported in the Town in January.

WUSA9.com reported that a woman was sexually assaulted in Chevy Chase Village as she left a party on Sunday January 20 at about 3:30 a.m.

Police Report

Officer *Sherif Almiggabber's* hours were foreshortened in January because he was participating in a training program. Over the two weeks in which he was on duty in Town he issued:

- One parking warning
- Four parking citations – one to a resident, three to non residents

In addition, Officer Almiggabber assisted one resident and investigated one suspicious situation.

By Tom Carter



remember to complete this section when filing your taxes. A sample of the form appears below.



The office staff is back to just Tom and Corrie as Sharon's schedule with college classes made it difficult to get her in when she was needed the most. Sharon was very helpful during the four months she was with us. We will continue to look for someone who can give us a hand on a part-time basis.

Montgomery County residents can now recycle their old and unwanted televisions at the County transfer station at 16101 Frederick Road in Derwood, MD. The sets may be dropped off on Monday—Friday between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., Saturdays between 7:00 a.m. and

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5:00 p.m., and Sundays between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Trash Pickup

It is Town policy to put trash at the curb no earlier than the night before pickup. Following this rule is important in keeping our streetscape clear and clean. It is also a common courtesy to your neighbors.

Garden Refuse Pickup

J&J resumes twice-a-week collection of garden refuse March 1. Pickups will be on Tuesdays and Fridays as in the past.

Please note that yard waste should either be placed in paper bags or loose in trashcans that are prominently marked as “Yard Waste” for easy recognition by the driver. Do not mix with trash or they will leave the entire can! Branches must not be over four feet long or three inches in diameter. Large branches must be trimmed to meet these dimensions. All branches not placed in trashcans must be tied into small bundles.

Odd Jobs Helpers

Having received several calls saying that listed personnel no longer are interested in doing the tasks they originally signed up to do, we have sent everyone on the list a letter asking them to update their status. Those who did not respond were removed and any changes requested were made to the Odd Jobs list enclosed with this edition of the Town Journal. Please let Tom know whenever there are any changes, additions or deletions so that this list remains fully accurate. Call 301-657-3211 with changes.

Some Springtime Activities Require Permits

Spring is coming and in the next few months residents will begin to add to their houses, redo their gardens and beautify their yards. Remember, for some things you will need a permit. Below is a list:

1. **Building permit**—needed for any construction or demolition that changes the exterior dimensions of a house or accessory structure. This includes building or enlarging a tool shed.
2. **Tree permit**—needed to take down trees that are four inches or more in diameter, four feet above the ground.
3. **Fence permit**—needed for any new or replacement fence or wall.
4. **Driveways**—repair or repaving of the section of the driveway on public right-of-way as well as a driveway apron may not proceed without a \$1,000 deposit to insure restoration of Town sidewalks, curbs and other public property. Replacement aprons must meet County standards.
5. **Dumpsters**—may not be parked in the street without permission of the Mayor.

MVA Mobile Office

The MVA’s mobile office will be in Friendship Heights on Monday, February 25, and Monday, March 24, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.



Book Sale Time at Somerset ES

By Elizabeth Hurwit

Somerset Elementary School’s Annual Used Book Sale is set for Friday March 14 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. and Saturday March 15 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the School’s All Purpose Room. Stop by to browse and buy from a great selection of books.

You’ll find home-baked goodies for sale as well.

The Used Book Sale fundraiser is one of the school’s most popular and successful events thanks to Somerset families and neighbors who generously donate children’s books, adult books (fiction and nonfiction), videos, games, audio tapes, cds, and dvds. It’s a great system – clean off your shelves, pass your books on to other readers, restock your shelves, and help raise money for the school.

The more you donate the more successful the sale. Donations will be accepted in the school’s All Purpose Room from Monday, March 10 through Thursday March 13. If possible, pack your books in good, strong cardboard boxes. If you’d like to give credit to a Somerset student for your contributions, find out who his or her teacher is and mark it on the box. The two

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classes that donate the most books to the Used Book Sale will be celebrated with an ice cream party.

We welcome volunteers to help sort books or work at the sale. For information, please call Cathleen Leipold at 301 657-1946 or Elizabeth Hurwit at 301 652-0608

It's Scrumdilyumptious!

Don't miss Somerset Elementary School's production of Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory. It's everybody's non-pollutionary, anti-institutionary, pro-confectionary factory of fun.

Join the fun in the All Purpose Room at Somerset:

**Friday, February 29 at 6:00 p.m.,
Saturday, March 1 at 7:00 p.m. or
Sunday, March 2 at 2:30 p.m.**

The box office opens one hour before show time. **Tickets are \$6 each.** Come enjoy a great performance and support our delicious school.



forgotten, we are in the I Division for 2008, seeded third and swimming on Saturdays against Eldwick (EW), Daleview (D), North Chevy Chase (NCC), Woodcliffe (WCF) and Wildwood Manor (M). On Wednesday nights, we swim Little Fall, Palisades, Mohican and CCRA as well as hosting the very popular B relay carnival scheduled for July 16.

Practice starts in the afternoon on May 27 (Monday – Friday 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.; 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.), when we have only three short weeks to get everyone in the water, legal

and more before the first meet on June 14. Morning practice will begin June 16 at 8:30 a.m. and kids can come to both practices or chose between the two. The season ends on July 19 this year with the Divisional Championships in the morning and the team banquet the very same evening.

All-Star events are the

following weekend.

The coaching staff is almost set – coaches **Adam Bookman, Toby Kathan, Maurie Kathan** and **Bess Pickar** will be returning. Unfortunately (for the team, but mazel tov to Dario), head coach **Dario Fuentes** will be in New York expecting his first child in July, so he will not be returning to coach. The swim team executive

committee is conducting a head coach search. If you have any candidates, please contact me

(morsekathan@earthlink.net).



An ad for the coach can be found on the MCSL website (www.mcsl.org) with job requirements. We are also looking for senior swimmers who would like an entry level coaching job and for teenagers (graduated 8th grade and up) who would like to work with the developmental team. Please contact me, if you are interested in one of these jobs.

Who can join the team? For those new to the neighborhood, the swim team is Somerset's only town sponsored sports team. We are part of the Montgomery County Swim League. We have about 110 swimmers and the team is open to all town residents ages 18 and under whatever their ability. No tryouts! We practice every weekday from May 27 to July 18. We have meets on Wednesdays and Saturdays starting in June. There is also a developmental team, the Minis, for kids under 8 who can swim at least 15 yards. These younger swimmers practice only 3 days a week.

So when you're making your summer plans, leave some time for the swim team. Whether you're here for 3 weeks or the whole season; whether you can practice 3 times a week or everyday, we want you on the team. You can't have a community team without the community participating. Call or email Sarah Morse 301-907-3298, morsekathan@earthlink.net for more information.

ISO Head Coach

The Somerset Swim Team seeks individual for Head Coach for our summer program. The ideal candidate will have

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News From the Swim Team

By Sarah Morse

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. The season schedule is set. For those who have

experience managing a large team, developing competitive and new swimmers, and managing coaching staff and MCSL or other summer swim program. He/she must be a certified Lifeguard. Coaching certification is a plus. The program runs from May 27 to July 28. Please contact Sarah Morse, morsekathan@earthlink.net for more information. Salary commensurate with experience.

Register for Department of Parks Summer Camps



More than 50 different options are being offered in Department of Parks camps for 2008. Select from nature facilities, ice skating rinks, tennis facilities, public

gardens and more. Weeklong choices include the department's signature Week in the Park summer day camp and archaeology camps for both children and adults. Register online at www.ParkPASS.org.

Parks Department Auditions Teen Talent

One lucky teen will be a ParkStar on the Parks Show, an award-winning 15-minute monthly television program on County Cable Montgomery.

The Department of Parks is hosting two open auditions this spring to review teen talent, ages 14 through 17, for their chance to work on and host The Parks Show this summer, June through August 2008. The winner will spend 12 days this summer writing, interviewing and hosting The Parks Show and working with the Department of Parks and the County Cable Montgomery office in all elements of television production. The winner can earn up to 100 Student Service Learning (SSL) hours.

Auditions will be held Saturday, March 29, Brookside Gardens Auditorium, 1800 Glenallan Avenue, Wheaton and Saturday, April 5, Agricultural History Farm Park Activity Center, 18400 Muncaster Road, Derwood.

Registration at auditions will begin at 9:30 a.m. and auditions will run from 10:00 a.m. through 4:00 p.m. Space is limited. The first 25 to register are guaranteed an audition.

Auditioning ParkStars must bring completed official contest entry forms with the signature of a parent or guardian. Please review the contest rules and prize information and practice the audition script in advance.

To learn more about the Parks Show, see a full description of the program at <http://www.mc-mncppc.org/Parks/events/starsearch/>.

Dormant Oil Spray

The Town has scheduled to have its oak and cherry trees sprayed the first week in March, weather permitting. They will be sprayed with a two-percent horticultural oil solution (dormant oil) to control scale.

Signs will be posted in areas to be sprayed. Please do not park your cars on the street near the trees that need to be sprayed. Trees in close proximity to the school will be sprayed another time when school is not in session.

Financing Facilities Improvements

By Council Member Marnie Shaul

Now that the Town is getting closer to making a decision about improvements to the **Pool site** and **Town Hall** it is timely to look at how these improvements might be financed. Like potential homebuyers, Somerset must consider:

- the cost of the projects,
- how much money we have for a down payment, and
- how to finance the remaining amount.

Right now, it's premature to have a firm plan in place, but I thought it might be helpful to residents if I discussed some considerations. These are based on the estimates we have for the facilities improvements (listed elsewhere in this Journal), conversations I have had with several Town residents who specialize

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in financial matters, the Director of the Maryland State Infrastructure Finance Program, our Mayor, other Council members and our Town Clerk-Treasurer.

At the March meeting I anticipate that the Council will vote on plans for the **pool** and **Town Hall** which it believes best reflects residents' wishes. Looking at the estimates made by Balodemas Architects, and for discussion purposes, a realistic assumption is that the total cost for these plans may be between \$5.5 million and \$6.5 million.

The Town has been building up its capital projects fund for many years in anticipation of needed infrastructure improvements. As of January 31, 2008, the fund stood at \$2.3 million. Of this, \$1 million has been budgeted for street improvements, although to date only a small portion has been spent on sidewalk and curb repairs. Whatever we do not spend for street paving will be available for facilities improvements, and I anticipate about \$1.5 million will be available as part of our financing package.

If the **pool** and **Town Hall** project costs total between \$5.5 million and \$6.5 million and we use \$1.5 million from our capital projects fund, the Town would need to finance \$4 million to \$5 million dollars. I think it makes sense to borrow to finance these projects because we expect them to serve Somerset families for many years into the future – thus families will pay for the facilities as they use them.



Currently Somerset has no debt. The Town has borrowed in the past to purchase park land and finance (together with the county) improvements in our storm drain system. On several occasions, Somerset went directly to banks for financing, which our strong asset base allowed us to do. For example, in 1987, the Town borrowed \$1 million directly from a Maryland bank to improve and extend our storm drain system, repave most streets, and make several other improvements. Once we borrowed from a Somerset resident. We could examine using these methods again.

Another option is the State of Maryland Infrastructure Financing Program, which borrows funds on behalf of communities for capital projects (Garrett Park recently used this program). If the Town qualifies, the program has the advantage of having an administrative and legal staff that will put the deal together so the Town wouldn't have to incur those costs. I've discussed Somerset's interest in the program with the program director, and it looks like the Town would meet most of the indicators that might be used by the private underwriter in charge of the program.

The Council would like to be able to finance the facilities improvements without any property tax increase and will examine all the alternatives.

We will want to be creative because depending on the length of time we borrow for, our current budget may not be able to cover our annual debt service. The longer the time period selected the lower the annual costs, but the higher the overall project costs. According to some very preliminary figures, it appears that the annual debt service for a \$4 million loan at currently available rates might be between \$240,000 over 30 years and \$500,000 over 10 years. The total cost for a 30-year \$4 million loan is about \$7.1 million, substantially more than for a 10-year loan, which totals about \$4.8 million. According to one council member, a 10-year time period is often used for municipal facilities because it is assumed that facilities may need improvements after 10 years. If the Town borrowed a larger amount, say a \$5 million loan over 30 years, the annual debt service would be nearly \$300,000 and the total loan cost about \$8.9 million. Especially for the shorter repayment period, the debt service is probably more than Somerset can count on from its current income (which is about \$1.3 million this fiscal year). No one likes tax increases, but it may be that lenders will say that if Somerset wants to make such a substantial investment in its community, it will need to increase its revenues to cover the annual debt service.

The current Town property tax rate at \$.04 per \$100 assessed value is a small part of the overall property tax that residents pay (the county's tax rate is \$.627 per \$100 assessed value). According to the 2007-2008 County Tax Rate table, our current tax rate is lower than most neighboring Montgomery County municipalities, such as Chevy Chase Village (\$.111) and Garrett Park (\$.19).

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The Town will want to keep in mind that there may be other capital improvement projects such as improved streetlights that it will want to be able to finance in the future. So, it is important to strike a balance between current and future projects, the resources the Town wants to expend overall on public facilities, and the desire to keep tax rates low.

Once the Council votes on the project options and we have estimated total costs, we can meet with entities that provide financing to go over our Town's budget history, resources, and projected revenues so we can determine the most prudent way to finance our facilities improvements. Meanwhile some of you may have suggestions beyond those I've outlined here that the council should consider. If so, we would very much welcome hearing from you.



Farewell Tribute Brown Bag Lunch for Mayor Behr Set for Friday, March 7

By Council Member Jeffrey Slavin

While there will be other than you events for the Mayor, I want to invite everyone to break bread with Walter Behr at the last brown bag lunch during his tenure, on Friday March 7 from 12:00 noon sharp until 1:00 p.m. at the Town Hall. I am hoping all the regulars will be able to attend, and everyone should be prepared to impart a favorite story or remembrance of our esteemed leader.

Remember to bring a sandwich or a dish or snack to share with the group. Soft drinks, ice, napkins and utensils are all provided. Newcomers are given special attention. We will also have a special dessert this time.

If you have questions, call me at 301-654-6767 or my cell 202-549-2299.

Somerset Election Reminder

Since Mayor Behr is not running for another term, a new Mayor will be selected at this year's election. In addition, the Council seats currently held by Jeffrey Slavin and Lesley Simmons are up for election. Nominations for all three positions may be made at the Town Council meeting on March 3 or by petition filed by March 11.

In anticipation of a contested race, a candidate forum has been scheduled for March 18 at 7:30 p.m. The forum will be held at Somerset School, not at the Town Hall. As usual, the forum will be recorded by Montgomery Cable TV. Information on when it will be replayed will be

available on the Town Web site. If you would like to submit a question for the candidates in writing, you may do so by emailing it to Bonnie Thomson (bonnthom@aol.com). The moderator will present those questions to the candidates at the forum.

April 1 is Election Day. If you have a question about whether you are registered to vote in Somerset, please contact Bonnie Thomson at 301-657-2923. If you have questions about voting by absentee ballot, please contact Tom Carter at the Town Hall.

New "Invisible Fence" Ordinance Proposed

By Council Member Richard Kessler

An "Invisible Fence" ordinance might seem a contradiction in terms, but many of you may have read the January 26, 2008, article in the Washington Post which discussed regulation of invisible dog fences in Somerset for safety reasons.

Several residents have raised concerns over the placement of fence borders right next to sidewalks or street curbs. Charging dogs

have frightened bicyclists, and pedestrians—some walking their own dogs. Children walking to Somerset School reportedly step into the street to avoid

these animals. As the Post articles observes, some municipalities ban



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fences and others insist that they guard spayed-only animals.

The proposed ordinance mandates that a permit be obtained, that fences only be installed three feet from the sidewalk or 14 feet from the curb (the Town right-of-way). Where there is no sidewalk, the ordinance will be applied retroactively for safety reasons (although the \$20 permit fee would be waived), and imposes penalties for non-compliance. One Council Member has suggested amending the ordinance to apply uniformly to 14 feet from the curb at all places.

This item will be on the April 7 Town Council meeting agenda for action.

Share Your Views on the Town Hall Use Policies

By Council Member
Lesley Simmons

In light of recently expressed concerns by a number of our residents who neighbor the Town Hall, affected and interested residents are invited to discuss the efficacy of current rules for use of our Town Hall. I have agreed to lead the discussion and look forward to seeing those who wish to contribute to the debate at the Town Hall on Tuesday,

March 11 from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. You can read or print off the current rules from the Town website at www.townofsomerset.com click on "Town Permits: Information and Applications," then click on "Town Hall Rental."

The Town Isn't Ready for the Council to Vote

Alan Proctor, Cumberland Avenue

Rumor has it that several council members plan to take a vote at the upcoming March 3 Council meeting on the Council's preferences for community facilities at the town hall and pool sites. I say "rumor" because there's been



no formal notice of this, much less any explanation of the specifics of what's to be voted on, and since this is conveniently the last and only Journal before the meeting, there's no opportunity to address the specifics in this publication.

I urge residents to join me in opposing a vote, if that's indeed what they call for. We deserve adequate advance notice of the specifics of a proposed action, we could renovate the town hall at a quarter of the \$2 million cost estimate, there's been no

decision on how to fund the investment or cut costs if needed, and the vote shouldn't be rushed now just so the current council can vote before we elect a new Mayor and Council in less than six weeks.

Interested in Participating in a Little Falls Stream Valley Stewardship Group?

Plans are underway for a March 2 meeting of people interested in forming a Stewardship Group for the Little Falls Stream. Steve Dryden, Stormwater Coalition of Montgomery County, and Dan Dozier, who has been actively following the proposed Westwood Shopping Center development, will address the gathering. They are hoping to get others to speak about stream monitoring and weed removal. Afterwards Steve will lead a walk along Little Falls Branch for those interested.

The purpose of the meeting is threefold:

- Assemble a group of individuals interested in forming a Stewardship Group
- Find a leader for Little Falls Friends.
- Familiarize people with the various aspects of Little Falls Branch

The meeting will take place on March 2 beginning at 2:00 p.m. at St. Dunstan's Church, 5450 Massachusetts Avenue, Bethesda, MD. If you are interested in attending, please contact Suzanne Richman, 301-951-0365.



Classified Ads



Services

ACADEMIC TUTOR. 20 years experience teaching all ages, subjects. Math through Algebra II. Reading comprehension and writing. Test preparation, organizational/study skills. M.A. in Biology and Special Ed. Call Sheryl Gilbert, 301-656-1753.

OUR CLEANING WOMAN is looking for work and we highly recommend her. Call Bob Siegel at 301-961-9076.

TERRIFIC HOUSECLEANER AVAILABLE. Our thorough, reliable, and very pleasant housecleaner has an afternoon available every other week. Please call Betty Clemmer, 301-654-4212, for information and recommendation.

Miscellaneous

SOMERSET HOME FOR RENT. 4 bedroom, 3 full bath, sunroom, carport. Available now: \$3,800/month. Call Georganne, 304-763-4287 (H) or 304-673-0332.

SOMERSET HOUSE FOR RENT. Beginning May 1, 2008. 4-bedroom, 3-bath rambler near Somerset Elementary School. For more information, call Rob McGarrah at 202-431-9838.

FABULOUS HILTON HEAD VACATION BEACH PROPERTIES FOR RENT. 6 BR home 3 minutes from ocean and 3BR and 2BR oceanfront villas; to view availability, go to www.vrbo.com, #92786, #33362, and #147822 or call 301-913-5973.

For Sale

TWO TICKETS FOR A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION. Garrison Keillor at Wolftrap on Friday, May 23, 2008. Orchestra seats, \$46 each (face value). Call Tim, 301-657-9455.

Ads are printed as a courtesy to Town residents. The Town makes no representations as to quality, safety, or otherwise regarding the goods and services advertised. Readers should make their own inquiries. To place an ad, submit typed or neatly printed copy to the Clerk-Treasurer. Ads must include a Somerset phone number.

Price: \$5 per advertisement per issue. Check or exact change. 50-word limit per advertisement.

Art Show

Group 93 and I will be showing art at the **Katzen Arts Center Rotunda**, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C., March 12 through April 4. The reception will be Saturday, March 20, from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The Rotunda is open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Everyone is welcome. **Free.** Call me for any questions 301-656-3430. *Florence Gang*

Thanks

I thank everyone who gave me very cozy pajamas, robes, and slippers. I got over 50 things! I am sure it will be very cozy for the families in the shelter (Greentree Shelter). **Thank you.** *Sabrina Rubenstein (age 9)*

Legislation

At the February 4 meeting, the Council:

The Council introduced a revised amendment to the Town Code to require invisible fences for pet containment to be installed at least three feet from Town sidewalks and 14 feet from curbs and increase penalties for violation of animal control requirements.



Council Members Set to Vote on Facilities

By Tom Eldridge, Rick Kessler, Marnie Shaul, Lesley Simmons, and Jeffrey Slavin

For two years the Town has debated what improvements to make to the pool facility. For over 7 years the Town has debated the scope of needed renovations for the Town Hall.

Town residents and their elected representatives have spent many hours in public meetings over the past several years, some of which have been well attended by residents, some less well, some with facilitators and some without, to try to reach consensus. Members of the Council have solicited and received lots of e-mail and phone calls on facilities topics from residents. Many people, including Council Members, have contributed their ideas and opinions to regular and special editions of the Journal, particularly in recent months.

We think the long and open process the Town has followed, in which we solicited input from all residents over a significant span of time and through a host of media, provides the Council an ample record upon which to make an informed vote on these issues.

We also think there has been real progress in reaching consensus on many aspects of the renovation project. Draft Requirements for the pool and Town Hall are enclosed in this Journal, and the development of these has been an important benefit of our work with Architect Lou Balodemas who assisted with five public meetings with residents on facilities issues over the past four months.

Of course, there is not unanimity on all issues, nor do we think that is possible. Reasonable people can and will continue to differ on what is needed where, some residents' positions are pretty entrenched, new residents are always arriving and want their new viewpoints weighed, neighbors who live near the facilities rightfully want their interests considered, and the multiple stakeholders' interests simply are too diverse to resolve differences completely.

But we believe there are now clear options before the Town for the Council to consider and vote on, and that the Council should vote on them in March at our regular meeting. These options which have evolved from the past several years of effort are reflected in materials published in this Journal.

This Journal contains the draft criteria, which if approved, would form the basis for bidding documents for the next phase of work. It also contains floor plans developed as these criteria evolved. Two of these schemes — Town Hall Scheme 1A and Pool Scheme 2 (modified to be for seasonal use only but designed to allow conversion from seasonal to year round use at a later date) best represent the draft criteria.

continued on page 14

All the draft layouts represent substantial improvement over the current state of the Town Hall and pool which we think no longer are adequate for the needs of the Town and are in urgent need of renovation or replacement.

Also in the Journal are cost estimates for these various schemes, and (separately) an article that explores the critically important issue of how the Town could finance these and other capital improvements.

We hope that residents will review these materials and attend the Council's regular meeting in March.

Council Activity

At the January 23 meeting, the Town Council:

The Council approved a building permit for Sandy Spring Builders to build a new house at 4520 Dorset Avenue, subject to receipt of a County building permit and Town fees and deposit. (Vote: Eldridge, Shaul, Simmons and Slavin for; Kessler opposed. Motion passed 4-1.)

At the February 4 meeting, the Council:

1. Approved permits for Matthew Zaft and Erin Chlopak, 4820 Dorset Avenue, to demolish the existing structures, build a two-story house with two-car attached garage and remove three trees with four replacements, subject to receipt of a noise abatement plan for the air conditioners, moving the generator to the rear with a noise abatement plan, receipt of a County permit and Town fees and deposit, and later review of plans for the driveway and retaining wall.
2. Extended the swimming pool management contract for 2008 with High Sierra, Inc., for \$74,095.
3. Postponed discussion of proposals for a traffic calming master plan until the March 3 meeting.
4. Postponed discussion of Town Hall rental rules until a meeting could be held with residents for their input. (A public meeting date was set for March 11 at 7:30 p.m.)
5. Discussed station operations of Montgomery Municipal TV Cable Channel 16 with Julian Mansfield, president; Vinnie Walter, manager; and Nat Finkelstein, director from Somerset.
6. Discussed briefly the possibility of requesting bids for legal services, but took no action.
7. Confirmed Tuesday, March 18, as the date for the candidates forum.



Volunteer Opportunities

Isiah Leggett is committed to having the County's boards, committees, and commissions representative of our County's residents. Public participation contributes to the work of County government and provides a valuable service to the community when a variety of issues, concerns and viewpoints are presented. Currently, there is a valuable opportunity to serve on the following:

Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture, Inc.—[http:// www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/exec/vacancies/PR_details.asp? PrID=4276](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/exec/vacancies/PR_details.asp?PrID=4276)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Committee—[http:// www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/exec/vacancies/PR_details.asp? PrID=4277](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/exec/vacancies/PR_details.asp?PrID=4277)

Victim Services Advisory Board—[http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ apps/exec/vacancies/PR_details.asp? PrID=4278](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/exec/vacancies/PR_details.asp?PrID=4278)



Free Workshop to Roll Out the Rain Barrels!

Learn how to capture rainwater off your rooftop, so you can water your yard with free water! Saving rainwater will also reduce demand for water during dry summers and improve water conservation in your home. Your rain barrel could be the envy of the neighborhood and set a trend. For more information go to: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/deptmpl.asp?url=/Content/dep/index.asp>



Somerset Helping Hand

NEED a ride to the doctor? **WANT** some milk or eggs from the market and can't get there?
COULD DO with a ride to Metro or a friend's house? **GIVE** us a holler.

Call Zola Schneider 301-654-7481 or Barbara Zueghauser 301-951-8560 and we will get a **SOMERSET HELPING HAND** from our list of neighborly volunteers.

Preliminary Agenda

Regular Meeting of Town Council at Somerset Elementary School

Monday, March 3, 2008 – 7:00 p.m.

1. Approval of minutes of February 4 regular meeting – 7:00.
2. Discussion of financial report – 7:05.
3. Nominations for Mayor and two Council member positions for two-year terms – 7:10.
4. Confirmation of Mayor's reappointment of Jeffrey Slavin to a two-year term on the Special Events Committee – 7:20.
5. Confirmation of Mayor's reappointment of Rodd Macklin, David Sacks and David Sapin to the Batting Cage Committee for two-year terms and reappointment of David Sapin as chair for one year – 7:25.
6. Confirmation of Mayor's appointment of Michael Hill and George Wyeth as co-chairs of the Environmental Committee – 7:30.
7. Discussion of proposals for traffic calming master plan – 7:35.
8. Fact finding hearing and action on application by Paulo-Sotero and Eloisa Marques, 5526 Greystone Street, to add a front porch – 7:55.
9. Fact finding hearing and action on application by Greg and P. Kaye Haniffee, 4800 Falstone Avenue, to add a second story over part of their house, enclose the carport and add a screened porch to the rear – 8:05.
10. Action on improvements to Town Hall and swimming pool complex – 8:15.
11. Mayor's report – 9:15.
12. Developments/plans in the vicinity of Somerset – 9:25.
13. Suggestions and questions from residents – 9:35.
14. Action on Arbor Day proclamation – 9:45.
15. New business – 9:50.
16. Adjournment – 9:55.

This is a preliminary agenda prepared to meet the Journal press deadline, which typically is two weeks prior to the next Town Council meeting. During this period there will likely be changes to the timing of items, and some items may be added or deleted. Please consult the bulletin board on the Town Hall porch or the Town web site for the most up-to-date agenda.

Residents who wish to be present for a particular agenda item are advised to arrive 15 minutes ahead of the item's scheduled discussion time as discussion sometimes run ahead of schedule.