



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

Somerset TOWN JOURNAL



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May 2020



TOWN OF SOMERSET ELECTION NEWS

A Virtual Election Forum and a Vote by Mail Election

By Phyllis Wiesenfelder, Chair of Board of Supervisors of Elections, Cumberland Avenue

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the stay-at-home orders issued by the Governor of Maryland, the Somerset Town Council in a special session on April 15 passed an emergency plan for this year's Town Election. **The date of the Town Election was changed from Tuesday, May 12 to Tuesday, June 9. Voting will be conducted entirely by mail.**

One candidate for Mayor and three candidates for two Town Council seats were nominated at the April 6 Council meeting. The current candidates are: **Jeffrey Slavin** (Warwick) for Mayor; and **Robin Barr** (Essex), **Morris Panner** (Essex) and **Stephen Surko** (Uppingham) for two Council seats.

How will the election process work?

- A virtual candidate forum will take place on **Tuesday, May 12 from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.** The event will be recorded and available on the Town website to view later for those who cannot attend the virtual meeting.
- In addition to the candidate forum, **written questions to candidates** may be submitted online to **Election@townofsomerset.com** no later than **Friday, May 8.** Written responses by each of the candidates will appear in the June issue of the Town Journal.
- **Ballots and postage-prepaid return envelopes** will be mailed to each registered voter on **Tuesday, May 19.**
- If you wish a ballot to be mailed to an address different than your Town residence, a request must be made no later than 5:00 p.m. on **Saturday, May 9** to **Election@townofsomerset.com**
- **Election Day is Tuesday, June 9 and all ballots must be postmarked by this date.**

- All completed ballots must be received by the Town's election service provider no later than 5:00 p.m. on **Tuesday, June 16.**
- Election results will be announced after 5:00 p.m. on **June 16.**

Who can vote?

- Everyone 18 years and over, who has resided in the Town for at least 14 days prior to **June 9**, is eligible to vote. College students who are over 18 and now residing at home are eligible to vote.
- You do not have to be a U.S. citizen, only a resident of the Town of Somerset to be eligible to vote.
- If you are already registered to vote in Montgomery County or have registered to vote in the Town, you are eligible to vote in this year's election.
- **Registration is permanent – all voters who have already registered to vote need not register with the Town again.**
- If you are currently not a registered voter in Town, you may send a completed voter registration form (included on page 3 in this Journal) by mail to the Town Hall, 4510 Cumberland Avenue **or** scan and email the form to **Election@townofsomerset.com** by 5:00 p.m. on **May 17.**

A SPECIAL REQUEST: In order to help the Board of Elections update this year's Town voting rolls, we are encouraging all residents who have moved into the Town since May 15, 2019 (the day after the last election) to fill out a Town voter registration form, even if you have already registered in Montgomery County. We want to be sure that all new resident voters are added to our current list.

If you have any questions or wish to confirm that you are currently a registered voter in the Town, please send us an email at **Election@townofsomerset.com.**



ON MY MIND

Time to Study

By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin, *Warwick Place*

During these unprecedented times, we have all been forced to adjust our work and family schedules to accommodate a new world order. Meanwhile, Somerset town government, somewhat exempt from the Governor's orders, has continued to operate under the new circumstances while maintaining services. In addition, many Town residents have actually found time to take on projects they have put aside for months and even years!

Last month, I wrote about our Town's continuing challenges with policies for managing stormwater and protecting our trees, and the need for the Council to perform a comprehensive study so that a final review of the old Town code could be completed in these areas.

At the Council work session earlier this month, time ran out and I wasn't able to present my two separate proposals to enable the Council to obtain much-needed comprehensive knowledge. No matter, because at that juncture I had not been able to resolve some legal technicalities for each study idea I had promised to present.

However, after consulting with the Council, Town Manager, Town Attorney, and many residents, I will be prepared in May to make this presentation. I want in particular to thank the Parks and Natural Resources Committee and its outstanding chair **Kristen Khanna** (Uppingham) for the research they have already done over the past several years, especially regarding several loopholes in the Town Code.

For those with a particular interest in this topic, be sure to Zoom in on May 4!

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.

CONTACT SOMERSET

MAYOR

Jeffrey Z. Slavin, 5706 Warwick Place
301-654-6767 | Town Hall: 301-657-2229
mayor@townofsomerset.com

TOWN COUNCIL

Marnie Shaul, Council President
5509 Uppingham Street
301-913-5973
mshaul@townofsomerset.com

Morris Panner, 4815 Essex Avenue
301-656-6184
mpanner@townofsomerset.com

Franny Peale, 5521 Uppingham Street
301-652-9695
fpeale@townofsomerset.com

Stephen Surko, 5500 Uppingham Street
301-656-5004
ssurko@townofsomerset.com

Barbara Zeughauser, 5412 Trent Street
301-951-8560
bzeughauser@townofsomerset.com

TOWN MANAGER

Matt Trollinger
301-657-3211
manager@townofsomerset.com

TOWN ARBORIST

Tolbert Feather
town@townofsomerset.com

TOWN HALL

Open: 9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Monday thru Friday
301-657-3211 | Fax: 301-657-2773
TTY users call Maryland Relay

SOMERSET TOWN JOURNAL

EDITORS
Barbara Marenus
bmarenus@gmail.com

Mary Wisniewski
mary.p.wisniewski@gmail.com

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If you prefer to receive the Journal via email, please provide your request to manager@townofsomerset.com or call Town Hall at 301-657-3211.

Deadline for copy and ads is the 15th of the month at 4:30 p.m.

POST OFFICE ADDRESS:
4510 Cumberland Ave.
Chevy Chase, MD 20815
www.townofsomerset.com

Town of Somerset Voter Registration Form

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|-------------------|--|--|--------|--|-----|---------------------|--|------|------|--|--------|--|
| NAME (Print) Last | | | First | | | Middle | | | DATE OF APPLICATION | | | | | | |
| RESIDENCE Street number | | | | | | Street | | | TELEPHONE NUMBER | | | MALE | | FEMALE | |
| AGE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Either | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| I am now at least eighteen years of age <input type="checkbox"/> (Check if true) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Or | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| I shall become eighteen on | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | Month | | | Day | | | Year | | | | |
| LEAVE BLANK | | | | | I HEARBY SWEAR (AFFIRM) THAT THE ABOVE STATEMENTS ARE TRUE | | | | | | | | | | |
| Registrar's Initials | | | Registration Date | | Signature | | | | | | | | | | |

Update on the Town Pool

By Matt Zaft, Chair, Pool Committee, Dorset Avenue

Since many people have been asking me about the use of the pool this summer, I want to provide an update. The short version is we just don't know, yet.

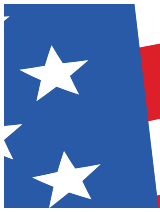
Here is the long version. American Pool, our pool management company, is proceeding as if everything is normal and getting the pool ready to open on time. In addition they are preparing a plan for what will need to be done if the opening is delayed. This will involve both maintaining the pool so it is ready to open as soon as we have the proverbial green light, as well as ensuring the security while closed. One option on the table would be to extend the pool season later into the fall, but we will cross that bridge when we get to it.

The Pool Management Committee (**Mayor Slavin, Council President Shaul, Town Manager Matt Trollinger, and I**) will



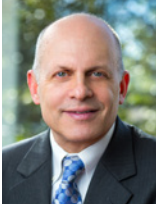
be meeting again with American Pools later this month. As soon as we have more information, we will share it.

While my completely unofficial feeling is we will not be able to open the pool on May 16 as originally scheduled, I remain very optimistic that we will open at some point this year. Feel free to email me directly with any questions.



SOMERSET ELECTIONS ARE TUESDAY, JUNE 9

Candidates' Statements



Jeffrey Slavin
Warwick Place
Candidate for Mayor

As your elected official for over 18 years, I truly believe in public service. When I originally ran for Council, some said it was

because I wanted to use Somerset as a stepping stone for higher office, but that was never my intent, and I think my record of accomplishment since proves that to be the case.

Working all this time with the Town Council, Committees, Staff and residents, we have made much progress during my terms, and I am proud of the legacy I am leaving for future generations. Together we have vastly improved assets like the Town Hall, Swimming Pool and Tennis Courts, maintained our streets, protected our parkland and trees, professionalized the Town government and operating procedures, improved communications, collaborated with Federal, State, County and local municipal governments and created great public events. That's just some of my record!

Should the voters give me the honor of another term, I want to finally see better street lights, institute a formal procurement policy, close loopholes in our tree protection laws, complete a study of County and municipal stormwater management policies, and enhance our social media presence, while at the same time supporting legislation and programs that enhance our high quality of life and the value of our personal residences.

It has also been my continuing mission to demand respect for everyone's views and to seek consensus when making decisions.

There is nothing more important than voting in a democracy, and I hope that everyone takes part in the June 9 election.

Should I be elected again, I will continue this mantra: "Satisfy the agitated without agitating the satisfied." Thank you.



Robin Barr
Essex Avenue
Candidate for Town Council

I am running for the Town Council because my experience on its committees and my problem-solving skills can help the Council

become more responsive to citizen concerns, particularly around environmental issues, and can enhance resident involvement and service in Town affairs. We are a Tree City — a forest from the air — showing our enduring commitment to preserving our environment. As our Town changes and new homes appear, we need to advertise and promote these ecological and community values as Somerset's values.

Our Council has a long history of being responsive to community concerns. I will follow that tradition. I will listen to all; look for solutions that work for everyone and that preserve the spirit and values of this forest from the air. Maintaining and improving our Town's life, and conserving the environment we cherish, are central to my vision. I will seek to organize open meetings - in evenings - where Council members listen to concerns of residents while sharing news of upcoming recommendations and other changes. That openness and responsiveness will guide me if elected.

My experience on Somerset committees:

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

- Founding member
- Chair 2013 to present
- Collaborated with Parks and Natural Resources Committee to introduce composting to the Town
- Worked with the Council to install rain garden and conservation landscaping by the tennis courts
- Developed recycling guide for the Town
- Established Shady Grove Road transfer recycling day in conjunction with Shredding Day
- Organized the LED light pilot
- Established "Sustainability Corner" in Town Journal

BUDGET COMMITTEE

- Founding member
- With Phil Young's lead, helped establish a "Rainy Day fund" for the Town's budget. This fund protects us from unexpected revenue loss and potential need for property tax increases. This committee advises the Town Council on issues of fiscal prudence regarding revenue projections and pressure points in our budget.

Somerset is a wonderful Town. Yet, we face issues that need a community response. Concerns about speeding traffic through Town were widespread after a hit-and-run incident at Greystone and River. The Environment Committee wrestles with how to better manage stormwater run-off, improve our street lighting, or address new challenges in recycling, and the list goes on!

If elected, I will bring my experience in Town affairs to the Council. With a belief in community service, and a record of accomplishment serving Somerset, I am ready and eager to enhance Town life through open and responsive Council service.



Morris Panner **Essex Avenue** **Candidate for Town Council**

I am running for re-election to serve a second term on the Town Council. The Town of Somerset is a special place and it is my honor to serve. My four children attended Somerset Elementary, swim on the Dolphins and my wife and I have volunteered for numerous community roles. We count our neighbors among our closest friends and ourselves fortunate to live here.

During my first term, I sought to ensure Somerset remains the friendly, open and supportive community that has made it the centerpiece of our lives. I hope to continue doing so on behalf of all Town residents. My approach always has been to listen to the issues, gather data, and try to make a decision balancing many resident interests.

Here are the issues most important to me:

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY: Our taxpayer dollars are precious - now more than ever with the financial impact of the pandemic - and spending them wisely is a vital council function. I will continue to ensure any proposed expenditure is cost-effective and in the clear Town interest.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY: As a father of four, I am passionately committed to protecting the

environment while balancing the rights of homeowners to the free enjoyment of their property. Having built a home in Somerset, I understand the process, which can be burdensome and time-consuming. At the same time, I recognize issues like storm-water management and preservation of the tree canopy are important topics on which opinions run strong. With a data-driven approach, I believe we can find a path that works for the Town, protecting environmental interests, balanced against the rights of property owners. That is why I support the Mayor's call for a citizen committee to assess these issues and make recommendations to the Council for review.

COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY: Somerset is an idyllic haven where neighbors of all ages, backgrounds and perspectives live, celebrate and recreate in a peaceful and respectful manner. I am committed to ensuring that our balanced and respectful culture is maintained here, welcoming to new neighbors and treating them as we would wish to be treated.

For the first time in some time, we have a contested election in Somerset. This is a welcome and healthy development, giving us the opportunity to surface and discuss issues of import to the community. I encourage everyone to participate - reading candidate statements, taking part in candidate forums, and, most importantly, voting!



Steve Surko **Uppingham Street** **Candidate for Town Council**

You may see me walking our dog, Lucy, around Town - she's an old dog who walks slowly and likes to sniff a lot, so I'm always

happy to stop and talk about the Town or share some "sea stories" from my Navy days. I'm an avid commuter cyclist, so you may also see me biking to and from work. (I'd like to see Somerset recognized as a "Bicycle Friendly Community.")

My family and I moved to the Town of Somerset in 2005. Over the years, we've come to appreciate the special, engaged and caring community that is Somerset. Our children all attended Somerset Elementary School. I am an Eagle Scout, and served as an adult Cub Scout and Boy Scout leader in the area. I also served as a soccer and lacrosse coach.

In terms of my service to the Town, I was a member of the Parks and Natural Resources Committee for several

Continued on page 6

New Pups in Town

Lots of lucky puppies have found forever homes in Somerset. Quarantine is more comfortable when shared with a puppy!



Nugget is new to the Cohen Family (Greystone)



The Thomson Family (Surrey) welcomes Rosie, shown with Riley (9), Mae (6) and CC (3)



Pepper is happy with Miriam, Oren and Shira Minsk (Surrey)



The Rovak Family are delighted with Archie, shown with Claire (5)



Wally lives with Patty Friedman and Blair Levin (Grantham)



Simba is happy with the Orseck Family (Dorset), shown with Robert (13) and Abby (10)

Continued from page 5

Candidates' Statements

years. We reviewed Town tree replacements with the aim of maintaining our tree canopy, introduced the Town's composting program (with the Environment Committee), and monitored WSSC's sewage pipe replacement project behind Dorset Ave. As my older children moved out of the house, I found myself with some "free" time and wanted to do more for the community. I was elected to the Town Council in 2018.

Fiscal prudence is essential to local government, and I'm pleased to be able to report that the Council has continued to increase the Town's "rainy day fund" over the last two years.

One of the most important things I've learned as a Councilmember is the importance of community engagement. 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 serve as the Council liaison to the Environment Committee – and have tried to be especially supportive of their efforts to install LED street lights, and purchase a battery-powered leaf blower for the Town. And as a Council liaison to the Citizens Coordinating Committee for Friendship Heights (CCCFH), I have engaged on broader community interests such as the Westbard Development and the Capital Crescent Trail crossing over Little Falls Parkway.

Good communications are critical to our government. Since the Open Meetings Act constrains our ability to communicate on the unofficial Somerset list serve, I make a point of responding directly to questions/comments on the list serve about my Council activities and I try to reply to every email I receive about a concern or issue in Somerset. My objective is to identify issues (such as small cell towers) early and proactively develop solutions within our Council.

If re-elected, I look forward to hearing more from you about your issues and concerns – and vision for Somerset. To facilitate this, I would like to expand the Open Session of our Council Meetings and hold Town Forums on topics of interest. My goal is always to help keep Somerset a special place to live, which in some situations requires having the Council mobilize the community to get out ahead of potential problems.

I would be honored to continue serving as one of your representatives and would appreciate your vote on June 9.

Proposed Austerity Budget for FY21

By **Jeffrey Slavin, Mayor, Warwick Place**, and
Philip Young, Chair, Budget Committee, Greystone Street

As everyone is aware, we are facing an unprecedented health and economic crisis. These are highly stressful times and the Town Council and Mayor are taking proactive measures so that Somerset can weather the storm, which is only going to worsen, not only in terms of health concerns, but also financial ones. With this in mind, along with the lessons learned from the Great Recession, the Mayor proposed an austerity budget that aims to substantially strengthen our “war chest” of reserves.

First, some history. During the Great Recession of 2008, Somerset experienced a precipitous drop in revenues. Income tax revenues fell by almost half (a drop of around \$400,000/yr) for two years running (FY2010 and FY2011). Making matters worse, the drop only became apparent very late in the game—and with a lag of about a year following the trough of the financial crisis. Reserves fell to a dangerously low level and the property tax had to be doubled from 4 cents to 8 cents per \$100. For a first-hand perspective of what it was like to live through the stress of such a severe financial crisis, see the accompanying article on page 8 by Council President **Marnie Shaul** and Former Council Member **Cathy Pickar**, who were both members of the Town Council during that period.

Armed with this historical experience, the Mayor has proposed a budget which re-phases non-urgent expenditures into later years, helping to build reserves during FY2021—*before* the full impact of the loss of tax revenues is felt. There may be some impact on income tax revenues in FY2021, but we expect the bulk of the decline to affect the budget in FY2022. This reflects the lag between capital losses and income tax collections. See the accompanying handout on the Five-Year Budget for further detail on the medium-term budget profile. Should income tax revenues indeed experience a steep decline in

FY2022, the Town will still be well-positioned to maintain the provision of essential services without having to make cuts that hit the bone or raise property taxes.

In order to prepare for this expected revenue shortfall, key actions to be taken in FY2021 include, *inter alia*, delaying street repairs, lighting improvements, and the hiring of a greatly needed additional Town office staff person. The savings from these delays will be allocated to our financial reserves, so that we can better address the consequences of the expected revenue shortfalls, as mentioned above.

The roots of the current crisis are different than those of the Great Recession. The latter stemmed mostly from deep financial imbalances, which took years to correct. On the other hand, the COVID-19 crisis is rooted in a highly contagious viral infection. With appropriate actions, both from individuals (e.g., physical distancing and frequent hand washing) and from governments (e.g., virus testing and financial support to individuals and businesses), we hope this crisis can be overcome more quickly than the Great Recession. Thus, the re-programming of the budget is being done for a one-year period for the time being. Normally, the budget is adopted once a year (in May), with approved spending for the coming fiscal year (July 1 – June 30). In view of the high degree of uncertainty we are facing, and the fact that this crisis is still in its early stages, the Mayor will ask the Town Council to conduct detailed quarterly reviews of the budget during FY2021, in addition to the monthly reviews of the financial situation. These reviews will guide the Town’s policy strategy and help determine whether further actions are needed, or if some austerity actions can be relaxed. Our aim is to keep Somerset residents fully informed of the budget situation and measures being taken to ensure that our financial health is being protected and Town operations are not severely disrupted.

Avoiding Another Nasty Surprise

By Council President Marnie Shaul, *Uppingham Street*
and former Council Member Cathy Pickar, *Dorset Avenue*

About 10 years ago, the Somerset Town Council got a nasty surprise. Somerset's income tax revenues, which had become a major source of revenue, suddenly dropped by almost half—a loss of \$400,000 per year and about one-third of the previous year's total spending. The Town was facing a potential budget crisis.

Some background: In the early 1990's, Somerset raised about the same amount of funds from property taxes and income taxes, and these two revenue sources were the major contributors to the Town's budget. But then, starting in the mid-1990's, Somerset had strong income tax growth. From FY1995 to FY2009 income tax revenues grew from about \$243,000 to \$912,000 per year. As income taxes grew, the Town Council lowered the property tax rate during the 1990's. As a result, income taxes became an increasingly important revenue source.

In hindsight, it probably was a mistake to have lowered the already low property tax rate in light of needed services and investments. The Town needed to have more professional services to call on to improve the Town and keep the Council informed. These included an arborist to oversee the Town's trees and a professional building plan reviewer. Most importantly, the Town lacked a plan for major capital expenses such as rebuilding the deteriorating pool house, maintaining the integrity of the pool structure itself despite problems due to aging, repaving the Town's roads, rehabilitating the Town Hall, undertaking major drainage repair, and resurfacing the tennis courts. The new Council and Mayor were in the process of addressing these needs when we were hit with a budget crisis.

Although the Great Recession started in late 2007, Somerset's FY2008 revenues (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008) continued to be strong. Strong revenue growth continued into FY2009, as income taxes once again rose considerably. But then in late calendar year 2009 worrying signs emerged, as the Town Council began hearing that Montgomery County was anticipating a decline of 10 percent or more in income tax revenues.

In a January 2010 meeting with the Maryland Comptroller's Office staff, Somerset learned that our income tax revenues were expected to decline by 45%. This was a HUGE and largely unanticipated cut in revenues, and a very nasty surprise. We were already more than halfway

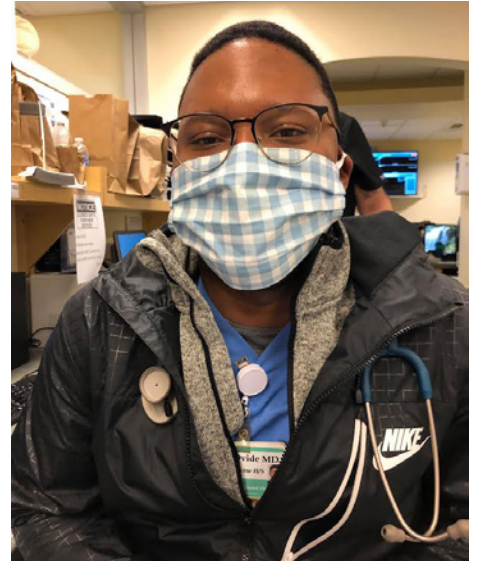
through the fiscal year, leaving little room for thoughtful expenditure reductions.

We cut the remaining FY 2010 expenses as best we could, but some expenses, such as salaries, were already committed for the remainder of the fiscal year. The Council directed the Mayor to decrease some items such as the arborist and police and to be economical wherever possible. In the capital budget, some items such as erosion control and major equipment were eliminated. Even with these reductions, the Town ran a deficit of over \$200,000 in its operating budget, the first such deficit in many years. The deficit was covered by taking funds from the Town's capital account, which meant less money was available for the pool house project—a recent major undertaking by the Town to replace a failing facility.

In 2010, Council Members and the Mayor were all relatively new at their jobs and the Town didn't have a budget committee to carefully develop revenue projections. In fact, we had just changed the bank account structure for the Town after realizing that for years the Town's account had been in a personal name rather than a municipal account. We weren't prepared for the fiscal storm we were suddenly facing. Since then, we've learned how to better prepare for the ups and downs in our economy. For FY 2011, the Mayor proposed and the Council approved raising the property tax from 4 cents to 8 cents per \$100 to make up for income tax losses and to have the stable source of revenues that the property tax provides. (The Town's income tax is much more variable, because although income tax revenues from wages are fairly steady, growing at about 3% per year, income tax revenues from capital gains are highly variable and can be especially hard hit in periods of economic decline.) The Town established a Budget Committee (**Phil Young**, Greystone, **Robin Barr**, Essex and **Jon Medalia**, Surrey) which carefully examines the Town's revenue sources and makes projections to aid the Council in preparing its annual budget and five-year plan. Members of the Budget Committee also proposed that the Town develop a Rainy Day Fund (RDF). The Council adopted the proposal, in 2014. Each year since the RDF was created the Council has worked to have total Town spending be less than revenues so that it could put money into the RDF. At the end of FY2019, the RDF was about \$900,000—about 9 months of operating expenses. (Note that the capital expenses budget is separate from the operating expenses budget.)

Continued on page 11

Somerset Residents Busy Making Masks



Somerset's booming mask-making project began when **Dania Fitzgerald** (Cumberland) learned that **Michael Tcheyan** (Somerset Elementary School class of 1999) is now an emergency room doctor working in Providence, Rhode Island. The first 21 masks made went to help him and his colleagues.

Once Dania heard that Suburban and Sibley Hospitals were in need as well, she decided to ramp up production. Using twill tape and bias tape are easy ways to finish off masks but the tapes have become hard to source. That meant that cutting and ironing by hand the fabric ties that are specified by a Johns Hopkins mask pattern was the only way to go. "But it is tedious work," Dania says. "Thank goodness so many Somerset (and Town of Drummond) residents accepted the challenge. Our team of non-sewer volunteers and fabric donors have been incredible." So far, 106 masks have gone to Suburban and Sibley and 62 and counting have gone to Children's Hospital in Washington.

The Journal wishes to thank Dania Fitzgerald and the many volunteers who answered the call:

- **Suzan Kovarick** (Cumberland)
- **Cathy Pickar** (Dorset)
- **Julie Greenberg** (Falstone)

- **Jane Rosenthal** (River)
- **Sue Edson** (Surrey)
- **Alex Acosta** (Warwick)
- **Debbie Heller** (Falstone)
- **Atsuko Horiguchi** (Essex)
- **Linda Potter** (Drummond)
- **Leslie Caplan** (Essex)
- **Caroline Cooper** (Cumberland)
- **Elizabeth Harris** (Drummond)
- **Barbara Marblestone** (Trent)
- **Tanya Nguyen** (Uppingham)
- **Nancy Batson** (Uppingham)
- **Sara Anderson** (Falstone)
- Fabric donors include **Vicki Malone** (Essex), **Lauren Rubenstein** (Surrey), **Alex Acosta**, **Caroline Cooper** and **Donna Harman** (Dorset).

There are other groups in Somerset who are making and donating masks directly to hospitals. Many thanks to all these sewers!

MAY CALENDAR

MONDAY, MAY 4

Town Council Zoom Meeting
7:30 p.m.

MONDAY, MAY 11

Bulk Trash Pickup

TUESDAY, MAY 12

Town Council Zoom Candidate Forum
7 to 9 p.m.

SUNDAY, MAY 17

Voter Registration Deadline, Somerset
Election

TUESDAY, MAY 19

Somerset election ballots and return
envelopes to be mailed to all registered
voters

MVA Mobile Office
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Friendship Heights

MONDAY, MAY 25

Memorial Day Holiday
Town Hall closed

**Please note all calendar items are subject to change as the COVID-19 situation evolves.*

Somerset Family's Zoom Bat Mitzvah Capped Off with a Surprise Drive-By Parade!

Olivia Zaft, daughter of **Erin Chlopak** and **Matt Zaft** (Dorset), was feted with a drive-by parade for her recent Bat Mitzvah. Somerset neighbor and friend **Debbie Berger Fox** (Cumberland) planned a surprise parade of 15 vehicles with signs and music to drive by Olivia's house to celebrate her big accomplishment. A sweet surprise for Olivia and her family.



From the Mayor's Desk

By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin



Over the last month, the Town Manager and I have continued to work—safely—to ensure that the vital functions of the Somerset government continue as required, including on major projects such as the FY21 Budget. Some of the staff are working remotely and others are performing their duties in place following the State-mandated safety measures. On a daily basis, and particularly since the sheltering-in-place order, we have been on conference calls with the Governor, County Executive Marc Elrich, U.S. Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, our two US Senators, Congressman Jamie Raskin, County Councilmember Andrew Friedson, nonprofits and utility companies, among others, keeping up with the latest information and vital advice. This is a national and worldwide pandemic, and information comes in that changes the landscape every day, almost by the hour.

The Town Manager and I are committed to doing everything in our power to assist residents and keep everyone as safe and healthy as possible. As many other mayors and governors across the country are doing, I am making decisions based solely on what is needed for everyone's protection, not to be popular. All citizens should feel free to call or email at any time if they are experiencing issues that we might address. It is heartwarming to see the kind messages and offers to help others on the listserv, in emails, on social media and by phone. It truly takes a village, and together we will get through this.

Since the heavily-used Giant in Friendship Heights is now closed, I have rediscovered an excellent walking route to the nearby Safeway on Connecticut Avenue south of Chevy Chase Circle. Exit Dorset Avenue and make a right on Wisconsin, then go behind Saks Fifth Avenue to the Western Grove Urban Park (official address: 5409 Grove Street, Chevy Chase Village). Beautifully designed and pet friendly, this park provides a lovely respite from the traffic and nice scenery. Once through this oasis, you are halfway to the grocery store. Try it!

Over a year ago, much-beloved resident and noted artist **Florence Gang** (Falstone) moved from her home of over half a century to a nice senior living community in Rockville. I have kept in touch with her ever since. I spoke with her the other day and she is excited about turning 100 this fall and is still using her creative talents. Since her ability to leave her apartment is severely restricted, I am sure she would love to hear from any of her former neighbors, so feel free to contact me if you need contact information.

While I realize that many of you are currently extremely time challenged, if anyone is looking for additional ways to help those in need in Montgomery County I want to recommend the Montgomery County Volunteer Center as a resource. Go to <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/volunteercenter/> for additional information.

Continued from page 8

Avoiding Another Nasty Surprise

COVID-19's stress on the national economy will likely result in revenue declines in Somerset in the coming years, as the article in this edition of the Journal on an Austerity Budget discusses. However, this time around the Town is better prepared to meet the budget challenges. Through

prospective expenditure cuts or postponements and the stronger financial reserves the RDF provides, we should be able to continue to fund essential expenditures and avoid another "nasty surprise."



Let's Celebrate Earth Day – 50th Anniversary

Hang Your Parachute and Signs and Show Your Concern for the Climate Emergency

As we now spend nearly all of our time at home helping to reduce the devastating impact of COVID-19, it is easy to see the many signs and good wishes neighbors are taping to their windows, doors, and bushes. Showing compassion for each other will help us pull through this pandemic. Social distancing and frequent hand washing are critical to flattening the curve.

Since this is the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, let's recommit our compassion for Mother Earth.



Mother Earth Project co-founders create their parachute

Scientists state that bats have superhero immune systems and can safely host dangerous viruses. "Viral spillover" occurs when deforestation forces bats and wild birds to leave their lost habitats and seek out new food sources, such as eating and infecting a pig's food trough. To learn more, see Karin Brulliard's Washington Post article about how "The next pandemic is already coming"...at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2020/04/03/coronavirus-wildlife-environment/>

Free Parachutes For Neighbors!

With the 50th anniversary of Earth Day this spring, it is time to show our focus on the environment and even human survival. Yikes, that sounds scary, but as Greta Thunberg says, "Hope comes through Action!" If you would like to receive a free 12' diameter white play parachute for your family to decorate and hang, please email us at

TheMotherEarthProject@gmail.com and we will drop it off on your doorstep, using gloves.

So far, we have distributed over 50 parachutes in the neighborhood!

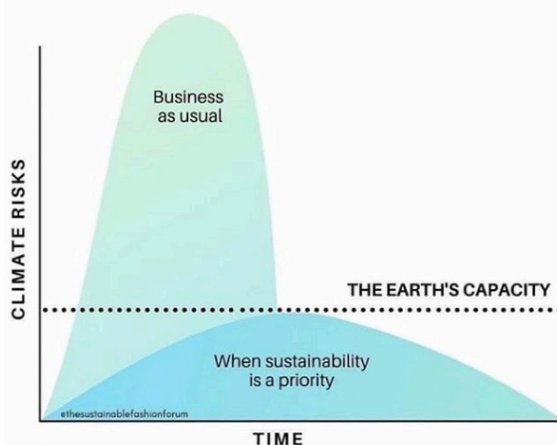
Here are some ideas for your signs and parachute:

- Choose a central image about the environment.
- Choose text about a particular topic that is of concern to you.
- Place your parachute or signs in a place that the rest of the neighborhood can see.
- Take photos of your art project and email them to us to share with others.
- For more info, please visit **www.MotherEarthProject.org/parachutes**

Awareness Leads to Action

People don't know that pandemics, back-to-back hurricanes and tornadoes, huge weather fluctuations, excessive flooding, snowless winters, cutting down trees, pesticides on our lawns, loud leaf blowers with cancer-causing fumes, taking long showers, using paper instead of cloth napkins, not composting, and countless other issues and behaviors are all connected to the Climate Emergency. Now is the time to focus on how our own families can live more sustainably and how our neighborhood can join the rest of the world to create a sustainable planet.

LET'S FLATTEN THIS CURVE TOO





Manager's Corner

By Matt Trollinger, *Town Manager*

Wow! It is hard to believe we are now a month and a half into social distancing, quarantining, and stay-at-home orders. I mean this in the least patronizing way possible: you all deserve a congratulatory pat on the back! Social distancing is a challenge, and I find it helpful to get reassurance that we're doing the right thing. Even if it feels a little helpless, just by adhering to the guidelines that have been set forth, we actually are helping. I also think that the term social distancing has suffered a bit from bad marketing: I like to think of it more as *physical* distancing than *social* distancing. That distinction is helpful for me to try and find creative ways to connect with people. For instance, I have a standing group "happy hour" with friends that I made doing Leadership Montgomery, which, by the way, is a program I highly recommend to anyone who is interested. There are three different programs designed for different stages in your career path.

We have thus far held two Council meetings virtually, and had several Committees meet virtually as well. There have been some hiccups, and there is a bit of a learning curve, but all things considered I think it has been successful and a workable solution given the constraints we have. One positive that has come out of this is that we have been able to easily record our Town meetings, and make them available for residents even if they are not able to "attend" at the time of the meeting.

Another positive that has come out of these trying times is the incredible efforts to continue to foster a sense of community among Somersettters. The listservs have been buzzing with people offering DIY masks to help out others, putting up symbols in windows for kids to spot on walks, donation drives, and two feel-good Town-wide "events:" a drive-by bat mitzvah parade; and an organized effort for residents to clap all together and thank healthcare workers.

FY 2021 Budget

There are a few matters of business I wanted to address for the month of May. The first is the Town's Fiscal Year 2021 Budget, which is included in this edition of the Journal and is also available on the Town website (as a reminder, the Town's fiscal year runs from July to June per Maryland law). The Council introduced the budget at the April Council meeting, and will vote on adoption at the May meeting. The May meeting will also be the public comment

opportunity. As described elsewhere in this Journal, the Mayor has introduced an austerity budget with the primary goal of maintaining the same level of service to residents without major expenditure increases in the operating or capital budgets. I applaud the work of the Mayor, Council, and Budget Committee in their preparation, flexibility, and vision in keeping the Town fiscally responsible and well-prepared even in uncertain times.

Town Election

The second item is the Town Election. Again, more information is included elsewhere in this Journal, but I want to highlight that the Board of Supervisors of Elections recommended to the Town Council to delay the Town's election in order to adequately prepare for the necessary contingencies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please take note of the deadlines and dates, as outlined in Board Chair Phyllis Wiesenfelder's article.

There will be a forum for the Town Council members seeking election on May 12 at 7:00 p.m. Similar to the Council meetings, this will be held virtually, so on behalf of myself and the election board, thank you in advance for your patience as we work through the technology. Again, one positive that will come out of this is that the forum will be recorded and available for viewing even if you are unable to log in to the event that evening.

Town Pool Situation

The Town pool is scheduled to open on May 16, but that is very much up in the air as the Journal goes to press. Please know that our number one priority is the health and safety of Somerset residents and those who use the pool, and that all decisions will be made with that at the forefront of our minds. (For further information, please see the article by Pool Committee Chair Matt Zaft in this issue of the Journal.)

Bulk Trash Pickup

We have arranged with Goode Companies, our trash contractor, for a bulk pickup on Monday, May 11. Because of COVID-19, we were not able to coordinate with A Wider Circle, the local non-profit, for a Town-wide donation pickup to coincide with the bulk trash pickup. So for this one time, it will just be bulk trash. We continue to have a strong relationship and active dialogue with A Wider

Continued on page 13

Manager's Corner

Circle, and will partner again with them for future pickups, but unfortunately the virus does not allow for them to do their regular pickups. Bulk trash items include furniture, mattresses, small appliances, exercise equipment, but not tires, paint, oil or construction debris. Please leave items that you wish to be picked up in front of your house in the Town right-of-way before 7:00 a.m. on Monday morning when Goode will begin their pickup.

Finally, I wanted to take this opportunity to say that my heart goes out to those who have contracted, and/or who have family members or loved ones affected by the coronavirus. And I wish continued strength to those with children, who are juggling work and childcare in circumstances no one could have anticipated.

Good health to everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you.

GENERAL PERMITS

The following permits were granted in April 2020:

TREE REMOVAL PERMITS

- Removal of two trees at 5019 River Road, as recommended by Town Arborist:
 - Norway Spruce, 6" diameter – 50% dead and under a power line;
 - Norway Spruce, 20" diameter – dead.
- Removal of two trees at 5015 River Rd., as recommended by Town Arborist:
 - Red Maple, 20" at base – hazardous ;
 - Norway Spruce, 6" diameter – contorted and unhealthy.

BUILDING PERMITS

- 6-month extension to existing building permit for property located at 5800 Deal Pl.
- Construction of new single-family home, keep dumpster on site, construct new fence, install new curb cut, and tree removal at property located at 4712 Essex (approved at March 2, Town Council meeting)
- Keep storage pod on site at property located at 5510 Trent St.
- Construction of rear addition and redesigned deck and patio (reduced footprint) at property located at 4721 Cumberland Ave.

CLASSIFIED ADS

BOZEMAN, MONTANA: Awesome Every Season! Ski Big Sky & the Bridgers! Fly fishing. Trail rides. White-water rafting. Hiking/biking everywhere. Enjoy our 4-bedroom home on 20 acres with spectacular 360-degree vistas. Four-night minimum stay. Just four miles to downtown Bozeman. Contact **Birdie Pieczenik** at SRPVacationHomes@gmail.com or 301-652-1207.

PARIS, FRANCE: Picturesque Day and Nite! And more affordable than ever! Enjoy our one-bedroom apartment in the 2nd arrondissement — the heart of historic Paris. Walk to the Louvre, the Pompidou Center, the Seine and two Metro stops. Four-night minimum stay. Contact **Birdie Pieczenik** at SRPVacationHomes@gmail.com or 301-652-1207.

LIFESTYLE AND WELLNESS COACHING: Would you like to get unstuck and upgrade your lifestyle and wellness habits? Small changes can make a lasting difference. If you are curious to see if coaching is right for you contact Certified Wellness Coach **Diane Horn RDH CHHC** at 301-654-0310 or diane.b.horn@gmail.com.

SEA COLONY - BETHANY BEACH - EDGEWATER BUILDING OCEAN FRONT: 3 bedrooms and 2 full baths. Sunday to Sunday rentals - \$2,900 per week (Somerset special price) Call: 301-233-2727 **Luba Marx**

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. Fifty word limit per advertisement.

Council Meeting Actions

The Town Council met in regular session on **April 6, 2020**, and took the following actions:

1. Approval of minutes from regular Town Council Meeting held on March 2, 2020.
2. Approval of emergency amendment to Town Charter allowing for Emergency Election Procedures.
3. Approval of six-month extension to building permit for construction project at 5800 Deal Pl.
4. Approval of rear addition to the property located at 4721 Cumberland Ave.
5. Approval of removals of the following trees, as recommended by the Town Arborist:
 - a. 52" diameter Flowering Cherry located at 4800 Falstone Ave. – tree in decline with large pieces of dead wood;
 - b. 36" diameter Flowering Cherry located at 4715 Trent Court – tree in decline with large pieces of dead wood;
 - c. 36" diameter Flowering Cherry located at 4707 Trent Court – tree in decline with large pieces of dead wood.
6. Approval of contract with Wet Yet Fitness to provide Water Aerobics at the Town Pool.
7. Approval of alarm monitoring and video monitoring contract with SkyLine Technologies in the amount of \$6,120.
8. Approval of parts replacements at Town Pool, as recommended by American Pool, totaling \$3,911.48.
9. Approval of Town Pool maintenance work totaling \$3,552.25 as recommended by American Pool and required by the Maryland Department of Health.
10. Approval of one-year extension of Waste & Recycling contract with Goode Companies, Inc. at an amount of \$137,409.
11. Introduction of FY2021 Budget and Tax Rates.
12. Approval of the following public events (dates TBD):
 - a. Shred Event
 - b. Somerset Kids Pop-Up Marketplace

Council Actions from Special Council Meeting held on **April 15, 2020**.

1. Approval of contract with Member Splash in the amount \$5,000 for Town Pool membership database, contingent on waiver language in contract if Pool opening is affected.
2. Approval of Emergency Election Procedures, as recommended by Town Board of Elections, including moving election date to June 9, and conducting election entirely by mail-in ballot.
3. Approval of contract with Electec as Town's election service provider for 2020 Town election.

Preliminary Agenda

Regular Somerset Town Council Meeting

May 4, 2020 at 7:30 p.m. via Zoom

The Somerset Town Council will meet via Zoom on May 4, 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 Zeughhauser, Stephen Surko

CONSENT

1. **Motion:** To approve minutes from regular Town Council meeting held on April 6, 2020.
2. **Motion:** To approve minutes from special Town Council meeting held on April 15, 2020. – 7:35 p.m.

NON-CONSENT

3. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To approve the following spring tree planting list, as recommended by the Town Arborist and reviewed by the Town's Parks and Natural Resources Committee:

1. 4509 Cumberland Ave, Yellowwood, 2 – 2.5" cal.
2. 4513 Cumberland Ave., Red Oak, 2 – 2.5" cal.
3. 4608 Dorset Ave, White Oak, 6 – 7' ht.
4. 4709 Dorset Ave., Yellowwood, 2 – 2.5" cal.
5. 4910 Essex Ave., Red Oak, 2 – 2.5" cal.
6. 4800 Falstone Ave., Yoshino Cherry, 2 – 2.5" cal.

7. 4906 Falstone Ave., Blackgum, 2 – 2.5" cal.
8. 4707 Trent Ct., American Beech, 2 – 2.5" cal.
9. 4715 Trent Ct., American Beech, 2 – 2.5" cal.
10. 5501 Trent St., October Glory Maple, 2 -2.5" cal.
11. 5511 Trent St., Yoshino Cherry, 2 – 2.5" cal.—
7:40 p.m.

4. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To approve the FY2021 Budget and Tax Rates, as introduced at the April 6, Town Council meeting. – 7:45 p.m.
5. **Discussion/Motion:** To confirm Mayor's nominations to Town Committees, including Communications Committee. – 8:05 p.m.
6. **Discussion:** Town Manager Administrative and Fiscal Reports. – 8:15 p.m.
7. **Discussion:** Mayor's Report. – 8:25 p.m.
8. **Adjourn** – 8:30 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.