



"Where People and Trees Have Deep Roots and Grow Strong"

SomerseT TOWN JOURNAL



Volume 65 • No. 6

June 2020

SomerseT Holds Virtual Forum for Town Council Candidates

By **Barbara Marenus**, *Surrey Street*

Democracy is alive and well in SomerseT! On May 12, the three candidates running for two open seats on the Town Council took part in a virtual Zoom exchange to answer questions from the community. The event was hosted by Montgomery County Cable and moderated by Town resident **Nancy Soreng** (Uppingham), a former President of the League of Women Voters in Maryland. One hundred five computers "participated." The Town owes a big debt of gratitude to SomerseT's Board of Supervisors of Elections (Chair, **Phyllis Wiesenfelder**, Cumberland; **James Berry**, Essex; **Sherry Bindeman**, Essex; **Lucy Freeman**, Falstone; **Robin Orseck**, Dorset) and to Town Manager **Matt Trollinger** for the success of this event and for all the hard work that they put into it.

The three candidates, **Robin Barr** (Essex), **Morris Panner** (Essex) and **Steve Surko** (Uppingham), first provided short opening statements. The moderator then asked the candidates a variety of questions that had been submitted in advance to the Board of Supervisors of Elections. Questions from residents viewing the Forum also were solicited via the chat function and posed to the candidates.

Much of the discussion dealt with the Town's plans for stormwater management and tree canopy preservation.

The questions posed to the candidates focused on:

- the candidates' personal and professional experiences;

- stormwater and tree protection issues;
- how to ensure that new residents are made to feel welcome in the Town;
- what to do about the stormwater waiver process for renovation activities and new owners;
- the use of gas leaf blowers;
- the conversion of the Town's street lights to LED;
- ideas for fostering community during and after the pandemic;
- cell towers in the Town;
- the membership of the new Town committee on stormwater management and tree canopy protection; and
- how to reflect resident concerns in Council decision making.

If you would like to hear a recording of the Forum, which was created by Montgomery Municipal Cable, click on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Je0YIHJG6SM>. The link is also posted on the Town website under the "Elections, Voting Registration and Running for Office" section. Montgomery Municipal Cable, Channel 16, is our local access TV station dedicated to municipal programming.

Please note that this edition of the Journal includes supplementary questions (see page 3) to the candidates with their answers. Town residents submitted these questions specifically for publication in the Journal.

Don't Forget...SomerseT Election on Tuesday, June 9!

- One candidate for Mayor (**Jeffrey Slavin**) and three candidates (**Robin Barr**, **Morris Panner**, and **Steve Surko**) for two Town Council seats are up for election.
- All ballots must be postmarked by June 9 and should be returned in their postage-paid envelopes.
- Election results will be announced after 5 p.m. on June 16.



ON MY MIND

Thoughts on Silver Linings

By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin, *Warwick Place*

Over the last two months, I have spent a lot of time pondering the many silver linings of sheltering in place. Dogs are better exercised, traffic is way down, pollution is diminishing, etc. One personal benefit for me is gaining a clearer understanding of my personal priorities and life's mission, discovering what and who matter to me.

For people of means, like the vast majority of us in Town, I have come to realize that the really valuable people in our lives are not tax lawyers, accountants and wealth managers, but grocery workers, letter carriers, delivery folks, waitresses and health aides. It's a shame that we often take these community members for granted. They are close to invisible. But in fact, they have identities and life stories, and wisdom to share.

I also will strive to stop making assumptions about anyone based on their personal appearance. If you see me on the street these days, unshaven for a week, no haircut and mismatched pajama-like attire, those who don't know that I'm a Mayor would think I was homeless!

I have also taken stock that even though I am fast approaching official senior citizen status and have what most would call a fancy educational background, I clearly don't know everything. And while I have always preached the power of listening, I have not always followed my own rules. I am also going to think harder before I put something in writing, especially on social media.

It is my hope that all of you have had a similar opportunity to give yourself a good self-exam.

Somerset's Helping Hand Is Just an Email or Phone Call Away



If you need a ride, someone to pick up some groceries or a prescription, a ride to the Metro, or even if you just want to get to a friend's house, please contact **Somerset Helping Hand**. We have a list of 30 Somerset volunteers who can help.

Send an email to HHSomerset@gmail.com or call **Barbara Zeughauser** at 301-951-8560, **Kathleen Kenyon** at 301-656-8581 or **Jim Berry** at 301-656-6089.

If you would like to add your name to the volunteer list, please send an email to HHSomerset@gmail.com.

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SOMERSET TOWN JOURNAL

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Three Candidates for Town Council Answer Your Questions

In order to provide residents with a wide opportunity to question and listen to candidates, the Board of Supervisors of Elections sponsored the Zoom Forum on May 12 and asked for questions that residents wished to have the candidates answer in writing for publication in the June Journal.



Robin Barr



Morris Panner



Steve Surko

1. Are there aspects of Town governance — pool management, maintenance, staffing, environmental issues, permit and/or contract processing, communications — where we could improve and if so, how should we do so?

Robin Barr: I see five areas where Town governance and services might be improved:

1. The two exceptional and seriously overworked office staff need another staff member to manage the load well.
2. The office also needs a modestly increasing budget every year to handle upgrades to software, replacement of equipment etc.
3. The website needs a complete upgrade.
4. The Town gardeners need more education in sustainable environmental practices.
5. We do need more emphasis on maintenance across the board. Maintenance is too easy to cut from any budget. Its rewards are the omission of budget headaches down the line and that is also its challenge – the savings are in the future. Better records on maintenance completed and maintenance avoided over time will teach its value. It saves us money!

Morris Panner: We can and should do a better job of communicating and soliciting input from a broader cross-section of residents when contemplating issues that have far-reaching implications. We have excellent Town committees. Still, many residents who care deeply about issues often do not have the time or bandwidth to engage in the debates that are currently at the forefront, such as stormwater management, site-to-site runoff, and managing our tree canopy. We need a better way to engage a broader cross-section of residents in these discussions – both to educate and hear concerns. We

should not assume that silence equals agreement. Some of the technology innovations we have had to adopt because of the pandemic can be helpful to that end. Adequate time and deliberative, fact-informed processes help. Finally, I have always worked to ensure anything we contemplate considers immediate costs and long-term maintenance. We have many beautiful facilities in Town to maintain and improve. Residents should know we are stewarding tax dollars carefully.

Steve Surko: Town government is all about serving the community. This includes maintaining the physical infrastructure, supporting what makes Somerset special (such as our Tree City USA designation, Town Pool activities, July 4 Picnic, and Halloween), as well as protecting the health and safety of our residents. And we need to constantly look for ways to do things better. At our Special Meeting on April 15, for example, the Council unanimously approved a \$5,000 contract with Member Splash for a more effective pool management software system. In July 2019, I recommended that the Town employ competitive contracting to the maximum extent practicable. This approach allowed the Town to secure lowest cost tree, trash removal, and recycling services, and best value pool management services.

Essential to improving governance is robust engagement with our active group of committees. I believe that our Committees reflect the values and interests of Somerset, and the Council should respect and support them by recognizing their critical role in local government and consider their recommendations positively. As part of my Councilmember duties, I regularly attend meetings as the liaison to the Environment Committee and represent Somerset on the Citizens Coordinating Committee for Friendship Heights.

2. Somerset has just tightened its belt on its budget. If it has to tighten more, what should be cut next and

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why? If more revenue than anticipated is available, what two priority items would you recommend for restoration and why?

Morris Panner: We expect to face a very difficult budget climate during the next two years and possibly longer. Our core budget relies on sharing state revenues. We may see a significant reduction, so we need to ensure that we have adequate funds to service our pool house debt and other obligations. We have instituted a budget that contemplates significant reductions in funds, and assumes we are not implementing any new programs until we evaluate the actual revenue we receive. We hope not to have to cut beyond what we have already delayed. In other words, I hope we have made the hard decisions already, so that we can keep other operations running normally. If economic recovery occurs much faster than our budget planning assumes and we have additional revenues to allocate, my top two priorities are: (1) budgeting for any recommendations relating to water flow and tree canopy that we all can agree will address a majority of residents' concerns; (2) completing the street light project, assuming PEPCO cooperates on reasonable installation costs and agrees to continue maintaining our lights once they are installed.

Steve Surko: The Mayor and Council, working with the Budget Committee, have ensured that Somerset is fiscally prepared for a significant drop in income tax revenues anticipated as a result of the COVID-19 situation. Indeed, we expect to close FY20 with \$1,068,224 in our Rainy Day Fund. And the Mayor has proposed a FY21 Budget with a surplus of \$227,805. However, income tax revenues from the State may be reduced for several years. The Rainy Day Fund was created to enable Somerset to handle such cyclic reductions in income while maintaining the services our residents expect. So I do not see the need for any further cuts in our budget in the foreseeable future.

The fiscal impact of the COVID-19 situation will almost assuredly play out in unexpected ways. So I believe it would be prudent to proceed cautiously with regards to any significant new expenses, even if our revenue does not drop significantly at first. That said, my priorities are:

- LED street lighting (once we successfully negotiate costs with PEPCO) for improved lighting, environmental benefits, and reduction in long term energy costs, and

- Modernized Town Web Site for improved engagement with the community.

Robin Barr: When revenues fall, we can consider both cuts to existing programs and fee increases for various activities. Both recover funds for the Town. We also have a Rainy Day fund – I helped develop it - that allows us to maintain most programs for a year or two of reduced revenue. If cuts are necessary, I support relatively small reductions across most budget categories rather than targeting particular programs or services for elimination.

Given how Maryland funds local communities, Somerset is likely to receive respectable income in FY2021 with much reduced revenue in FY2022 and possibly beyond that. That was the pattern after the Great Recession and is a driving factor in how I recommend we use any extra funds in our FY2021 budget. Maintenance becomes a priority when future revenues are expected to fall. For that reason, I support restoring these funds because this current expenditure prevents heavier expenditure in a future of falling revenues. I also support restoring funds to upgrade the Town's website. Expanding its capacity to handle meeting minutes, and enhancing the ease at which materials are uploaded, as well as the ability to support complex web design are all vital going forward.

3. In 2015, Montgomery County passed The Healthy Lawns Act, which requires the use of safer alternatives to most toxic synthetic pesticides on private and county lawns, playgrounds, mulched recreation areas and private healthcare facilities. After being suspended by a court challenge, the law went into effect in May 2019 when the Maryland Court of Special Appeals ruled in favor of the act. Municipalities like Somerset must opt in to the law for it to take effect in our community. Do you support the Town of Somerset opting in to the County Pesticide law and Program? If not, why not?

Steve Surko: Yes, I unequivocally support the Town of Somerset opting in to the County Pesticide Law (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/lawns/law/>). "The purpose of this law is to protect the public health and welfare and to minimize the potential pesticide hazard to people and the environment, consistent with the public interest in the benefits derived from the safe use and application of pesticides." Somerset residents, pets, and wildlife deserve the same protection. It is important to

note that there are exceptions (such as mosquitos on private property).

As the Council liaison to the Environment Committee (EC), I coordinated a presentation by Montgomery County's Department of Environmental Protection. The EC readily determined that it made sense for Somerset to opt-in, as we already have for County regulations on Air Quality, Erosion and Sediment Control, Noise, and Forest Conservation. There would be no cost to Somerset as the County is responsible for education and enforcement. Neighboring jurisdictions have already opted in. I eagerly brought this forward to the Council in April – to be effective in November so as not to impact any lawn care arrangements which may have already been made for this summer — with the hopes of securing support for formal consideration the following month.

Robin Barr: The Environment Committee, which I chair, recommended to Council that we incorporate the County's Healthy Lawns Act into our code. Most of the County already follows the act and landscapers are adapting their practices to comply. The act allows pesticide use for harmful invasives and noxious plants. It bans pesticide application for cosmetic purposes – to make your lawn or pathway pretty. The Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection site has many suggestions for how to use safer ways to keep your yard attractive.

Heavy use of pesticides in our area has polluted 90% of our waterways, threatening aquatic life. Pesticides are poisons. They are harmful to small children, pets, and the neighborhood's rabbits, squirrels, and chipmunks. It makes a lot of sense to use them only when we really do need to use them.

Morris Panner: The Town has already adopted this program for our own operations. We control our own destiny in this regard and have made the vendors aware of our needs. I have heard from many residents that their vendors have already adopted the policy because of the County requirement. At a council level, we are continuing to study what adopting the law as a Town would mean for residents in practical terms. We all support the idea of ensuring a healthier environment, but we need to answer basic questions. What penalties will residents face for any non-compliance and what enforcement mechanisms would we use? A number of residents use sole proprietor lawn care professionals or similar small business operators - who will be in charge of educating them? Can these small businesses readily adapt? These are the types of questions we are studying to ensure we really understand the practical implications for residents and their trusted

lawn care providers. As a Council, our duty is to answer these types of questions and share that information with residents before we enact legislation, not after.

4. Three Town Committees drafted a welcome letter for prospective and current residents to give them information on Town regulations on tree removal and on best practices regarding storm water and other environmental concerns. If drafted to make clear which part is based on code and which part is advisory, do you favor having Somerset provide the letter to residents and encourage real estate agents and builders to provide it to their clients? If not, would you modify it in any way?

Robin Barr: I favor posting it on the Town site and, in addition, expanding the site to include a welcoming introduction to Town life. The site should include information about the pool and swim team, our tennis courts, and our several committees that enable residents to participate actively in the Town's affairs.

The letter is part of an effort to reduce confrontation in our Town Council's hearings on approval of building permits. One part helps families who are interested in making Somerset their home learn more about life in our Town as well as our regard for trees, and problems with storm water run-off. They may choose to use that information in final design considerations for their new home. The other parts to reduce confrontation involve improving our Town code (the focus of the new committee) and (as I suggested at the Council forum) having a storm water management review of building plans when the County has provided a waiver to intending owners. A landscaper, qualified in storm water management, would conduct the review. That meeting and our arborist's, on reforestation, should be conducted with the aid of Zoom to facilitate attendance.

I already have had input into the letter.

Morris Panner: I support a letter that offers a welcoming tone to new residents. I am a big fan of diversity. The letter as originally drafted suggested that people had to adopt a set of Somerset "values" and was not particularly welcoming. I want us to encourage people of all types and beliefs to feel welcome here. I also want people to feel safe that if they comply with building codes and regulations they can build homes without being shamed for their design choices. There are neighborhoods that have very strict codes, even regulating the color a family can paint a home, but I do not see Somerset and its big heart as fitting that mold. I will suggest edits to the

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letter at the next council meeting to ensure the letter is consistent with our welcoming and open hearts.

Steve Surko: For a variety of reasons, the building permit process appears to have become more contentious over the last couple of years. My impression has been that residents have engaged positively in our democratic process! They genuinely welcome their new neighbors - but do not feel that the Town is fulfilling its responsibility to protect "the health and safety of adjoining or confronting property owners and residents, or the enjoyment of their property". As I said at the Town Forum, I believe this situation has arisen more from process than any lack of civility.

The Mayor, recognizing that this process could benefit from more communications and earlier engagement, formed an Ad Hoc Committee to draft a Welcome Letter to help real estate agents, construction firms, and potential new home owners understand some of our values and special aspects of our Code *before* they put pencil to paper.

Such a Welcome Letter is an excellent idea. And I'm reassured by its pedigree: drafted by an Ad Hoc Committee; reviewed by the Environment Committee and Parks and Natural Resources Committee; and currently being edited by the Council and residents. I am ready to vote for it as soon as the language is finalized!

5. If you could equip the Somerset Town Council with one regulatory power it does not now have, what should that be?

Morris Panner: I believe our Town has sufficient regulatory power to ensure our health, safety and well-being. I appreciate that some neighbors hold very strong beliefs about home size and property use and have suggested "closing loopholes" in the Town Code in support of those beliefs. I would prefer to encourage diversity and openness. I also hope we can rely more heavily on neighbor to neighbor dialogue and interaction when we have areas of disagreement.

Steve Surko: Small cell towers in residential neighborhoods such as Somerset will be required for 5G. A timely rollout is vital to keeping the United States on the cutting edge of high-tech advances, which promise much faster bandwidth and a vast array of new home automation services via the Internet of Things.

Several residents have expressed their concerns to me about the environmental health and aesthetics of small cell towers. Although it is not a realistic wish, I believe that Somerset should have regulatory control of where these small cell towers are located on yards throughout our Town.

Robin Barr: Traffic regulation! For the Town to have the option of restricting cut through traffic on Dorset.

6. The Town Code requires approval by the Town to remove trees above a specific diameter, considering various factors such as the health of the tree, environmental degradation and whether there is no reasonable or prudent alternative. In general, would you be supportive of a request to remove healthy, mature canopy trees to build structures other than houses (e.g., a pool, garage, or patio)?

Steve Surko: Somerset is more than a Tree City USA. Our tree canopy is part of the environment we protect and enjoy. It increases our property values and helps cool us in the summer. A permit is required for removal of any tree – regardless of condition.

I support the right of home owners to build what they want on their property – so long as they do not adversely impact the health, safety, and enjoyment of property of their neighbors. With regards to tree removals, I am concerned that new construction permits receive insufficient scrutiny. Trees take a long time to grow – and clear cutting a lot leaves a scar on Somerset's precious canopy! To the extent that trees need to be removed for new construction, I expect a robust reforestation plan. New construction should take protection of canopy trees into consideration in the design. In accordance with the Code, I do not believe that accessory structures, pools, or patios automatically justify tree removals. In November 2019, I voted against the removal of two healthy poplar trees for a new pool and patio. More recently, the Council worked with different new homeowners to modify their driveway and save a mature tree.

Robin Barr: The Town code on buildings and other structures rules our decision-making. That is what builders and architects design to. That is how our Town makes decisions. We can modify the code to strengthen provisions on trees. I favor that.

Trees, especially native canopy trees, are amazing. They help control storm water in a big way. They are major carbon sinks. Their leafy canopy cools the Town by a degree or two on hot days. They are apartment living for birds and squirrels. They are birthing centers for butterflies. They are supermarkets for bees. Their fallen leaves enrich our soil and are cover for many species of bee to lay eggs. They are truly remarkable. My hope is that when homeowners know the wonderful powers of trees, they will make sensible choices about when to remove them. Modifying our code can help a little. Education needs to shoulder the major burden.

Morris Panner: I have endorsed a study of our tree canopy, which will give us an accurate census over time of our tree canopy. We need to undertake a data-driven approach to maximize our tree canopy, rather than attempt a referendum on each and every home renovation or construction project. Among other things, we should understand the age of trees and life cycle as well as the status of Town trees. We are undercutting the open spirit of the community and not advancing our effort to ensure healthy and vigorous canopy trees in the Town. Our Town requires everyone to submit a reforestation plan for any construction. This is developed in cooperation with the Town Arborist and approved by the Council. We have never denied a reforestation plan and never imposed our judgement over what families can do with their property provided they comply with the landscaping and reforestation provisions of the Town and County codes. Once we have more data, we will be able to figure out how best to ensure there are more trees.

7. Do you have thoughts on what might be done to allow more dialogue between residents and their elected officials while complying with the Open Meetings Law?

Robin Barr: As I mentioned in my platform statement, if elected, I intend to hold meetings – Zoom meetings too (or another video conferencing platform) – with residents around particular issues or themes. Individual Council member meetings with residents are not subject to the Open Meetings Act. Of course the meetings would be open to all residents anyway. I would also like to use the meetings to run ideas by residents. At the forum I supported the idea of holding Council meetings on Zoom as well as in person. And as mentioned in an earlier answer when we have expert reviews on reforestation plans and hopefully on storm water management plans, these should be open and conducted with the help

of videoconferencing to make them accessible to all residents.

Morris Panner: We are studying this with our Town Attorney and developing our comfort level with various communication methods. I support the Zoom meetings, which make it easier for residents to attend meetings of all types. I also support person to person communication not barred by the law. Avoiding debates on issues on the listserv as suggested by my fellow council member in the forum makes good sense. We need to figure out ways to bring more voices from a wider range of residents into our discussions and decision-making in a way that is productive and easy for residents to navigate. We need to rethink our notifications processes and ensure we build enough time in our legislative processes for people to be aware of the issues being contemplated and having a variety of ways to share their opinions. Many of our residents have busy jobs and young children and may care about the long-term implications for the issues we're debating but do not have the bandwidth to engage in our current processes. We may need to deploy more survey tools or more one-to-one outreach when the issues are particularly important, such as changes to our Town Code.

Steve Surko: Maryland's Open Meetings Act is a statute that requires many State and local public bodies to hold their meetings in public, to give the public adequate notice of those meetings, and to allow the public to inspect meetings minutes. In practice, this means that no more than two Councilmembers can discuss an issue outside of formally structured meetings.

I share concerns expressed by some residents that the Open Meetings Act – and prohibitions on *ex parte* communications regarding matters before the Council – constrains valuable dialogue between Councilmembers and residents. I am an engineer, not a lawyer, but I believe we can use new technologies to improve communications without violating Maryland's Open Meetings Act. Residents can use the informal list serve to voice their thoughts – or email Councilmembers directly. If the topic is not prohibited, Councilmembers may reply directly to the individual. The Town could also create a bulletin board on the official website for thoughtful exchanges of opinions or positions on different topics. We can also have longer Open Sessions at Town Council meetings and Town Forums on particular topics.

And I have been impressed by the way our recent virtual meetings have resulted in greater participation by residents.

JUNE CALENDAR

MONDAY, JUNE 1

Town Council Zoom Meeting

7:30 p.m.

TUESDAY, JUNE 2

Maryland Primary Election

FRIDAY, JUNE 5

National Gun Violence Awareness Day

TUESDAY, JUNE 9

Town of Somerset Election Day

Completed ballots must be postmarked by this date.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

Town election ballots must be received by 5 p.m.
Results will be announced after 5 p.m.

Update on the Pool

By Matt Zaft, Chair, Pool Committee, Dorset Avenue

As the weather turns warmer, I am sure many of you are feeling the same way I do... longing for the pool to be open. Sadly, I cannot report this, but it isn't all bad news.

While we do not have any specifics, all indications are that pools will be part of a Phase 2 re-opening of Montgomery County, which will most likely occur two weeks after Phase 1 commences. While parts of Maryland are starting Phase 1, Montgomery County is not. Not to sound like a broken record, but while we do not yet have any specifics, indications are that the County will begin Phase 1 in late May. If this is the case, a realistic timeframe would be opening the Town pool perhaps two weeks later, in June. Our wonderful pool management company, American Pool, will be ready to go and open the pool the moment we are allowed to do so.

Clearly, there are many unanswered questions about the nature of the restrictions that likely would be placed on pool use. The Pool Committee will address these issues as they emerge. Anyone is welcome to attend our Zoom Pool Committee meetings (dates to be announced) as well as to contact me directly.

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Doors of Somerset

The editors would like to recognize the numerous creative contributions of **Deborah Shulman** (Falstone).

Deborah was able to galvanize young children and families to work on art projects initiated by suggestions she and other families placed on the community listerv. She posted different shapes for the children to color and decorate, and many families placed the artwork on their front doors for others to enjoy. Thank you, Deborah!



Sounds

During our shelter-in-place order, we are all becoming more aware of the sounds of our neighborhood. Birdsong is very evident now in spring. It is a delight to our office-tuned ears. And kids playing outside again, on their bikes. What a joy to hear their abandon and escape from the confining walls of home! And these moments of almost silence when we can hear the wind rustling leaves in the trees. That's bliss to those of us inured to the din of our modern city!

Noise

And then a leaf blower starts up.

Last fall, I wrote about a presentation from Jamie Banks of Quiet Communities and from Chuck Elkins, one of a small group of committed D.C. residents who worked successfully to arrange a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers in D.C. that will begin in 2022. Their argument was that battery-powered equipment is now sufficient to manage routine landscaping chores. Battery-powered equipment is much quieter than gas-powered equipment.

I had mentioned at that session that we, in Somerset, were working on a list of landscapers who are either already using only battery-powered equipment or would agree to using only battery-powered equipment if an owner requested it. Colleagues in the Town of Chevy Chase and in Chevy Chase Village agreed to work with us in developing the list.

The Town of Chevy Chase has now published that list of landscapers on its website. The list was developed intentionally for residents of Somerset and Chevy Chase Village to use along with residents of the Town of Chevy Chase. Here's the site: <https://www.townofchevychase.org/431/Quiet-and-Clean-Landscapers>

I hope many of you will take advantage of this list when choosing a landscaper.

Why we did what we did

The idea behind the list is that we can explore among those who are interested in trying these services whether quieter landscaping works, and whether it is priced competitively with gas-powered services. If it does work, talk to neighbors, spread the word. Battery-powered equipment also generates no pollution at the point of use, unlike gas-powered equipment. And that benefits all of us.

A pandemic pause?

That list of "quiet landscapers" will not quiet down our Town overnight. But we can achieve some temporary relief if we all agree to tell our landscapers not to use leaf blowers while the shelter-in-place order is in effect. Many of us are at home during the day, participating in Zoom calls and other phone meetings. It would make a real difference if that penetrating noise disappeared from the background. So, I ask that we try this experiment in neighborhood calming for the duration of the shelter-in-place order. Let's allow us to hear the wind rustle the leaves in our trees, or alternatively, hear what people are saying during that Zoom meeting. Turn off the leaf blowers.

New Ad Hoc Committee on Stormwater Management and Tree Canopy Protection Proposed to Town Council

By Councilmember Steve Surko, *Uppingham Street*

I want to thank Mayor Slavin for proposing a constructive path forward on a topic of interest to many of us.

Background. At the Town Council meeting on November 4, 2019, the Mayor tasked another Councilmember and myself to review the building regulations in the Town Code with regards to issues apparent in Council considerations of recent building applications and propose a revision if appropriate. Working with our Town Attorney, as directed, we reviewed our Town Code and those of neighboring jurisdictions, and developed a compromise revision to the Town Code – largely to close a “loophole” regarding consideration of a covered porch in calculated lot coverage. As my colleague noted, I proposed this revision “in the usual way,” along with a recommendation “to explore the merits of various approaches adopted by local municipalities” in the March Town Journal and discussed it at the Town Council meeting on March 2. Members of the Council and residents clearly wanted to study the situation carefully prior to making any revisions to the Town Code, so I recommended that we form a study group and addressed this in an article in the April Town Journal. The Mayor volunteered to consider the situation.

Where we are now. On May 6, the Mayor made his recommendation for an Ad Hoc Study Stormwater Management and Protection of the Tree Canopy (SMTC) Committee in the Town of Somerset listserv.

The Mayor proposed the following mission statement: “To perform a comprehensive review of current County and Town laws and administrative policies related to stormwater management and the tree canopy. To identify

problems and concerns specific to Somerset. To review a variety of legislative and administrative solutions to such problems with special attention to what has been done locally and across the nation. To evaluate the impact of such solutions on staffing, cost, and property values. To make specific final recommendations which would be most effective in Somerset.”

The Mayor also proposed that the committee be of nine Town resident members, with at least one being a real estate sales professional, one with expertise in engineering/stormwater management, one a land use attorney, one an expert in trees and the other five would be citizens with the time and interest in working on the study. As with all committees, the members and chair would be nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council. The Ad Hoc SMTC Committee would be supported by an experienced consultant.

I fully support this proposed committee and its mission and am pleased to report that I added the Ad Hoc SMTC Committee as an agenda topic for approval by the Council at our next meeting on June 1. It is my hope that we will be able to move forward expeditiously as a community to capture relevant information, assess options, discuss with residents, and propose recommendations to the Council by the end of 2020.

I welcome your comments on the Ad Hoc SMTC Committee. Please feel free to communicate directly with me (or other Councilmembers) – and the Town Manager if you wish your comments to be formally considered by the Council as a whole.



To Your Health

By Diane Horn, Certified Wellness Coach
Chair, Ad Hoc Wellness Committee, Surrey Street

As we are all finding out, wellness encompasses so much more than what our weight is or if we have a cold. In these trying times you might find that it's harder to feel in control of living a balanced life. Maintaining a positive outlook is challenging when something as simple as running out to the market can feel like a huge challenge fraught with unforeseen complications. After waiting in line to enter the market, I've discovered my grocery list was still at home. Usually this would not be a big deal but it feels like one now.

I have read numerous articles on how to shop during a pandemic and feel grateful that I am lucky enough to be able to get out to the store. My cooking has become more experimental depending on what I have in the house. My grandmother had a huge spare freezer in her garage which was always filled to the top with baked goods and pre-prepared meals. She loved reaching in and pulling out something for dinner. I have a much smaller freezer and have always enjoyed cooking for every meal but am trying to become smarter by using what I have and combining foods in new ways.

I have made "kitichari," an ayurvedic dish, which is traditionally made with basmati rice and mung beans, cooked with your choice of vegetables and aromatic

spices. I've made breakfast for dinner usually with eggs. Shakshuka is a dish of eggs poached in a sauce of tomatoes, peppers, onion and garlic. Seasoning includes cumin and paprika and sometimes feta cheese. It can be quite spicy but can also be made to taste. I've bought boxed miso soup and doctored it up with seaweed and scallions, then added soba noodles and topped it with a piece of salmon. I did not use a recipe.

There are many more dishes that have no name but used basic pantry ingredients and different spice combinations. As I said, some are better than others. I know many in Somerset are baking up a storm but have had difficulty finding yeast and/or flour. Our neighborhood Clyde's (as I'm sure other local restaurants) has a pantry market you can order from which includes dairy, eggs, flour and yeast. I am trying my luck with sourdough starter and have not yet tried making bread with it.

Our informal listserv has had many postings on good takeout food and I am very grateful for all the recommendations. If anyone is keeping a list of these please consider posting it for us again; I would love to hear what others are doing. Please share your suggestions on ways you simplify daily tasks, reduce stress and find balance in your life...and stay healthy!

Greetings from the Town's New Landscaping Consultant

Groundsmith Collective is grateful to be the new gardening/conservation landscaping consultant for the Town of Somerset. We look forward to engaging with staff, the Town Council, and residents with the goal of establishing and maintaining a robust network of healthy sustainable landscapes.

We will start with sustainable asset mapping which entails cataloging all previously developed conservation landscapes. We will be creating a narrative for each site describing the design intent, assuring that subsequent maintenance will reinforce and not contradict the site goals. We will also be conducting interviews with maintenance staff, Council Members, and residents to understand and build on the existing knowledge and skill sets within the Town.

You will most likely see me or one of my staff walking around the town in the next few weeks. Feel free to ask any questions about the project. Please remember to social distance, as we want to ensure good health for all.

Kelley Okleson, LEED AP, ASLA
Principal Designer
Groundsmith Collective

From the Mayor's Desk

By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin



With the Council's vote on the FY21 budget earlier this month, the Town's annual fiscal planning season is officially over. I want again to thank the members of the Ad Hoc Budget Committee for their guidance-- Chair, **Phil Young** (Greystone), **Robin Barr** (Essex) and **Jon Medalia** (Surrey)--because it's always challenging to balance all the competing interests, especially when we are in the middle of an unprecedented pandemic and the Council does not wish to impose a tax increase! And I want to express my particular appreciation to our new "budget wizard" Town Manager Matt Trollinger for meeting this big challenge during his first year on the job.

Walking way more than usual these past months, I have noticed how Somerset is so much better groomed and litter free than neighboring towns and communities like Kenwood, Chevy Chase Village, and Chevy Chase West (not to brag!). This is due in large part to our wonderful, hard-working maintenance crew, led by **Enrique Cabrera**. If you run into any of the maintenance staff, a wave and a thank-you will let them know they are appreciated! And they have been on a reduced schedule, too.

As a reminder, the Town's annual election will take place on **Tuesday, June 9**, and ballots were to have been mailed in pre-paid envelopes to all registered voters on May 19. Please check with the Board of Supervisors of Elections, chaired by **Phyllis Wiesenfelder** (Cumberland), if you have any questions. It's important that everyone vote. Voting is one of the primary responsibilities of citizenship, and given that this is a mail-only election I am hoping for record turnout!

It's graduation time and I know that many households have graduates at all levels, from elementary school to professional school, and even beyond. Because there is so much interest, I want to encourage students and their parents to inform the Town so that we can make note of these accomplishments in the Journal. In addition (fingers crossed that it takes place), we will be encouraging all graduates to attend our annual July 4 celebration where we will announce their accomplishments and give them a gift.

June is also LGBTQ Pride Month and this year, as a result of citizen requests, I have asked the Council to approve a resolution to recognize this event and to authorize

the raising of the Pride flag for the month. Also, I am a member of the national group Mayors Against Illegal Guns, and former Garrett Park **Mayor Peter Benjamin** has asked our Town Council to support a resolution to recognize June 5 as National Gun Violence Awareness Day. In addition, supporters of this movement are asked to wear orange on that day.

It was a pleasure to listen to the Council's discussion during the May work session regarding a proposal for an official public notice that could be used by anyone planning to apply for a building permit for new construction, major renovation or an addition to their structures. Several months ago, after **Jon Medalia** (Surrey) made a suggestion for this type of notice at a Town Council meeting, a tool I was familiar with when I was a condo president, I formed an ad hoc committee which I asked to go to work on this idea. It is my belief that if residents, owners, realtors, and prospective purchasers are aware of the history, values and rules of Somerset before they design new buildings or additions, many problems down the road will be avoided. The proposed notice contains language that was approved both the Environment and Parks and Natural Resources Committees in addition to the Ad Hoc Committee. It is well written, comprehensive, and friendly, and reflects the values of our Town. Having just re-read our Town history book, I feel it will truly help to forever maintain the character of an oasis that we are so well known for. While a few minor tweaks will be needed to this document, including further clarification of what's based on code and what's advisory, I am planning to place it on an upcoming Council agenda. In the meantime, I want to urge everyone to read this notice and let me know your thoughts. Here is a link to this notice on the Town's website:

<https://bit.ly/2TqQVCN>

Every Friday at 6 p.m. these past weeks it has been very heartwarming to hear the sounds of bells, horns, drums and the like as Town residents have made noise for five minutes to thank health care workers, grocery and pharmacy employees, delivery people and letter carriers. Keep it up! We need to celebrate and support these frontline folks.

**HAPPY FATHER'S DAY TO ALL DADS,
GRAND-DADS, AND GREAT GRAND-DADS!**



Manager's Corner

By Matt Trollinger, *Town Manager*

June marks the final month of the Fiscal Year 2020. It also marks my one-year anniversary in the Town of Somerset. I was lucky enough to overlap with my predecessor, Rich Charnovich, for one month while I "learned the ropes." It has been a challenging and rewarding year in Somerset for me. For starters, I certainly did not anticipate a global pandemic! But I could not be happier to be serving and working for this Town. I am so very appreciative of the beauty of our suburban streets and tree canopy; the first-rate facilities like the Town Pool and Tennis Court; and the engagement of the community. Throughout the year I have had the opportunity to get to know so many of you. I hope you have, in turn, found the Town Hall to be approachable, friendly, and service-oriented. I will continue to try to improve as I get to know Somerset and its residents better, and I welcome your suggestions on how we might make the administration of the government work better for you. Thank you to the Mayor and Council for appointing me to this position, and thank you to the residents for welcoming me.

I hope everyone has enjoyed the weekly tradition of **Clap Because We Care**. Montgomery Municipal Cable (who also hosted the Town's Candidate Forum), posted

a nice video on its YouTube page (available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ma_24cteIQ) of our initial event. I encourage residents to take a look at all of MMC's videos, as they are a great resource for municipal and local programming. The Town of Somerset appoints one person as a Board Member to MMC; if you are interested, please contact the Town Hall and I can give you more information about ways to get involved.

I will not take up too much space this month – and hardly need to remind anyone of the Town's upcoming election. I encourage everyone to watch the Town Council Candidate Forum (available on the Town website), read through candidate statements from the May edition of the Town Journal, and the Qs&As in this month's Journal. I want to personally thank the Town's Board of Supervisors of Elections, who have worked very hard this year under trying circumstances. They have volunteered many hours to work through the myriad issues that have arisen in order to conduct a fair and safe election in Town.

Best of luck to all the candidates! Everyone, remember to fill out your ballots and vote!

GENERAL PERMITS

TREE REMOVAL PERMITS

- 4819 Cumberland Ave. (Public Tree) – Remove 21" dia. Sugar Maple (hollow at base, hazardous).
- 4710 Falstone Ave. (Public Tree) – Remove two (2) Flowering Cherry Trees, 2" and 3" dia. (dead).
- 4709 Cumberland Ave. – Remove two (2) Linden (Tilia) trees, 30" dia. (decay in trunks, hazardous).
- 4818 Cumberland Ave. – Remove 24" dia. Tulip Poplar (dead).
- 4814 Grantham Ave. – Remove 6" dia. Japanese Maple (dead), and 18" dia. Black Cherry (hollow, hazardous).

- 5015 River Rd. – Remove 20" dia. Red Maple (hollow trunk and decay at base, hazardous).
- 5019 River Rd. – Remove 6" dia. Norway Spruce (50% dead under a power line).
- 5400 Trent St. – Remove 42" dia. Tulip Poplar (decay at base, hazardous).
- 4702 Warwick Pl. – Remove 36" dia. White Oak (rapid decline with dead spring leaves).

BUILDING PERMITS

- 4709 Dorset Ave. – Install picket fence.
- 5813 Surrey St. – Install open cedar picket fence.
- 5516 Trent St. – Keep dumpster on site.

Council Meeting Actions

The town Council met in regular session on **May 4, 2020**, and took the following actions:

1. Approved minutes from regular Town Council meeting held on April 6, 2020.
2. Approved minutes from special Town Council meeting held on April 15, 2020.
3. Approved the following spring tree planting list, as recommended by the Town Arborist and reviewed by the Town's Parks and Natural Resources Committee:
 - 4509 Cumberland Ave, Yellowwood, 2 – 2.5" cal.
 - 4513 Cumberland Ave., Red Oak, 2 – 2.5" cal.
 - 4608 Dorset Ave, White Oak, 6 – 7' ht.
 - 4709 Dorset Ave., Black Gum, 2 – 2.5" cal.
 - 4910 Essex Ave., Red Oak, 2 – 2.5" cal.
 - 4800 Falstone Ave., Yoshino Cherry, 2 – 2.5" cal.
 - 4906 Falstone Ave., Blackgum, 2 – 2.5" cal.
 - 4707 Trent Ct., American Beech, 2 – 2.5" cal.
 - 4715 Trent Ct., American Beech, 2 – 2.5" cal.
 - 5501 Trent St., October Glory Maple, 2 -2.5" cal.
 - 5511 Trent St., Yoshino Cherry, 2 – 2.5" cal.
4. Approved the removal of the following Town trees:
 - 4710 Falstone Ave., 2" dia. Flowering Cherry. – tree is dead.
 - 4710 Falstone Ave., 3" dia. Flowering Cherry. – tree is dead.
 - 4819 Cumberland Ave., 21" dia. Sugar Maple. – tree is hollow at base and hazardous.
5. Approved Swim Team coaching hires and payment of Swim Team coaches.
6. Approved FY2021 Budget and Tax Rates, as introduced at the April 6, 2021 Town Council Meeting
7. Confirmed the following Mayoral nominees to the Town Environmental Committee:
 - Barton Rubenstein, Dorset Ave.
 - Jack Frink, Cumberland Ave.
 - Donna Harman, Dorset Ave.
 - Ralph Wooden, River Rd.
 - David Kathan, Dorset Ave.
 - Bugs Bartley, Cumberland Ave.
 - Robin Barr, Essex Ave., Chair.
8. Confirmed the following Mayoral nominees to the Town Parks and Natural Resources Committee:
 - Alan Dock, Falstone Ave.
 - Sophia Maroon, Warwick Pl.
 - Patty Friedman, Grantham Ave.
 - Jennifer Marron, Warwick Pl.
 - Dudley Fowlkes, Falstone Ave.
 - Semra Mesulam, Surrey St.
 - Robert Hyman, Falstone Ave.
 - Josh Rosenthal, Surrey St.
 - Kristen Khanna, Uppingham St., Chair.
9. Confirmed the following Mayoral nominees to the Town Swim Team Committee:
 - Ann Bolten, Cumberland Ave.
 - Kelly Swain, Trent St.
 - Gayle Horn, Surrey St.
 - Michael Roark, Dorset Ave.
 - Jeff Mascott, Surrey St., Chair.
10. Confirmed the following nominee to the Town Communication Committee:
 - Kathleen Kenyon, Grantham Ave.
11. Confirmed the following nominees to the Town Pool Committee:
 - Michael Veksler, Warwick Pl.
 - Nate Hurst, Dorset Ave.

Preliminary Agenda

Regular Somerset Town Council Meeting

June 1, 2020 at 7:30 p.m. via Zoom

The Somerset Town Council will meet via Zoom on June 1, 2020 at 7:30 p.m. Agenda updates are posted on the Town website:

www.townofsomerset.com.

- **Council Work Session–7:00 p.m.**
- **Council Meeting Convenes–7:30 p.m.***
- **Comments: Public Comment Period–7:30 p.m.****



Council Members (l to r): Morris Panner, Marnie Shaul, Franny Peale, Barbara Zeughauser, Stephen Surko

CONSENT

1. **Motion:** To approve minutes from regular Town Council meeting held on May 4, 2020.
2. **Motion:** To approve a proclamation declaring June as LGBTQ Pride Month in the Town of Somerset.
3. **Motion:** To approve hanging the Rainbow Flag at the Town Hall in honor of LGBTQ Pride Month throughout June, 2020.
4. **Motion:** To issue a proclamation declaring Friday, June 5, 2020 National Gun Awareness Day in the Town of Somerset. – 7:35 p.m.

NON-CONSENT

5. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of a building permit submitted by John and Vanessa Beckman for the construction of a detached garage and new driveway and driveway apron, and temporary dumpster at 4816 Dorset Ave. – 7:36 p.m.
6. **Discussion:** Building Administrator Report. – 7:50 p.m.
7. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of the Town of Somerset Swim Team Committee Charter/ Mission Statement. – 8:00 p.m.

8. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of reallocating funds from Snow Removal budget to be used for sidewalk repair by Precision Concrete (amount TBD). – 8:10 p.m.
9. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider the creation of a committee to study Stormwater, Tree Canopy, and Building Code in the Town of Somerset, as introduced by Council Member Steve Surko. – 8:25 p.m.
10. **Public Hearing/Motion:** Consideration of Town Welcome Letter/Notice, as recommended by the Environment Committee and the PNR. – 8:45 p.m.
11. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of use of Town Hall green space and placement of banners for a private graduation celebration for 2020 High School Seniors in Somerset. – 9:05 p.m.
12. **Discussion:** Town Manager Administrative and Fiscal Reports. – 9:15 p.m.
13. **Discussion:** Mayor's Report – 9:25 p.m.
14. **Motion:** Adjourn – 9:30 p.m.

KEY

Public Hearing Item: Agenda item where public comment is permitted.

Discussion Item: Agenda item limited to discussion among the Council, Mayor and Town Staff.

Motion Item: Agenda item requesting action, limited to Council discussion.

Comments: Opinions and Questions from Town residents.

* Times listed are estimated, and may run longer or shorter than allocated.

** Questions should be submitted via email ahead of the meeting to manager@townofsomerset.com or town@townofsomerset.com.

This is a preliminary Agenda prepared to meet the Journal press deadline, which typically is two to three 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 contact Matt Trollinger at Town Hall if you are interested in what has been added, or consult the bulletin board on the Town Hall porch or the Town website/ email blast for the most up-to-date Agenda.

The Mayor and Town Council may entertain a motion during the open meeting to close a portion of the meeting, in accordance with Section 3-305(b)(1)(7) of the Open Meetings Act (Maryland Code, General Provisions Article), to consult with counsel to obtain legal advice.

The Preliminary Agenda for each month's Town Council meeting is posted on the Town website (www.townofsomerset.com) seven days prior to the meeting. A copy is also posted on the bulletin board on the Town Hall porch.