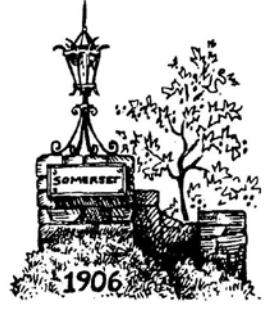


"Where People and Trees Have Deep Roots and Grow Strong"



# Somerset TOWN JOURNAL



Volume 66 • No. 1

January 2021

A ban on gas-powered leaf blowers is currently under discussion in the Town. In this issue of the Journal, there are two articles by Town Council Members. All the Council Members favor the ban but differ on when it should take effect. The articles provide important perspectives and information. On Monday, January 11, 2021 the Town will hold a public hearing at 7:00 p.m. to provide residents an opportunity to present testimony on this Code amendment.

## Ban on Gas Powered Leaf Blowers: ECONOMIC EFFECTS AND TIMING ISSUES

**By Marnie Shaul, Council President, Uppingham Street,  
Barbara Zeughauser, Council Member, Trent Street, and  
Franny Peale, Council Member, Uppingham Street**

We appreciate the lively conversation residents, the Environment Committee, and Council Members have been having about whether to ban gas powered leaf blowers (GPLB). Based on the information that's been provided, and the comments provided during the public forums, we are in favor of banning GPLB, but remain concerned about the timing. Given the potential economic effects of the ban on small and minority-owned businesses, and the probability that the pandemic will be with us through the first half of 2021, we recommend that the ban become effective on January 2023, rather than on January 2022 as the current proposed legislation recommends.

Although several big landscape companies work for Somerset residents, some of the companies that residents use are small and minority-owned firms. During the second forum sponsored by the Environment Committee, Kelley Okleson, Somerset's landscape consultant, reminded us that a ban on GPLB should be viewed critically for socio-economic impact and consequences.

The past months have been tough for small businesses and complying with a ban on GPLB will be an expensive investment for them. Both the District of Columbia and

Chevy Chase Village (CCV) have banned GPLB as of January 2022. But the District passed its legislation two years ago and gave companies three years to comply with the ban, and similarly CCV passed its legislation in December 2019 and gave companies two years to comply. Depending upon when Somerset adopts a similar ban, we will be giving small businesses operating in Somerset possibly less than a year to comply.

Landscaping is an entry-level opportunity to achieve the American dream, and unlike large companies, these small minority businesses have no safety net for unexpected expenses, and it is easy for them to lose their financial footing. As we understand it, constantly used equipment will wear out in a few years and companies could invest in battery-powered leaf blowers when their current equipment wears out. But that's a natural business process and isn't forcing firms to scrap their existing equipment in less than a year. Before enacting a ban, it would be good to learn more about how costly the shift to battery-powered leaf blowers might be and how difficult small and minority companies that are currently operating in Somerset would find complying with a ban in January 2022.

*Continued on page 3*



# ON MY MIND

## Reign of Terror

By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin, *Warwick Place*

Now that the Presidential campaign is finally over, I feel compelled to share my thoughts about the last four years without any further need to appear neutral regarding the leading candidates.

Growing up in Montgomery County with its traditions of bi-partisanship and where people were open-minded about political differences, I have always tolerated and tried to understand all viewpoints, from the far left to the far right. Accordingly, after the 2016 election, while I found it impossible to accept our leader's denial of climate change, weakening of environmental protections, attacks on civil rights, general nastiness and mendacity, and rejection of sound science-based advice to combat the pandemic, I nonetheless tried to understand where he was coming from and, in particular, what motivated his supporters. After all, we only have one President at a time, and he has a dominant say in policy as well as access to the (literally) bully pulpit.

But this year, when the leader showed incredible insensitivity to the murder of George Floyd and attacked peaceful demonstrators in Lafayette Square, I held out hope that with an election coming up, the voters would take advantage of the opportunity our democracy offers to choose our leaders and go in a different direction—which they did.

However, in recent weeks I have discovered that my tolerance has limits, and one of those limits is when citizens' public safety is put at risk. The latest assaults on democracy, unwillingness to accept the Electoral College results, and damaging messaging from the White House have led to misinformed citizens pretending to take the law into their own hands. But I was truly terrified when I was in downtown DC on a recent weekend and saw armed protesters, some of whom were eventually arrested, and learned that they burned Black Lives Matter banners at historic Black churches where I have attended services on a variety of occasions. Yet our President encouraged them!

Democracy is beautiful but fragile. We must all do our part to never let this happen again! Never again can we stay on the sidelines and assume that things will just work out; democracy cannot be a spectator sport.

With the dawn of a new Administration I am hopeful that together we can join hands and find common purpose again.

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## Ban on Gas Powered Leaf Blowers: Economic Effects and Timing Issues

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A secondary issue for deliberation is how a ban might be enforced. CCV has 11 police officers and an overall staff of 28, including the police and a full-time civilian enforcement officer. Currently Somerset has a part-time contractor who monitors construction sites for violations and a staff of two office and three public works employees as well as some part-time consultants. At any given time, there are probably fewer than 10 active construction sites. We don't know how many residents might use landscapers who employ GPLB, but there could be dozens of sites on a given day that might require a visit, which would be difficult for Somerset's relatively small staff. Fines would likely be imposed on residents, rather than the companies they employ.

All of us agree that education of residents and landscaping companies is the key to making the transition to battery-operated leaf blowers. CCV proponents of the ban spent time in their community meeting with residents and businesses to discuss the ban and provided information concerning GPLB in both English and Spanish. As we have seen this past year, mandates aren't a popular tool, so providing some much-needed additional time for residents to work with their landscapers to make this change is necessary.

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## Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers: NOISE ISSUES AND LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

**By Council Member Steve Surko, Uppingham Street, with Council Member Robin Barr, Essex Avenue**

I am pleased to report that at the December 7th Town Council meeting, I introduced legislation to enact the Environment Committee's proposal to ban gas-powered leaf blowers in Somerset. In general, the proposal follows similar legislation enacted by Washington DC and Chevy Chase Village which bans the use of gas-powered leaf blowers by contractors and residents, effective January 1, 2022. The Town Council will host a **Public Hearing on January 11th** for residents to learn more about the proposed legislation and express their opinions.

This legislation addresses a public health issue. Hearing loss is a personal issue to me. My father served as a gunnery officer aboard a destroyer during the Korean War (he used to proudly recount that his ship had set the Navy record for continuous days on the bomblines) and suffered permanent hearing loss.

I noted that a resident opined on the listserv that there are papers and reports on every side of such issues. Perhaps. But I would argue strongly that the science related to hearing loss is well understood and agreed on. Like the damage caused by exposure to lead or mercury, hearing damage is a real issue. Loud noise is more than a nuisance. Fortunately, we can take action to protect ourselves.

The Environment Committee (EC) has held two Town forums on gas-powered leaf blowers. Guest speakers at the first forum provided background on the harm of gas-powered leaf blowers and the legislation to ban them in Washington DC and Chevy Chase Village. Local landscapers spoke at the second forum and talked about how they have already switched over to electric leaf blowers (partially for Shorb Landscapers, completely for Backyard Bounty). **Barton Rubenstein** (Dorset) Chair, EC, also shared comments he collected from small, minority owned landscapers. In general, battery-powered leaf blowers can deliver equivalent performance to legal gas-powered leaf blowers – producing around 600 cfm of airflow.

In accordance with Montgomery County Code §31B-9 on leaf blowers, "a person must not sell, buy, offer for sale, or use a leaf blower at any time that has an average sound level exceeding 70 dBA at a distance of 50 feet. This requirement is in addition to any other noise level or noise disturbance standard that applies under this Chapter." In accordance with §31B-5 on Noise level and noise disturbance violations, "a person must not cause or permit noise levels that exceed the following levels: Residential ~ 65 dBA Daytime, 55 dBA Nighttime measured at the property line."

Continued on page 4

## Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers: Noise Issues and Legislative Update

As described by Noise Help (<https://www.noisehelp.com/decibel-scale.html>): "The ear has the remarkable ability to handle an enormous range of sound levels. In order to express levels of sound meaningfully in numbers that are more manageable, a logarithmic scale is used, rather than a linear one. This scale is the decibel scale." Noise levels are commonly presented as dBA, which adjusts the sound levels to account for the varying sensitivity of the human ear to different frequencies of sound. Thus a 10 dBA increase represents a 10 times increase in power intensity while only describing a 2 times increase in loudness. It is important to understand that the "potential for a sound to damage our hearing is proportional to its intensity, not its loudness."

Thus, the 74 dBA gas-powered leaf blower I chanced upon at American Plant produces a sound intensity more than 2 times above the legal limit for such a machine in Montgomery County (I've written to American Plant regarding this leaf blower, but have received no response). And if this 74 dBA gas-powered leaf blower were operated 50 feet from the property line (and I regularly see operators blowing leaves to piles right up to the street – which reduces the distance), it would be 9 dBA greater than allowed (which translates into 8 times the allowed sound intensity).

Please note that the "measured GLB sound spectrum had a markedly greater low frequency component compared with the BLB sound spectrum allowing it to transmit and remain audible over longer distances and have greater adverse impact on the surrounding community."<sup>1</sup> This is not just a nuisance. And for the operators of gas-powered leaf blowers, "sound exceeds the 85 dBA occupational safety standard set by NIOSH (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) by 10-to 100-fold."

1 Lawn and Garden Equipment Sound: A Comparison of Gas and Battery Electric Equipment (2019). Pollock C, Sparks G, Banks JL. 10.16966/2576-6430.118. *Journal of Environmental and Toxicological Studies*

Several residents and Council Members have asked about enforcement. From my perspective, this is straightforward. The proposed legislation simply adds a one-sentence paragraph C to § 140-3- Lawn maintenance activities of the Town Code. Enforcement would be in accordance with existing Town practice regarding noise from construction and lawn maintenance activities. As a practical matter, this would mean the use of verbal and formal warnings prior to issuance of any fines. But the objective here is compliance – not revenue. With this in mind, the Environment Committee is developing a robust community outreach



and landscaper education campaign over 2021 and after the ban is implemented.

Next steps: The Town Council has 60 days from the proposal's introduction to consider the legislation. I expect that the Town Council will continue to discuss the proposed ban during its work sessions.

## JANUARY CALENDAR

### FRIDAY, JANUARY 1

Town Hall Closed

### MONDAY, JANUARY 4

Town Council Zoom Meeting  
7:00 p.m.

### MONDAY, JANUARY 11

Gas-Powered Leaf Blower  
Ban Public Hearing 7:00 p.m.

### THURSDAY, JANUARY 14

Somerset Council Work  
Session 5:00 p.m.

### MONDAY, JANUARY 18

Town Hall Closed  
Observance of Martin Luther King,  
Jr. Day

# A Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Update

By Bruce Tully, Chair, Public Safety Committee, Warwick Place

Just after the September 11th attacks in Washington and New York, our then Mayor Walter Behr asked me to write a guidance piece on emergency preparedness for the Town Journal. At the time, I was the Special Agent-In-Charge of the Washington Field Division and the Mid-Atlantic Region for the Diplomatic Security Service and formerly U.S. Secret Service, White House Protective Division.

In light of the recent large demonstrations in the DC/MD area, upcoming winter weather, and whatever else may be on the horizon, I thought it a good time to update and remind Town residents how to make it through these and other difficult happenings – situations that you can bet on coming around, again and again.

- You NEVER know when a no-notice threatening national security event will occur in the area. There was one previously, and another could result in gridlock in the entire metropolitan region. It is then too late to prepare.
- Keep your car at least halfway filled with fuel. That is a cardinal rule of all emergency responders. If power does go out (count on it), the gas pumps won't work. If a major storm is forecast, fuel-up to be ready as it could be days before power is restored, and gas supplies will be severely limited.
- Food – have at least a 10-day supply on hand of dry and canned goods that can be eaten without an electric stove. A hand held can opener is essential. A Sterno stove and cans of fuel and stick matches can be found at area hardware stores. Your gas grill can be used as well but outdoors. Don't forget your beloved pets! Stock up for them, too!
- Water – have bottled water and juice on hand, and fill any containers necessary to have enough water for 10 days to drink. You can fill your bathtub with water immediately and start with that.
- Medications – have whatever you need on hand for at least 10 days as pharmacies could be closed and no daily mail service can be counted on for mailed prescriptions.
- Money! Cash is KING in any emergency and more so when power is out – credit cards won't work in that case! Have a sufficient amount of money on hand (in a

protected location in your home) in small bills that you can use for several days.

- Because outages can occur in cold weather, have your fireplace inspected and order enough wood to keep you warm and possibly to cook with. Have a fully charged ABC Fire Extinguisher on hand in the kitchen and anywhere open flames are to be present. Again, any area hardware store has them.
- DON'T count on using a cell phone or laptop! Have and plan a rally point for all family members to meet (home, school, church) if separated when a "no-notice" emergency occurs. DON'T count on ANY public transportation to be functional. On 9/11, my wife Barbara walked home six miles. Cars and buses were at a gridlock and many cars were abandoned by panicked drivers. Metro was closed at a point for fear of terror attacks.
- Stock up on basic batteries for your portable radio, flashlights and so on.
- Be ready to offer aid and comfort to the elderly, ill and families with small children in your immediate area. Be sure to check up on your neighbors, especially if you don't see or hear from them as events unfold.
- Don't think it won't happen and put things off; sudden, no-notice emergencies happen.
- Lastly, be ready to help and protect yourself and your family. Sit down and develop a plan now. Remember, the fire / rescue service and police are just minutes away – when seconds count! In any area emergency there will be multiple 911 calls for help. The system may crash and police / fire call requests will stack up like airplanes over Chicago O'Hare in a snowstorm! Be ready to handle your own immediate problems by yourself.

These are just some immediate things and ideas to do and think about. You'll want to fine-tune them for what works best for you and your family. But please, don't put it off – you just never know.

Be like the Boy and Girl Scouts – Be Prepared! Good Luck and Stay Safe!

*Bruce Tully is a designated Subject Matter Expert by the Federal Government in the areas of Public Safety, Law Enforcement, Anti-Crime, Personal Security, Counter Terrorism, Executive Protection, Training, Board of Examiners and related fields. He teaches at the George Shultz National Foreign Affairs Center & Institute, Harding University, Sacred Heart University and is a consultant for various Fortune 500 and national media and broadcast companies.*

# Get Your Somerset Town Flag!

During these difficult days, we have an opportunity to demonstrate our municipal spirit, while brightening up our homes in advance of winter. Once again, Town of Somerset Flags are for sale!

The Town of Somerset was incorporated in 1906 as a small residential enclave among the then-unpaved roads of Maryland. In the ensuing 114 years, Somerset has grown into a unique municipality of 413 homes, an award-winning swimming pool complex, tennis courts, the historic Somerset Elementary School, and our very own Town Hall, all governed by the Somerset Town Council and Mayor.

Along the way, Somerset held a design competition to select a Town Flag. Town resident **David Herbick** (Cumberland) submitted the winning design depicting the "Red House" Town Hall and the big trees lining our small streets.

Somerset is now selling 3' x 5' Town Flags for \$35 (cash or check). You can see the Town Flag displayed at **5412 Trent Street**, the home of **George Schlossberg** and **Council Member Barbara Zeughauer**. Flag poles and mounting brackets can be conveniently purchased on-line or at local hardware stores.



Anyone wishing to purchase the Somerset Town Flag, or with any questions on how best to hang or display the flag, should contact George Schlossberg at **George.schlossberg@kutakrock.com** or by cell at **202-549-7117**, to arrange for contact-less delivery.



## 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 Zeughauer** 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**.



# SOMERSET LEADERS

## Robin Barr

This article concludes our Journal profiles of Town Council Members. Stay tuned for future interviews.

**By Ilene Ringel Heller, *Uppingham Street***

Timing is everything. The day Robin Barr chose to retire, January 31, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency because of Covid-19. He was spared from determining how the 50-person office he had directed since 2007 -- the National Institute of Aging's (NIA) Division of Extramural Activities (DEA) -- was going to cope with the pandemic. But it wouldn't have phased him.

In 2018, when Congress reached an impasse on immigration that provoked a government shutdown, on short notice, Robin determined how to conduct an Advisory Council meeting electronically without the technological advantage of Zoom and squeezed the meeting into the final hours that the government was open. NIA could not award research grants unless the Advisory Council met. In advance of the shutdown, Robin made sure everyone had the documents available on his or her computer and linked the numerous participants on the telephone. Even a member from New Zealand, who would have been unable to attend an in-person meeting, attended. Thanks to Robin's 2018 experience, his successor had a precedent for how to handle the physical closure of the Agency during the pandemic.

Planning seems to be something at which Robin excels. He was a founding member of both the Environment and Budget Committees. While chair of the Environment Committee, Robin worked with the Council to install a rain garden and conservation landscaping by the tennis courts to deal with flooding caused by storm water. So far, the rain garden is working. The Environment Committee also established a municipal composting program well in advance of other local communities. He also helped establish a "Rainy Day" fund for the Town's budget to protect Somerset from unexpected revenue loss and the potential need for property tax increases.

Robin grew up in Scotland and England. His parents moved numerous times from a Glasgow suburb, to a rural village, to the South of England and then back to Scotland,

this time to the Highlands. Robin received undergraduate and doctoral degrees in psychology from the University of Oxford, England. After postdoctoral work at the University of Pennsylvania, he joined the faculty of Ball State University in Muncie, IN where he conducted research on attention and aging.

When asked if he experienced culture shock when he arrived in the United States, Robin laughed and explained that the only culture shock he felt was in going from the University of Pennsylvania to Muncie. Although the people were very nice, their only ethnic restaurant was a brave French start-up that lasted just two years. Robin enjoys the multi-cultural atmosphere of a big city.

Muncie did have one advantage though: Leslie Caplan, a new psychology professor from Cleveland, Ohio with whom he commiserated. They married in Elgin, Scotland in 1983.

In 1987, Robin joined NIA as a program administrator in the Behavioral and Social Research program and, among other things, helped to develop NIA's human factors initiative and research focused on older drivers. He has tried without success to convince AARP to focus on "useful field of view" training for older drivers, lamenting that AARP improves people's confidence in their driving, but not their skills.

In 1994, Robin was named deputy head of DEA and the NIA training officer. DEA manages NIA's grants and training policies and procedures, including the oversight of grant and contract administration, scientific review and committee management functions. Robin became the acting director of DEA in 2006 and was appointed director in 2007.

In 1987, Robin and Leslie moved to Rockville and saved until they could move to Somerset in 1995. By this time, they had a little boy, Matthew, who was in second grade. Like many residents, they were looking for a home that

*Continued on page 8*

## Somerset Leaders: Robin Barr

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was close to Metro and that would enable them to walk to stores and their offices. At this point, Leslie was working as a developmental psychologist at the National Institute on Mental Health and would ultimately move to the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research.

Two years before they moved here, Matthew had already begun attending Somerset Elementary School. Montgomery County officials had allowed Matthew to attend Somerset even though they were living in Rockville because both parents worked nearby, and Matthew was receiving physical and occupational therapy by area therapists for a minor condition. Matthew, who later attended Westland, B-CC and Yale University, now works for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. (Yes, we can disclose that!) He lives in Hyattsville, with his wife, Zoe, and 15-month-old daughter, Ellen.

When Robin retired, DEA's press release said his "retirement plans include working on a book, serving

in local government, and grandparenting." Robin has completed a chapter or two on a book on aging and Alzheimer's disease.

Robin expanded his local government work by being elected a Council Member in July 2020. He is most proud of the creation of the Equity and Inclusion Committee, and he helped with the creation of the Stormwater Management Committee. Robin serves as liaison to the Audit and History Committees and as an alternate liaison to the Communications and Budget Committees.

As for grandparenting, when you watch Robin's Zoom sessions, you can see a crib in the background. Robin and Leslie, who retired in April, are enjoying minding granddaughter Ellen four days a week so her parents can work.

In short, Robin is well on his way to accomplishing what he set out to do when he announced his retirement plans. Somerset is fortunate to have such a planning whiz on our Council.

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## Update on Thrive Montgomery 2050

By Marnie Shaul, Council President, Uppingham Street

I introduced Thrive Montgomery 2050 in the November Journal and this month I am providing an update with directions or links to the relevant documents. I realize it's hard to get excited about a long-range planning effort, but once passed, this Plan will guide growth in Montgomery County for the next 30 years and could substantially change the area around Somerset.

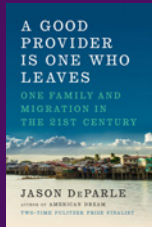
The Planning Board held a hearing on the draft plan in November and more than 80 people testified, many from the eastern part of Montgomery County. Several representatives from the Chevy Chase area testified, including Mayor Jeffrey Slavin. You can listen to the 2050 hearing on the Planning Board website, <https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/>, under archived Planning Board meeting on November 19th.

After the hearing, the Town of Chevy Chase, with the help of other nearby municipalities and citizen associations, including Somerset, put together more than 20 questions that provided an outline for a December 8th meeting with the Chair of the Planning Board and the Director

of Planning Department. You can listen to the questions and the planners' answers at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RXI5seAbQ4>. There's a huge range of issues discussed, from what public investment is envisioned for facilities and transportation to how missing middle housing fits into existing neighborhoods. ("Missing middle housing" refers to the range of housing between single-family detached homes and mid-to-high-rise structures; examples include townhouses and duplexes.) To date it appears that the planners are still introducing their ideas to the Montgomery County Public Schools and the County Department of Transportation, both of which would have a changed focus if the Plan is adopted.

If you are interested in following this issue, the Planning Board intends to announce work sessions on various parts of the Plan over the next months and will devote portions of its Thursday agendas to these discussions. Eventually, there will be a new outline that reframes the current draft and the final document will be shorter and more focused. A final Planning Board document will be sent to the Montgomery County Council in March or April for its consideration.





## A Good Provider Is One Who Leaves

by Jason DeParle

Reviewed by  
Sara Anderson,  
Falstone Avenue

If you read *A Good Provider Is One Who Leaves* you will learn about many things including global migration, the history of American immigration law and attitudes towards immigration, the culture and history of the modern Philippines, guest workers in the Middle East, immigrant workers in Houston, working as nurse, injured cruise ship workers, supporting your children when there are not sufficient job opportunities in your own country, and building a family when you do not see your children for years.

The author, *New York Times* writer Jason DeParle, went to the Philippines in 1987. (Disclosure – Jason is a friend and a writer we have admired for many years.) He moved in and lived with a branch of the Portagana family in the largest slum in Manila, Leveriza. He has remained connected with this family, and, through the lives of three generations, tells the stories of their successes and failures in supporting their children by working in countries across the world. He sets these individuals' stories in the larger context of global legal migration – policy, law, statistics, cultural attitudes -- over these decades.

In living with the Portaganas, it was Jason's intent to write about poverty, not migration. However, as he was with them in Leveriza and then was later 'with' them as a friend, correspondent, sometimes helper, and return visitor, he found a universal story about parents becoming migrant workers to avoid poverty for their children. Indeed, the Philippines is an iconic embodiment of the phenomenon of migrant workers. In 1974, Ferdinand Marcos established a government agency – the Overseas Employment Development Board – to place Filipinos in temporary contracts with overseas employers. In 1975, 36,000

Filipinos went abroad to work; by 1983, the number had risen to 434,000. As of 2017, 10 million Filipinos, or about 10% of the population, worked/lived abroad.

The principal narrative involves Rosalie, who was a child when Jason moved in to sleep on the floor in her mother's house. (Her father was cleaning pools in Saudi Arabia.) Rosalie set her sights on becoming a nurse, an ambitious goal for a child from Leveriza. Nursing, as a means of advancement, is a favored path in the Philippines because its nursing school curriculums are aligned with US nursing standards. Filipino nurses are therefore particularly valued in times of US nursing shortages and nursing can be a path to US work authorization. However, as Rosalie's story shows, that path is full of challenges – getting a degree, mastering English, market demand, getting a visa, and obligations resulting from a highly interdependent family culture like unexpected financial needs of relatives.

Immigration has been a headline topic during the Trump presidency. The controversies surrounding it will probably again soon fill the news cycle. **YOU CAN BE READY** – read this book and learn about American immigration history (including why we have family linked immigration, or chain migration, as the current President calls it) and the debates that have informed our present laws. Equally, appreciate a story about lives that may be very different from your own -- the story of a family that ultimately obtains work authorization for the United States and its path – the parents' through work; the children's through school – to becoming Americans. Jason is a wonderful writer – the personal stories are engaging; the policy discussions are thoughtful and clearly presented.



## Moving Toward Plant-Based Eating

Many people turn to a vegetarian diet because of their love of animals or because they are addressing a particular health concern. Some just eliminate animal products and fill their plates with what they've always eaten.

Plant-based diets aren't new, but there is still confusion about the different types of diets they include. To minimize confusion let's define the terms:

- A **vegan** diet is entirely plant-based. It excludes meat, fish, dairy and eggs – basically anything that comes from an animal.
- **Vegetarians** also eat a plant-based diet, but their menu may include dairy and eggs.
- A **flexitarian** is a vegetarian that sometimes indulges in meat or fish but mostly sticks to plant foods.
- **Plant-forward** is a style of cooking and eating that emphasizes plant-based foods but is not strictly limited to them. Meat may be included but it's usually not the main feature of the meal.
- **Whole Foods Plant Based** doesn't include any meat, poultry, fish, dairy, or eggs. It's not, however, the same as a vegan diet, which is defined only by what it eliminates. A WFPB diet is defined also by what it emphasizes: a large variety of whole foods. The term "**whole**" in **WFPB** describes foods that are **minimally processed**. This includes as many whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes as you want. It also includes, in moderation: nuts, seeds, avocados, natural sweeteners, and certain soy or wheat products that don't contain added fat (e.g., tofu).

If you want to lean into a plant-based whole foods or plant-forward diet, there are several ways to do it.

- **Lean In** by trying **Meatless Monday**, a global movement started in 2003 to encourage people to reduce their meat consumption for their own health and the health of the planet. The website [mondayscampaigns.org](http://mondayscampaigns.org) is full of resources including recipes and tips on how to start a group in your community or organization.
- **Lean in** by adding in more fruits and vegetables and eating smaller and fewer portions of animal products as a conscious choice.
- **Lean in** by trying to eat more whole and minimally processed foods (three ingredients or less).

Another way to really experience a plant-based diet is to try the "**Forks Over Knives Fresh Start Challenge**" to go plant based in 21 days beginning January 1st. I have signed up for it and have been following Forks Over Knives on social media and trying many of their recipes. It is free and includes recipes for replacing one meal a day per week with a plant-based meal, until you have worked up to all three daily meals. There is also a documentary film called "Forks over Knives" available for streaming. If you are at all curious you can find out more on the website [forksoverknives.com](http://forksoverknives.com), which has many recipes as well as a meal planner and other resources.

Please let me know if you would like to try this 21-day event and we can be accountability partners. You can reach me at [Diane.b.horn@gmail.com](mailto:Diane.b.horn@gmail.com).

Are there any Somerset residents who can speak to following a plant-based diet?

*Disclaimer: This article and any recommendations in it do not speak for or represent those of the Town of Somerset.*



## Climate Emergency Actions in Our Region

### Clean Energy Act – Washington, DC Is Focused on the Underserved

In January, 2019, DC passed one of the most ambitious clean energy laws in the nation, aiming to reduce carbon emissions by 50% by 2032. The financial engine for this law is the DC Green Bank, which focuses on issues regarding equity, fairness and accountability. A Sustainable Energy Utility fee will be charged for electricity and natural gas consumption; proceeds will be used to fund energy efficiency improvements in low-income housing buildings and underserved neighborhoods. The law also aims to electrify all public transportation vehicles. By 2045, all privately-owned commercial transportation will be required to have 100% zero emissions. DC officials claim that this is just the beginning of future green initiatives.

When I was growing up in Northwest DC, the city was struggling with many of its essential services, like trash collecting and recycling. Now DC is a leader with aggressive Green Initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint.

### Town of Somerset – Are We Also Focused on the Climate Emergency?

Montgomery County is also focused on Green Initiatives and it is my hope that Somerset will become a part of this worldwide system change and desire for a sustainable and livable future for all. Toward that goal, Somerset has opted into MoCo's Healthy Lawn Act to protect our residents from the hazards of lawn pesticides and, now, the Town Council is considering a proposal to piggyback on actions by Washington, DC and Chevy Chase Village and vote to ban gas-powered leaf blowers (GPLB).

### Gas Powered Leaf Blower Issues:

- This is a real health issue for our town. The science is real.
- GPLBs are loud machines that produce a low frequency noise that penetrates our homes at great distances (unlike battery-powered leaf blowers).
- Most GPLBs in use are illegal because their noise level is over 70 dB; they need to be retired immediately.
- Normal masks will not protect operators from the health hazards of GPLB fumes.

- EGO Battery Powered Backpack Leaf Blowers at 600 cfm are as powerful as legal GPLBs at 580 cfm and the cost of these machines are comparable.
- Because DC and CCV have recently banned GPLBs, many local landscapers, including some used by our residents, have already begun to shift to battery-powered machines. These landscapers, including minority-owned businesses, are also concerned about the health hazards of GPLB. At the ear of the operator, GPLBs exceed the 85 dB occupational safety standard set by NIOSH (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) by 10- to-100-fold.
- Using multiple leaf blowers in close proximity (less than 50') is additive and thus will exceed the 70 dB limit.

### Ask Your Landscaper to Transition to Less Leaf Blowing and Battery Powered Leaf Blowers

It is now time to thank your landscaper for their hard work this past fall and discuss future sustainable garden practices. That could include:

- Reduce leaf blower use during the year. "Please use leaf blowers only once a month and only to clear the drains. Otherwise, please use a rake."
- Please do not blow leaves from the grass anymore. "It is bad for the soil and you can mow the leaves from now on."

I bought an **EGO backpack leaf blower** with an **extra battery** (total of \$715) and have split the cost with my minority-owned landscaping company. Each battery lasts about an hour and takes about an hour to charge. The landscaping company owner is very happy to remove the health hazards of GPLB and go electric! Please



*Continued on page 12*

## Sustainability Corner

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consider doing the same with your landscaper during the coming year.

### Montgomery County Focusing on Banning Gas Powered Leaf Blowers

I thought I would share with you this website that was created in response to the thousands of people who have already signed a MoCo petition to ban GPLBs. <https://www.quietcleanmc.com/>

It includes a petition to sign and a one-page fact sheet that is filled with scientific evidence of the health hazards. <https://bit.ly/3mz6h49f>

I know that you probably have already read some of these scientific articles, but just in case...

Remember, a real health hazard issue such as GPLBs is never the concern of just one or a few residents; this is an issue that affects the health and well-being of all residents, including adults, children, and the operators of these machines.

Also remember that some residents could decide that banning GPLB is not an important issue or a priority, but that does not invalidate the science. It only exposes a need for more education.

Happy Holidays to all and my hope is that with the arrival of a COVID vaccine, life will begin to normalize in the coming year.

## GENERAL PERMITS

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### TREE REMOVAL

- 5509 Greystone – 6" Spruce
- 4710 Essex – 24" Twin Trunk Silver Maple
- 5804 Surrey – 18" Black Cherry
- 4811 Cumberland:
  - 12" Holly
  - 15" Walnut
  - 14" False Cypress
  - 6" Leyland Cypress
- 17" Leyland Cypress
- 11" Leyland Cypress
- 15" Leyland Cypress
- 17" Leyland Cypress

# From the Mayor's Desk

By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin



I have been extremely impressed over this past year as I watched Council Member **Steve Surko** (Uppingham) initiate, research, advocate for and ultimately introduce an amendment to our Town Code that would ban the use of gas-powered leaf blowers. It is impressive that hundreds of you have indicated that you strongly support this measure. Given the environmental and noise concerns that so many of you have communicated to me over the years, taking action on a ban is certainly warranted. I strongly support this amendment, which is the result of much compromise and public discussion and is similar to laws passed in the District of Columbia and neighboring Chevy Chase Village. Both of these jurisdictions plan for the law to go into effect in a year and I see no reason why Somerset shouldn't align that way, too.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to the Town's Annual Holiday Fund which benefits our hard working Town employees during the holiday season. I also want to thank everyone who contributed to the food drive so that the less fortunate among us would have something to eat during the winter cold. The number of people in affluent Montgomery County who go hungry each day is mind-boggling. I hope that many of you will continue to engage with Manna Food Center during the coming year. For more information, go to [www.mannafood.org](http://www.mannafood.org).

Around this time every December, I like to ask residents whether our US mail service has been satisfactory for the last twelve months --especially because in the recent past we have received a number of complaints about which we requested and received Congressional assistance. Accordingly, I would like to encourage everyone with a concern about the mail in general or with a specific problem to write to me or the Town Manager now so that we can bring such issues forward to our Congressman Jamie Raskin and his expert staff. Service will only improve if we know about the problems.

There is one additional piece of good news to report. Last month, I was honored to be elected President of the LGBTQ+ leadership group ("caucus") of the National League of Cities (NLC) for a two- year term. I have been active in the NLC for the past six years, learning lots of best practices, keeping informed about pending national legislation affecting municipalities, networking and developing new skills. I have been a member of a committee--called REAL--which deals with racial equity and was chaired by Takoma Park Mayor Kate Stewart. In my new position, I will work with a board of directors and staff on national laws and policies regarding LGBTQ+ equality, an issue in which I know many Somerset residents have an interest.

## 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](mailto:diane.b.horn@gmail.com).

MASSANUTTEN, VIRGINIA. Own a well-appointed timeshare at this all-season family resort in the Shenandoah Valley. Two connected units (each sleeping 6) can be separated for personal use, for rental, or for exchange through RCI, the world's largest timeshare exchange network. Any offer considered. Call 301-907-8805. **Jeanette Kreiser**

*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.*



# Manager's Corner

By Matt Trollinger, Town Manager

Another year on the books! (And what a year it was!) Auld Lang Syne choruses are in the air, and New Year's resolutions are fresh on people's minds. For the Town, the new year means a couple of things. The first is that it will soon be tax season:

## Filling Out 502 Tax Form

Revenues received through our residents' paid income taxes are a main source of Town revenues. The Town needs your help to ensure that all income tax revenue due to the Town arrives here. In order for the state of Maryland to return this revenue, your political subdivision (Town of Somerset) needs to be entered on Maryland Form 502.

Maryland Form 502 now requests a 4-digit Political Subdivision Code as well. The four-digit Code for the Town of Somerset is **1610**. If filing electronically, there is a character limit, therefore, you may have to enter simply "Somerset" for Maryland Political Subdivision.

City or Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP Code \_\_\_\_\_

**REQUIRED:** Maryland Physical address as of December 31, 2018 or last day of the taxable year for fiscal year taxpayers. See Instruction 6, Part-year residents see Instruction 26.

**1610** Town of Somerset  
4 Digit Political Subdivision Code (See Instruction 6) Maryland Political Subdivision (See Instruction 6)

Your Address Here  
Maryland Physical Address Line 1 (Street No. and Street Name) (No PO Box)  
Maryland Physical Address Line 2 (Apt. No., Suite No., Floor No.) (No PO Box)

Chevy Chase MD 20815 5666 Montgomery  
City State ZIP Code +4 Maryland County

1.  Single (If you can be claimed on another person's tax) 4.  Head of household

## Public Hearing on Leaf Blowers

As previously mentioned, the Town Environment Committee has recommended that the Town Council pass an ordinance banning the use of gas-powered leaf blowers in Somerset, beginning in January of 2022. The Town will hold a public hearing on this issue on **January 11 at 7:00 p.m.** The Town Council is expected to consider adoption at its February Council meeting. If you wish to comment on legislation, please email the Council directly at **Council@townofsomerset.com**, or email me at the Town office at **manager@townofsomerset.com** with the email subject "Leaf Blower Proposal."

## Budget Development and Discussion

The new calendar year also means we will soon enter budget season. The Town's fiscal year runs from July through June, so January marks the halfway point. Because of the extended tax filing deadline, the pandemic's fiscal impact on the Town is not entirely known at this time. Nonetheless, over the next few months the Town Council,

Mayor, Budget Committee, and Town staff will begin preparing for the next budget year. Remember that all residents have a stake in the Town government. I think I can speak for not just myself and the Town staff, but also the Mayor and Council when I say that citizen input and feedback are vitally important to the process of setting priorities for the Town government. The government represents your taxpayer dollars at work, and we all want to ensure that it is serving you well.

## Snow Management

The new year is when snow removal services are on our mind. We have already had more snow than last year! The Town is fortunate to have Mulheron Tree Experts providing our plowing, shoveling, and street treatment services again this year. We are in good hands, as they are experienced in keeping the Town safe during winter season.

## Email Communications

As of mid-December, the Yahoo Groups system stopped supporting the Town's listserv. As a result, the Town will no longer have its own listserv and will focus on communicating through other means. All Town email communications will come through Constant Contact – the program that is used to send out the weekly Friday Town announcements. If you are unsure if you are signed up to receive these notices, please contact me directly at **manager@townofsomerset.com**. I would be glad to add your name to our distribution list.

## New Year's Thanks

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who was able to contribute to the Town's holiday fund. While I do not personally take part, I know that the contributions were very much appreciated by Linda Williams, the maintenance staff, and the police officers — well-deserved for their hard work! Additionally, the coat drive and food donation collections were a great success and went to some excellent local organizations and causes.

One last note: I hope everyone has/had a wonderful holiday season. Onwards and upwards in 2021! I have high hopes for a bounce-back year, and – in time – enjoying some of the things that we have missed this past year, not least of which is congregating and spending time in the company of friends, family, and loved ones. I wish you all a happy, healthy, and successful New Year!

# Council Meeting Actions

The Town Council has taken the following actions:

- Approved Minutes taken from the regular Town Council meeting held on October 5, 2020.
- Approved Minutes taken from the regular Town Council meeting held on November 2, 2020.
- Approved a three-month extension on the moratorium on the rental of Town of Somerset public spaces and facilities through March, 2021.
- Approved a building permit application submitted by Paula Marques, on behalf of Helene Safire, to enclose the existing back porch at the property located at 4723 Falstone Ave.
- Approved a one-year extension of contract with American Pool, LLC for 2021 Town of Somerset Pool Management, in the amount of \$138,840.00.
- Adopted a Charter for the Town Pool Committee.
- Approved the following Mayoral nominees to the Public Safety Committee:
  - Bruce Tully, Warwick Pl. (Chair)
  - Dolores Biocca, Surrey St.
  - Seth Cohen, Greystone St.
  - Caroline Cooper, Cumberland Ave.
  - Steve Friedman, Essex Ave.
  - Archana Gregersen, Dorset Ave.
  - Max Teleki, Warwick Pl.
  - Kumar Vaswani, Trent St.
  - Joseph Wheatley, Dorset Ave.
- Adopted Resolution No. 8-20, an Ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to change instances of Vice-President to President; clarify the procedures for creation of committees; add a definition of lot; amend the procedures for appeals so that Council decisions are not stayed pending a prospective petition for judicial review; delete unnecessary provisions; and otherwise amend and clarify existing provisions.
- Adopted Resolution 11-20-1, a Resolution Adopting Protocol for Amendment of the Town Code.
- Introduced Resolution 11-20, an Ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to prohibit the use of gas-powered blowers on or after January 1, 2022.
- Approved Town vehicle repairs in an amount not to exceed \$5,000.
- Approved administrative engagement with Pepco for evaluation of Town Hall parking lot for viability of installation of electric car charger.

# Preliminary Agenda

## Regular Somerset Town Council Meeting

January 4, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

The Somerset Town Council will meet via Zoom on Monday, January 7, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.

Agenda and updates are posted on the Town website: [www.townofsomerset.com](http://www.townofsomerset.com)

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82629760527?pwd=M3YrT3lMRVNubnFSUHBwT0thMjkv>

UT09 Meeting ID: 826 2976 0527 Passcode: 433034

### Somerset Town Council

- Marnie Shaul, Council President
- Robin Barr
- Franny Peale
- Steve Surko
- Barbara Zeughauser

## PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

7:00 p.m. Opportunity for residents to make public comments. \*

## APPROVAL OF AGENDA

7:10 p.m. **Motion:** To consider approval of agenda as presented.

## CONSENT AGENDA

7:11 p.m. **Motion:** To consider approval of the following items without discussion:

- Minutes taken from the regular Town Council meeting held on December 7, 2020;
- Minutes taken from the Town Council Work Session held on November 16, 2020;
- Set 2021 Calendar Year Town Council Meeting dates;
- Approval of Town Manager Matthew Trollinger as Somerset's representative to Montgomery Municipal Cable Board.

## NON-CONSENT AGENDA

- 7:30 p.m. **Discussion:** Presentation of FY2020 Audit findings by Zelenkofske Axelrod, LLC
- 7:40 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To Approve Audit Committee recommendation for approval of FY2020 Audit.
- 7:45 p.m. **Discussion:** Building Administrator Report
- 7:55 p.m. **Hearing/Motion:** To Approve Mayoral nominees to the Diversity and Inclusion Committee.
- 7:58 p.m. **Hearing/Motion:** To Approve Mayoral nominees to the History and Archives Committee.
- 8:00 p.m. **Hearing/Motion:** To Approve Mayoral nominees to the Traffic Committee.
- 8:02 p.m. **Hearing/Motion:** To Approve Mayoral nominees to the Welcoming Committee.
- 8:05 p.m. **Hearing/Motion:** To Approve Introduction to Permitting Page on Town website.
- 8:20 p.m. **Introduction:** To Re-Introduce Resolution 11-20, an Ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to prohibit the use of gas-powered blowers on or after January 1, 2022.
- 8:25 p.m. **Discussion:** Manager Report
- 8:40 p.m. **Motion:** Adjourn

## 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.

\*Questions should be submitted via email ahead of the meeting to [manager@townofsomerset.com](mailto:manager@townofsomerset.com) or [town@townofsomerset.com](mailto:town@townofsomerset.com).

Residents who wish to present for a particular Agenda item are advised to arrive 20 minutes ahead of the item's scheduled discussion time, as discussions can run ahead of schedule.

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](http://www.townofsomerset.com)) seven days prior to the meeting. A copy is also posted on the bulletin board on the Town Hall porch.