



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

# SomerseT TOWN JOURNAL



Volume 68 • No. 12

December 2023

## Town Police Program: Challenges and Alternatives

**By Kumar Vaswani, Chair, Public Safety Committee,**  
*Trent Street*

The Council has requested that the Public Safety Committee (PSC) evaluate Somerset's police program. This is the first in a series of articles reporting our findings.

Since 2007, Somerset has employed County police officers part-time for stop sign enforcement.

Many have questioned whether it is prudent to spend money on a program that: (1) has significant limitations and (2) duplicates services the Town already receives at no cost from Montgomery County.

Even as Somerset has spent (with good intentions) hundreds of thousands of dollars on a program whose efficacy is being questioned, the Town has been unable to devote funds and staff time to address hazards that have actually injured residents or that residents have complained about for years. Examples include the lack of pedestrian-scale lighting, inadequate traffic safety infrastructure, sidewalk tripping hazards, sidewalks obstructed by plantings, and pedestrian hazards in the pool parking lot.

The question has been asked: Should Somerset transition to a holistic public safety program that actually addresses our needs?

*No one is questioning the quality of our excellent officers.* However, the Town needs to consider:

- Is the program a good fit for Somerset?
- Are there more effective, more fiscally prudent alternatives?

### Traffic Committee Findings

Notably, in September, the Traffic Committee notified the Council that the police program is *not* increasing stop sign compliance or general traffic safety and that the committee is exploring other traffic safety solutions.

### PSC Findings

The PSC has spent two years studying the police program. Among the PSC's findings:

- **The data show that the program has little to no impact on Somerset's crime rate.** Even as police hours have remained the same or dropped, reported crimes in

*Continued on page 3*

## IN THIS ISSUE



# DECEMBER 2023 TOWN CALENDAR

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 4

Town Council Meeting  
7:30 p.m., Town Hall (in person)  
and via Zoom<sup>o\*</sup>

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 11

Communications  
Committee Meeting  
5:00 p.m., via Zoom<sup>\*</sup>

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15

Final Leaf Vacuuming Day

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 18

Final Day for Toy and Food  
Drives at Town Hall  
(see page 15 for details)

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 18

Town Council Work Session  
5:30 p.m., Town Hall (in person)  
and via Zoom<sup>o\*</sup>

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 25

Town Hall Closed in observance  
of the Christmas Holiday

<sup>o</sup>The Town Council instituted "hybrid" meetings starting in September 2022, to allow residents to attend both in-person at the Town Hall, or to continue to participate via Zoom.

<sup>\*</sup>Login information for Zoom meetings will be sent via email the week prior to the meeting. Residents may also email [town@townofsomerset.com](mailto:town@townofsomerset.com) for login and dial-in information.

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Monday thru Friday  
301-657-3211 | Fax: 301-657-2773  
TTY users call Maryland Relay

### SOMERSET TOWN JOURNAL

#### EDITOR

#### Leslie Caplan

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

#### POST OFFICE ADDRESS:

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Chevy Chase, MD 20815

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## Somerset TOWN JOURNAL

The Town Journal welcomes submissions from Somerset residents. Submissions should address topics of direct interest to the Town of Somerset and/or to Somerset residents. The suggested word limit for submissions is 300-500 words. The deadline for copy and ads is the 15th of the month that precedes the pertinent issue, at 4:30 p.m.

Please email submissions to the Town Journal Editor, Leslie Caplan, at [LeslieCaplan.townjournal@gmail.com](mailto:LeslieCaplan.townjournal@gmail.com). The editor is happy to discuss articles before they are submitted.

## Town Police Program: Challenges and Alternatives

Town have dropped from 17 crimes in 2021 to 9 so far this year. (Most are property crimes.)

- **Nearby neighborhoods that don't hire police have crime rates similar to Somerset's** (e.g., Chevy Chase West, Edgemoor, and the Village of Drummond).
- **Even with a Town officer on duty, crimes have still occurred.** Both the carjacking on Essex Avenue and an unlawful entry on Cumberland Avenue in 2021 occurred while a Town officer was on duty.
- **Somerset, with its low rate of crimes and collisions, presents our officers with little opportunity to take police action.** This year, our officers have responded to 9 Somerset incidents (about 1 per month on average), according to the police activity log. The officers classified all as "non-emergency."
- **This year, our officers have issued only one traffic ticket. And the last time a Town officer issued a ticket for a stop sign violation was March 2019** — more than four years ago — according to the log.
- **Our regular Second District Montgomery County police — not our Town-hired officers — respond to about 90% of the incidents in Town.** So even without

our police program, Somerset enjoys a robust County police presence.

- **The police program is expensive.** The \$37,180 budget allows for one officer for only 1.9 hours per day, on average — i.e., 8% of the time.
- **County rules prohibit our officers from patrolling.** They sit parked for up to 60 minutes at a time. (They can drive to incidents or pursue violators).
- **We don't control the dates or times of day/night that officers work.**
- **Somerset sometimes goes for 4 – 5 days without a Town officer on duty.**
- **Infrastructure improvements would likely be more effective than the police program — and less costly — for inducing traffic law compliance 24 hours a day, at multiple locations,** rather than at the 1 intersection where we have 1 officer posted for an hour or two.

For more information, please visit the PSC page on Somerset's website (<https://bit.ly/3slo8i2>) or contact me at [kumarvas655@gmail.com](mailto:kumarvas655@gmail.com).



### 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](mailto:HHSomerset@gmail.com) or call **Barbara Zeughauser** at 202-368-9986 **Kathleen Kenyon** at 301-651-0758 or **Jim Berry** at 240-994-3939.

If you would like to add your name to the volunteer list, please send an email to [HHSomerset@gmail.com](mailto:HHSomerset@gmail.com).

### HAVE STUFF TO DONATE?



Please check out this Montgomery County website for places that may accept your items: <https://bit.ly/47ed7EK>

Information provided by  
Lauren Rubenstein (Surrey)



# Solar Panels Installed at Town Hall

In accordance with our Town's pledge to be carbon neutral by 2050 or earlier, the Town has recently installed 33 photovoltaic solar panels on the roof of the Town Hall. This installation will almost completely offset the electricity usage of the Town Hall and its garage, used by the maintenance crew. The project is the culmination of an initial recommendation by the Environment Committee, the determined efforts of the Town Council, and a tremendous amount of coordination by our Town Manager **Matt Trollinger**.

Installing solar panels at the Town Hall is only the beginning of the story, as the Town Council is also now considering solar panels for the swimming pool building. As you might imagine, heating our pool is the largest electrical expenditure of the Town, so this would be an important step forward towards sustainability.

It is the hope of the Environment Committee and the Town that installing these solar panels will inspire residents to do the same for their homes, as becoming carbon neutral should be a goal for everyone. For those homes that are covered by canopy trees (like my home), please consider a third-party renewable energy provider (through Pepco),



Town Manager Matt Trollinger stands with the newly installed solar panels at Town Hall. Photo by Barton Rubenstein.

or Neighborhood Sun, (<https://bit.ly/3sLK2kE>), which allows a home owner to buy into a nearby solar farm and guarantees that your electrical rates will always be the same or less than Pepco's.

Please let us know if you have any questions or sustainable ideas for the Town at [tos.environmentcommittee@gmail.com](mailto:tos.environmentcommittee@gmail.com).

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## PHOTOS FROM AROUND TOWN

# Upgrading the Town Entrance at Greystone Street and River Road

Have you noticed the improvements at the Town entrance at Greystone Street and River Road? If not, check out these photos! (Photos by **Linda Williams**, Town Administrator).



# Richard Siegman Art Exhibit at Somerset Town Hall Gallery

By Barbara Zeughauser, Town Art Curator, Trent Street

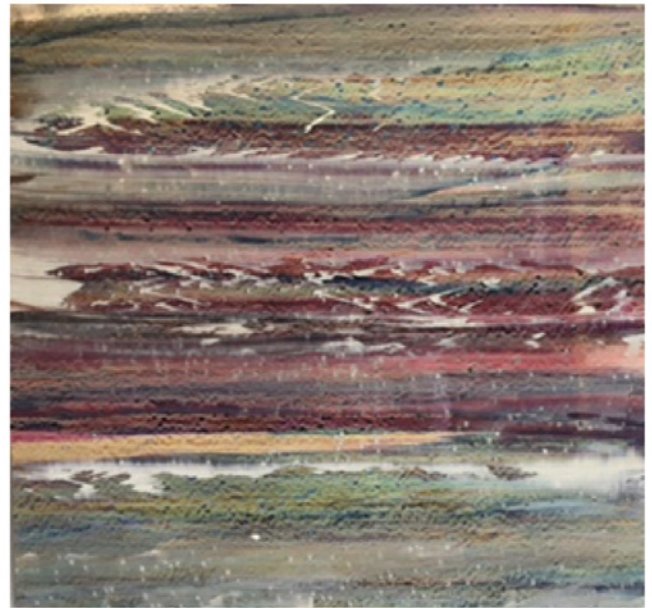
The Town of Somerset is pleased to announce the next exhibit in the Town Hall Gallery entitled *Winter Colors*, displaying the work of Richard Siegman. The Exhibit is open to the public during regular Town Hall hours, through January 23, 2024.

Richard was born in southwestern Pennsylvania, studied art at Penn State University, and has lived and worked as a painter, sculptor, and photographer in the Dupont Circle area of Washington, D.C. since 1973. In 1996, Richard established the Painting and Sculpture Studio (PASS), a gallery showcasing Washington artists creating abstract, minimalist, pop, and conceptual art. Richard's work has been shown at many area galleries, alternative art spaces, and at local university exhibits. In addition, Richard works with the Town to hang the many exhibits in the Town Hall Gallery.

In *Winter Colors*, Richard explores the beauty of winter relationships through color.

Richard Siegman's works are available for sale, and I hope many Town residents will stop by the Town Hall to see the Winter Colors Exhibit.

## Richard Siegman WINTER COLORS



**November 6, 2023 thru January 23, 2024**

Monday thru Friday 9:00 - 4:00 PM

Somerset Town Hall

4510 Cumberland Ave., Chevy Chase, MD 20815

Contact: Richard.Siegman@gmail.com 202-745-0796





# Faces of Somerset

## Russell Green – Economist Champion of Somerset's Pool Olympics



**By Soching Tsai, Member, Equity and Inclusion Committee, Trent Street**

**Russell Green** (Cumberland), an economist, has never found such a concentration of fellow economists as in Somerset, where there are several in his immediate neighborhood. A native of

Houston, Texas, Russell received his Ph.D. in economics from University of California, Berkeley in 2002. He had two professional stints in Washington, D.C. before settling in Somerset on his third. He first came to Washington to work for the Federal Reserve Bank, and later, at the U.S. Department of the Treasury which, after four years, sent him to New Delhi, India, where he was Financial Attaché at the U.S. Embassy for another four years. He returned to Houston to teach international economics at Rice University. In 2017, he left Houston for Washington again, this time for a position at the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He currently works on Nepal for the IMF.

It was on his third move to Washington, D.C. that a colleague of his wife, **Jamie Kaplan**, suggested that they should consider the West Chevy Chase/Somerset area. Somerset won out because of its swimming pool and the proximity to the Capital Crescent Trail, which Russell uses to bicycle to his office. Russell felt he landed in heaven when he moved here. Whereas Houston is hot and humid, Somerset has seasons enhanced by its greenery. Whereas Houston is flat, Somerset spreads across undulating land. Whereas Houston's bayou is partially lined with concrete, Somerset boasts untouched woods, trails, creeks, and a stream, all in the middle of an urban area. Russell and his family – including his two adolescent daughters – have

such a sense of belonging and safety in Somerset that the girls feel very comfortable commuting to their schools (Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School and Westland Middle School) and visiting neighborhood events, on foot or by bike.

Russell was a runner and soccer player in Houston but the tropical heat, humidity and air pollution in Delhi made it difficult to engage in those sports. So his interest in swimming began during his years in India, where the Embassy had a gym-size swimming pool. Russell swam for exercise there. Upon his return to Houston, he swam with a Masters group at Rice University. In Somerset, he met **Matt Zaft** (Dorset), chair of the Pool Committee. Together they organized the Somerset Whales, an adult swim team that competes County-wide. During the summer, the team practices at the Somerset pool. Out of season, they use indoor pools in the County and in D.C. Most of the Whales are Dolphin parents. Another brainchild of Matt was the Somerset Pool Olympics, which Russell and **Walt Whalen** (Trent) launched in the summer of 2023. All ages were welcome to participate. The event was such a success that Russell expects to repeat it in the future.

Describing his family as interfaith, Russell grew up Christian Protestant in Houston. His wife Jamie, who works in communications for the electronics industry, comes from a Jewish family in the Baltimore area. His older daughter, who spent her early years in Houston, went to church services with Russell's parents. His second daughter, who was in Somerset at that age, was close to Jamie's family and has been more exposed to Jewish practices and traditions. Although neither Russell nor Jamie is particularly religious, the family does celebrate the important holidays of both faiths. The Green-Kaplan family expects to remain part of our Town for many more years to come.



# Somerset Employee Holiday Fund

## MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Dear Residents,

Our annual holiday fund for thanking Somerset employees has been extremely successful in recent years, and I am asking that the Town recognize our hard-working staff again this year. It is hard to believe that over ten years have gone by, but I began this project in 2012 in response to the many resident calls and emails I had received from residents asking how to properly thank our dedicated staff. I hope that everyone will show their gratitude this year by contributing generously. The pooled monies will be distributed to participating employees on the basis of length of service and responsibility. Other municipalities in the area make the distributions in this manner, which seems fair and equitable. The employees who will share in the funds are:

- The two maintenance employees, Tomas Villanueva and Jose Castillo;
- Security/police personnel, Officers Olcott and Cheoung;
- The Town arborist, Dr. Tolbert Feather; and
- Office Administrator, Linda Williams.

Contributions can be made by check or via Venmo. Residents can Venmo @townofsomerset-md to contribute electronically. Checks should be made payable to the Town of Somerset or cash, with "Holiday Fund" placed on the note line. Checks can be mailed or delivered to the Town Hall, 4510 Cumberland Avenue, Chevy Chase 20815 or left at my residence at 5706 Warwick Place. Enclosed in this month's Journal is an envelope for your use. Due to travel over the holidays, we are extending the deadline this year a little later than usual. **Please send your contributions before 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 2.** Your gifts will be greatly appreciated by those who do so much for us.

Stay tuned for an announcement from the Town Manager on how to contribute to gifts for the postal and trash employees who serve us.

Best wishes for you and your families this holiday season,

Jeffrey Slavin  
Mayor

# House Decoration and Pet Costumes: Special Halloween Events in Somerset

By Maya Weil, Dorset Avenue

## HOUSE DECORATION

Halloween in the Town of Somerset is an especially fun time. We eagerly debate possible winners of the House Decorating Competition as we watch décor go up around Town. This year's judges (see photo) for the Halloween House Decorating Competition consisted of:

- **Alex Acosta** (Essex), resident for more than 20 years
- **Eleanor** and **Caroline Wheatley**, ages 5 and 3, respectively (Dorset)
- **Sylvie Kaplan**, age 6 (Cumberland)
- **Amelia** and **Cece Lawler**, age 9 (Trent, residents for less than 3 years)



The judges debated the merits of the many cleverly decorated houses, placing extra value on homemade creativity. After multiple elimination rounds, three winning houses were chosen:

### Judge's Choice:

"Barbie's Scream House," home of the Hursts at 4922 Dorset Avenue. Décor included details from the Barbie movie like one skeleton wearing a pink cowboy hat and another holding a "I've had Kenough" sign – as well as a tombstone announcing the end of the Patriarchy.



Continued on page 9

## House Decoration and Pet Costumes

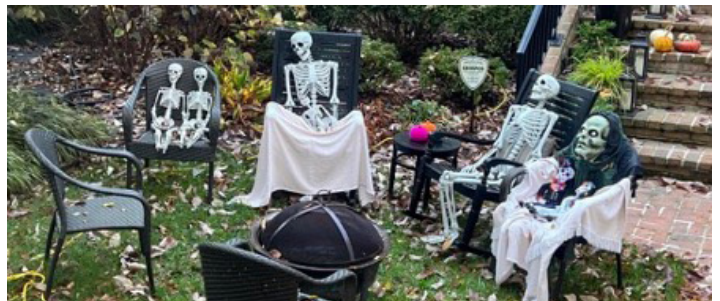
### Most Spooky:

"Scary Red House," home of the Zanders at 4807 Cumberland Avenue. This house was so spooky with the atmospheric red lighting and heads on stakes along the path, that the youngest judges were too scared to even trick-or-treat there.



### Most Creative

"Fire-breathing Dragon House," home of the Green/Kaplans at 4813 Cumberland Avenue. When the front door light was on, it was as if the dragon breathed fire!



There were many homes in Somerset with wonderful details. Thank you to everyone who decorated – see photos for a sample of these.

A long-standing Halloween tradition is the cotton candy given out by **Sarah Morse, Dave Kathan**, Maurie and Greta at 4920 Dorset Avenue. This year, they served 500

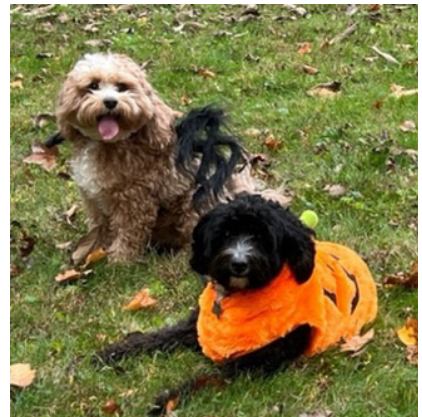
kids (and a few parents too)! Every year, they have kept a tally of the costumes. This year, animals (cows, chickens, cats, and a beautiful moth) topped the list, in contrast to the past three years, during which scary costumes were most frequent. Notable costumes included the trio of "Cereal Killers" including "Unlucky Charms," and a set of girls in Taylor Swift album costumes! Next door, the Hursts with their Barbie Scream House counted almost 800 trick-or-treaters! Creating a loop that included both of these houses at the bottom of Dorset Avenue, the police closed the top and bottom of Cumberland Avenue keeping the kids safe while the road was packed shoulder-to-shoulder with trick-or-treating families. However, if you're already planning for next year, **Anne Hawkins** (Falstone) hinted that those looking to maximize their candy might try #FullSizeFalstone.

*Continued on page 10*

## House Decoration and Pet Costumes

### PET COSTUMES

A fun new activity this year was the Pet Costume Parade in the front yard of 4807 Dorset Avenue. Dogs, kids, and adults gathered to play and admire the costumes on a blustery fall afternoon. See photos below for some examples.



## Florence Gang Turns 103!

Recently, former Somerset resident **Florence Gang** (Falstone) celebrated her 103rd birthday. Florence is pictured here with **Mayor Slavin**, and Somerset resident **Maura Vanderzon** (Falstone).

# Outside Our Gates: A Selection of December Events in Montgomery County

Compiled by Leslie Caplan, Town Journal Editor, Essex Avenue

## THE MUSIC CENTER AT STRATHMORE

5301 Tuckerman Lane, North Bethesda

| EVENT/DATE   | SUGGESTED AUDIENCE                  | FOR MORE INFORMATION  |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| Mannheim Steamroller Christmas, 12/1   | Adults, teens                       | <a href="https://bit.ly/47mxyyZ">https://bit.ly/47mxyyZ</a> |
| The Nutcracker, 12/2   | Adults, older children, teens       | <a href="https://bit.ly/47DnMba">https://bit.ly/47DnMba</a> |
| Seán Heely's Celtic Christmas, 12/8  | Adults, older children, teens       | <a href="https://bit.ly/3R9tZFx">https://bit.ly/3R9tZFx</a> |
| A Candlelight Christmas (The Washington Chorus), 12/15   | Families with older children, teens | <a href="https://bit.ly/3QOSPKr">https://bit.ly/3QOSPKr</a> |
| Handel's Messiah, Baltimore Choral Arts Society & National Philharmonic at Strathmore, 12/16 & 12/17 | Adults, teens                       | <a href="https://bit.ly/47JZLPI">https://bit.ly/47JZLPI</a> |
| The Hip Hop Nutcracker, 12/19-12/21  | Adults, teens                       | <a href="https://bit.ly/3GbCj2i">https://bit.ly/3GbCj2i</a> |

## GLEN ECHO PARK

7300 MacArthur Boulevard, Glen Echo

| EVENT/DATE   | SUGGESTED AUDIENCE  | FOR MORE INFORMATION  |
|--|---------------------|---|
| 35th Annual Nutcracker (The Puppet Company), 11/26-12/31                     | Kids                | <a href="https://bit.ly/3MRaik8">https://bit.ly/3MRaik8</a> |
| Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins (The Puppet Company), 11/30-12/31           | Kids, ages 5+       | <a href="https://bit.ly/3sKqhd6">https://bit.ly/3sKqhd6</a> |
| The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (Adventure Theater), 11/17-1/7         | Kids                | <a href="https://bit.ly/3sLkRP4">https://bit.ly/3sLkRP4</a> |
| Holiday Art Show and Sale (Popcorn Gallery & Stone Tower Gallery), 11/18-1/7 | Adults and families | <a href="https://bit.ly/3QSa7qb">https://bit.ly/3QSa7qb</a> |

## BROOKSIDE GARDENS

Wheaton Regional Park, 1800 Glenallan Avenue, Silver Spring

| EVENT/DATE                                       | SUGGESTED AUDIENCE | FOR MORE INFORMATION  |
|--|--------------------|---|
| Garden of Lights, 11/17-12/31                    | Families           | <a href="https://bit.ly/49M8Byo">https://bit.ly/49M8Byo</a> |
| Garden Railway Exhibit, 11/25-1/1 (closed 12/25) | Families           | <a href="https://bit.ly/3sMe8o8">https://bit.ly/3sMe8o8</a> |

Continued on page 12

## Outside Our Gates: A Selection of December Events

### MONTGOMERY COUNTY LIBRARY: LITTLE FALLS BRANCH

5501 Massachusetts Avenue, Bethesda

| EVENT/DATE   | SUGGESTED AUDIENCE   | FOR MORE INFORMATION  |
|--|--|---|
| Legos, Duplos, and More!<br>12/6, 12/13, 12/20, 12/27,<br>4:00-6:00 p.m. | Preschoolers through<br>tweens (children under<br>8 must be accompanied<br>by adult)           | 12/6: <a href="https://bit.ly/3uuXRo8">https://bit.ly/3uuXRo8</a><br>12/13: <a href="https://bit.ly/40L4UoJ">https://bit.ly/40L4UoJ</a><br>12/20: <a href="https://bit.ly/47lufif">https://bit.ly/47lufif</a><br>12/27: <a href="https://bit.ly/40N8dvs">https://bit.ly/40N8dvs</a> |
| Read to a Dog,<br>12/12, 4:30-5:30 p.m.                                  | Elementary school<br>students, ages 5 and up,<br>who have some ability to<br>read on their own | <a href="https://bit.ly/3slHKCE">https://bit.ly/3slHKCE</a>   |
| Baby Storytime, 12/11  | Babies and toddlers,<br>and their caregivers   | 10:30-11:00 a.m.: <a href="https://bit.ly/3MQbcgU">https://bit.ly/3MQbcgU</a><br>11:00-11:30 a.m.: <a href="https://bit.ly/3sLohBo">https://bit.ly/3sLohBo</a>  |

### MONTGOMERY COUNTY LIBRARY: CONNIE MORELLA (BETHESDA) BRANCH

7400 Arlington Road, Bethesda

| EVENT/DATE  | SUGGESTED AUDIENCE  | FOR MORE INFORMATION  |
|---|---|---|
| Family Storytime,<br>12/2, 11:00-11:30 a.m.   | Children of all ages  | <a href="https://bit.ly/3GajNr1">https://bit.ly/3GajNr1</a>   |
| Toddler Storytime,<br>12/5, 12/12, 12/19  | Toddlers and their<br>grownups  | 12/5:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10:30-11:00 a.m.: <a href="https://bit.ly/3uqTnP9">https://bit.ly/3uqTnP9</a></li> <li>11:15-11:45 a.m.: <a href="https://bit.ly/47nDPKJ">https://bit.ly/47nDPKJ</a></li> </ul> 12/12:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10:30-11:00 a.m.: <a href="https://bit.ly/47qyVws">https://bit.ly/47qyVws</a></li> <li>11:15-11:45 a.m.: <a href="https://bit.ly/49NOz6Q">https://bit.ly/49NOz6Q</a></li> </ul> 12/19:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10:30-11:00 a.m.: <a href="https://bit.ly/3MSqthg">https://bit.ly/3MSqthg</a></li> <li>11:15-11:45 a.m.: <a href="https://bit.ly/3RakPtx">https://bit.ly/3RakPtx</a></li> </ul> |
| Read to a Dog, 12/14, 4:00-5:00   | Elementary school<br>students, ages 5 and up,<br>who have some ability to<br>read on their own                          | <a href="https://bit.ly/3G9FJT7">https://bit.ly/3G9FJT7</a>   |
| LEGO Construction and<br>Duplo Too!<br>12/6, 12/13, 12/20, 12/27,<br>4:00-5:00 p.m. | Children ages 3 years<br>old and up. Caregivers<br>MUST accompany<br>children under the age<br>of 8 during the program. | 12/6: <a href="https://bit.ly/40MRHLQ">https://bit.ly/40MRHLQ</a><br>12/13: <a href="https://bit.ly/3R8G8LM">https://bit.ly/3R8G8LM</a><br>12/20: <a href="https://bit.ly/3R8Gfaa">https://bit.ly/3R8Gfaa</a><br>12/27: <a href="https://bit.ly/3sJdR58">https://bit.ly/3sJdR58</a>   |

Continued on page 14



## A Monthly Review of Town Council's Activities

The Town Council is in the process of evaluating, discussing, and possibly adopting several Code Amendments. Below is a summary of the resolutions and ordinances under consideration.

### Considering for Adoption

*An ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to add intents and purposes; add building height requirements applicable to main and accessory buildings; add definitions; clarify the applicability of existing provision; add a grandfathering provision for buildings; and amend provisions for internal consistency.*

The proposed ordinance seeks to amend the Code of Ordinances with several key provisions aimed at regulating building heights within the Town. Primarily, the amendment addresses the absence of a specific building height requirement in the current Town Code, which presently defers to the County's rule allowing a maximum height of 35 ft. from the average front grade to the roof peak or 30 ft. to the median roof height. The proposed changes establish a 33 ft. limit for maximum building height and a 28 ft. limit for maximum mean building height. Notably, a provision is introduced that permits the maximum building height to reach 35 ft., depending on the height of neighboring houses, reminiscent of the Town's established building line provision. This initiative stems from Town Council discussions regarding concerns raised by residents about new construction being perceived as excessively tall and incongruent with the distinctive characteristics of the community. The ordinance aims to ensure a harmonious architectural landscape by providing clear building height requirements.

The Town will hold a public hearing and the Council may consider the ordinance for adoption at the December Council meeting.

*An ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to revise and clarify stormwater drainage requirements, and to require a permit for a new or replacement driveway*

The Town's existing stormwater code provisions require that new driveways must be built with permeable materials unless the slope of the driveway is greater than 5%. If it

is over 5%, a permeable driveway would no longer be effective. This provision offers clarity on what requirements would exist if a driveway is raised to have a slope greater than 5%. Construction would now need to capture water equivalent to a one-year storm even for the impervious surface area at the pre-construction grade.

The Town will hold a public hearing and the Council may consider the ordinance for adoption at the December Council meeting.

### For Introduction

*A Resolution in support of the Maryland Municipal League (MML) legislative priority advocating for a State bill that would allow municipalities to issue citations for red light cameras; and advocating for municipalities to use stop sign cameras, as recommended by the Traffic Committee*

This Resolution endorses the legislative priority put forth by the MML, advocating for a State bill enabling municipalities to issue citations for red light violations and speeding using cameras, as proposed by the Town Traffic Committee. The current system permits municipalities to employ speed cameras in school zones, with police officers reviewing and certifying the accuracy of captured data before issuing citations. However, MML's proposed legislation seeks to broaden this authority by allowing municipal officials, who are not necessarily police officers, to review and certify speed camera images and sign citations. The resolution urges Council support for the MML bill, emphasizing the potential for enhanced enforcement methods in addressing speeding and stop sign violations, and suggests the drafting of letters to our State Senator and Delegates to communicate Somerset's backing for these measures.

The Town will introduce a Resolution at the December Council meeting, and plan for a public hearing before a potential vote on adoption at the January Council meeting.

*A Resolution establishing a Consent and Release form for the use of residents' photographs in media, as recommended by the Communications Committee*

*Continued on page 14*

## Outside Our Gates: A Selection of December Events

### VARIOUS LOCATIONS

| EVENT/DATE   | SUGGESTED AUDIENCE  | FOR MORE INFORMATION  |
|--|---------------------|---|
| <b>NORFOLK AVENUE STREETERY</b>   Norfolk and Cordell Avenues, Bethesda                              |                     |   |
| Bethesda's Winter Wonderland, 12/2   | Families            | <a href="https://bit.ly/3MTDmaT">https://bit.ly/3MTDmaT</a> |
| <b>7 LOCKS BREWERY</b>   12227 Wilkins Ave., Rockville   |                     |   |
| Sixx Cool Moms Winter Market, 12/2   | Adults and families | <a href="https://bit.ly/481xmVR">https://bit.ly/481xmVR</a> |
| <b>CLARA BARTON NEIGHBORHOOD RECREATIONAL CENTER</b>   7426 MacArthur Blvd, Bethesda                 |                     |   |
| Clara Barton Holiday Craft Show, 12/3  | Adults and families | <a href="https://bit.ly/3R8Eji5">https://bit.ly/3R8Eji5</a> |
| <b>SILVER SPRING CIVIC CENTER</b>   1 Veterans Place, Silver Spring                                  |                     |   |
| Annual Women-Owned Holiday Market, 12/10   | Adults and families | <a href="https://bit.ly/47I7RIR">https://bit.ly/47I7RIR</a> |
| <b>BETHESDA THEATER</b>   7719 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda  |                     |   |
| New Year's Eve Party with EU Featuring Sugar Bear, 12/31   | Adults              | <a href="https://bit.ly/47o2HSy">https://bit.ly/47o2HSy</a> |
| <b>IMAGINATION STAGE</b>   4908 Auburn Avenue, Bethesda  |                     |   |
| A Year with Frog and Toad, 11/15/-1/7  | Kids, ages 4+       | <a href="https://bit.ly/3R8CKk2">https://bit.ly/3R8CKk2</a> |
| <b>ROUTE STARTS AT ROCKVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT STATION</b> , 380 Hungerford Drive, Rockville |                     |   |
| Chanukah Fire Truck Parade (Organized by Chabad Lubavitch of Upper Montgomery County), 12/11         | Families            | <a href="https://bit.ly/49JE04C">https://bit.ly/49JE04C</a> |
| <b>CABIN JOHN REGIONAL PARK</b>   10610 Westlake Drive, Rockville                                    |                     |   |
| Cabin John Winter Ice Show, 12/16  | Families            | <a href="https://bit.ly/3uysMj5">https://bit.ly/3uysMj5</a> |

## On the Docket

The Communications Committee has proposed a Resolution to address concerns regarding the potential unauthorized use of residents' photographs, particularly those of children, in the Town Journal. The aim is to establish a formal Consent and Release form. This document would serve as a protective measure, ensuring that individuals have the opportunity to grant explicit permission for the use of their likeness in the Town Journal. The overarching goal is to uphold privacy standards and instill a sense of transparency and consent in the publication of residents' images.

The Town will introduce a Resolution at the December Council meeting, and plan for a public hearing before a potential vote on adoption at the January Council meeting.

*A Resolution establishing Reasonable Accommodation procedures*

The proposed Resolution aims to institute formal Reasonable Accommodation procedures within the

Town Council, allowing for the systematic consideration of requests from individuals with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Developed in collaboration with the Town of Somerset's Town Attorney, the policy draws inspiration from the successful implementation of a similar framework in the Town of Chevy Chase, which aligns with ADA requirements. Leveraging the well-received model from Chevy Chase, the Resolution provides a structured and transparent process for applicants, ensuring compliance with ADA regulations. Notably, the Town has encountered two reasonable accommodation requests in the past year, making this Resolution a crucial step in standardizing, codifying, and offering clear guidance on a process the Town is already legally obligated to follow.

The Town will introduce a Resolution at the December Council meeting, and plan for a public hearing before a potential vote on adoption at the January Council meeting.

# Holiday Donation Opportunities

By **Matt Trollinger**, *Town Manager*

It is that time of year again when we can help spread the joy of the holidays to those less fortunate. This year, we will be partnering with two local nonprofits for a Toy Drive and a Food Drive.

## Toy Drive (in partnership with the Bethesda Fire Department)

We will collect unwrapped toys in a labeled box at the Town Hall through Monday, December 18. Toys will be brought in on a nightly basis and delivered Tuesday, December 19 to the Bethesda Fire Department. All toys will be given to local children and families to help ensure that all children receive gifts this holiday season.

What kind of toys can be donated?

- New
- Not wrapped
- Books are also needed!
- Gifts for children aged 0-2 are particularly needed

What kinds of toys should be avoided?

- Used toys
- Toys that look like realistic weapons
- Toys with candy or food
- Toys with chemicals (e.g., experimental labs, etc.)

Toys can be delivered to the Somerset Town Hall, or directly to Fire Station 6 at the corner of Wisconsin Avenue and Bradley Boulevard.

## Food Drive (in partnership with Manna Food Center)

Once again, Somerset will collect and donate to Manna Food Center. The same deadline applies here as to the Toy Drive: the last drop off date is Monday, December 18, and a delivery will be made on Tuesday, December 19.

What kinds of foods are most needed?

- Grains
  - Instant oatmeal packets, especially original flavor
  - Brown rice
  - Whole grain pasta
- Protein
  - Canned tuna, salmon, or chicken (preferably in water)
  - Dry or canned beans (preferably low sodium)
  - Natural nut butters
- Fruits and Vegetables
  - Canned vegetables (preferably low sodium)
  - Canned fruit (in juice)
  - Fruit cups
- Other healthy items
  - Shelf-stable individual milk boxes
  - Cooking oil and spices
  - Infant formula and baby foods





# Notes from Mayor Slavin's Desk

By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin

**Halloween report:** Surprisingly, I had only 80 trick-or-treaters — mostly Somerset youth and their friends. Last year, despite the on-and-off heavy rain, I received over 100 trick-or-treaters. Three years ago, pre-COVID, I had 318 young people at the door and the following year about a third of that. It is my understanding that this year, many residents of Cumberland still had loads of kids. In 2024, I propose again putting together a task force to do some planning so that there is some equity and inclusion for the holiday. The citizens on Cumberland Avenue have been overly burdened for years. We also might want to think about “trunk or treating” (see <https://bit.ly/40Pwggp>.) or having households sign up in advance with a map. Closing Dorset Avenue, as some have proposed, could create a hazard for emergency vehicles; if we consider this approach, I will ask the Public Safety Committee to weigh in. Special Kudos to **Maya Weil** (Dorset) and her band of volunteers for establishing the wonderful house decorating contest (see also page 8).

I am still looking for input on revamping our Town entrances and there will be preliminary plans available for review by early next year. (For a start, see photos on page 4 of the recent improvements at the Town entrance at Greystone Street and River Road.)

We are also announcing plans for our annual holiday fund by which we thank our tremendous Town employees who work so hard for us throughout the year — see page 7 for more information. I wanted to mention this now as I know that our well-prepared residents are already writing out their giving lists because Christmas, Channukah and Kwanzaa are just around the corner.

Wonderful Thanksgiving wishes to all — and safe travels throughout the holiday season. The Town Council, staff, and I want to express our gratitude for all — especially those who serve on Town committees — who help us run an efficient government.

## 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 301-717-8083 (2/23)

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 301-717-8083 (2/23)

*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.*

## GENERAL PERMITS

### DEMOLITION PERMIT

- 5528 Trent Street – Demolish the house as approved by Council

### TREE REMOVAL PERMITS

- 5820 Surrey Street – White Oak (26”) – Tree is dead
- 5518 Greystone Street – Tulip Poplar (37”) – Tree is dropping limbs and is dangerous to resident and neighbors
- 5015 River Road – Norway Spruce (12”) – The spruce is dying with 50% live canopy and will not revive.

### FENCE PERMIT

- 4801 Essex Avenue



# Manager's Corner

By Matt Trollinger, *Town Manager*

Throughout November, the Town has provided leaf vacuuming services via Wray Brothers Landscapes. In addition to leaf vacuuming, Wray Brothers has kept this practice as environmentally friendly as practicable, raking leaves to the vacuum and recycling leaves so that they can be used as a natural fertilizer. This service will continue through December 15.

Similarly, with winter right around the corner, we will soon pivot from leaves on the ground to snow. Once again, snow removal services will be provided by Mulheron Tree Experts. In addition to plowing the streets and shoveling sidewalks, Mulheron last year became equipped with a brine solution that will effectively keep the road from freezing, while using only a fraction of salt that can be harmful to our four-legged friends' feet and ultimately wind up in the Bay. These two services illustrate that the Town is committed to providing the basic services that residents have come to expect while staying environmentally conscious.

In the same spirit of environmentalism, the Town has made major progress on two significant projects over the past month. The first is that the Town completed its installation of solar panels at the Town Hall (see Environment Committee Chair Barton Rubenstein's article on page 4 for more information). The second is that installation of the LED streetlights began, starting on Cumberland Avenue. Through Pepco, using a contractor, all streetlights throughout Somerset will be replaced with energy-efficient LED streetlights, reducing the Town's energy consumption by roughly 75%. The installations will be done in three phases, targeted primarily on traffic and proximity of planned locations. Phase 1 will include Cumberland Avenue and Dorset Avenue and their connecting streets, selected mainly because of the importance of the main Town entrances along Dorset Avenue. Phase 2 will include Greystone Street (site of the other primary Town entrance), and its connecting streets. And finally, Phase 3 will include the interior streets in Somerset. We expect the whole installation to be completed over the next six months.

## Pool Construction

Another major project underway is at the Town Pool, where the deck and piping are being replaced due to their old age. The project remains on track, as the weather has cooperated, and we have run into no major "surprises."

The weather will continue to be a factor in the winter and especially into early spring when the concrete is to be poured.

As of this writing, the pipes supplying the pool have been dug out and replaced, and the concrete pool deck has been removed, along with all the infrastructure on top of the deck (diving board, railings, light fixtures, etc.). The Town has passed its initial trench inspection with Montgomery County and is currently installing electrical lines and potable water lines back in place.

## Ordinances and Policies

I encourage everyone to read the summaries provided in the *On the Docket* column (see page 13), which goes over the Code Amendments and Resolutions that the Council is currently considering. In addition to those listed, the Council is also in the beginning stages of considering other important issues, including impervious surface restrictions and the future of police services in Town. I encourage residents to stay informed by following the agenda and Council actions which are sent out in weekly email blasts, reading the Town Journal, and checking in on the Town website. Resident input is a valuable and important part of good decision-making!

## Holidays

December is, of course, a big holiday month, and will affect our Town Hall. The Town Hall will be closed on Christmas Day, Monday, December 25, and we may have limited availability around that time as the staff celebrates the holidays with our families who live all around the country — and the world. Thank you in advance for your patience and understanding, and we will monitor to ensure that we stay on top of any storms and other developments that need immediate attention, and do our best to stay as responsive as possible.

Finally, I would like to draw extra attention to Mayor Slavin's holiday fund message (see page 7). While I do not personally participate in the holiday fund, I encourage residents to consider contributing. It is the Town's way of giving a "bonus" to Office Administrator **Linda Williams**, the maintenance staff, and some of our dedicated contractor-staff. Every year they are grateful for your generosity.

Happy holidays to any and all who celebrate.

# Council Meeting Actions

The Council took the following actions at the Monday, November 6 meeting:

- Approved the appointment of **Lucy Freeman** (Falstone) to the Public Safety Committee (term ending Dec. 2025)
- Approved the appointment of **Cinzia Furlanetto** (Dorset) to the Environment Committee (term ending Dec. 2025)
- Approved a tree removal application submitted by **Hayley** and **Karl Blunden** for the removal of a dead tree (White Oak, 26") at the property located at 5820 Surrey Street
- Approved a tree removal application submitted by **Brian** and **Rebecca Pilot** for the removal of a tree (Tulip Poplar, 37") at the property located at 5518 Greystone Street
- Approved the fall tree planting list, as recommended by the Town Arborist and Parks and Natural Resources Committee (full list available online; see <https://bit.ly/47nEEDj>)
- Introduced an ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to provide that notice of building permit applications will be issued by the Town; to delete the neighbor signature sheet requirement; and to change the application processing deadline
  - The Ordinance will be considered for Adoption at the December Council meeting
- Introduced ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to provide that notice of planned removals of trees in the public right-of-way will be issued by the Town to abutting owners
  - The Ordinance will be considered for Adoption at the December Council meeting
- Adopted an ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to revise and clarify stormwater drainage requirements, and to require a permit for a new or replacement driveway
- Re-Introduced but did not Adopt an ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to add intents and purposes; add building height requirements applicable to main and accessory buildings; add definitions; clarify the applicability of existing provision; add a grandfathering provision for buildings; and amend provisions for internal consistency
  - The Ordinance will be considered for adoption at the December Council meeting, pending further discussion



# For Your Reference

## TOWN OF SOMERSET COMMITTEES AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

| COMMITTEE          | CHAIR                             | COMMITTEE                 | CHAIR                      |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Audit              | Chuck Edson (Surrey)              | Parks & Natural Resources | Josh Rosenthal (River)     |
| Budget             | Ann Kelly Bolten (Cumberland)     | Pool                      | Matt Zaft (Dorset)         |
| Communications     | Leslie Caplan (Essex)             | Public Safety             | Kumar Vaswani (Trent)      |
| Environment        | Barton Rubenstein (Dorset)        | Revenue                   | Nick Fox (Cumberland)      |
| Equity & Inclusion | Atsuko Horiguchi (Essex)          | Swim Team                 | Dario Fuentes (Cumberland) |
| History & Archives | Paige Whitley (Cumberland)        | Tennis                    | Carrie Wofford (Essex)     |
| Newcomers          | Phyllis Wiesenfelder (Cumberland) | Traffic                   | Elizabeth Hurwit (Dorset)  |

## TOWN COUNCIL CALENDAR 2023

### COUNCIL MEETINGS

(All times at 7:00 p.m.)

- Mon., December 4

### WORK SESSIONS

(All times at 5:30 p.m.)

- Mon., December 18

## LINKS TO COMMITTEE-PROVIDED RESOURCES

### STORMWATER STUDY COMMITTEE

<https://bit.ly/3QQkCvR>

- Committee Report to Mayor & Town Council: <https://bit.ly/46FBRUZ>
- FAQs for Somerset Residents: <https://bit.ly/47I3RYL>
- Resource Guide to Green Infrastructure: <https://bit.ly/3QPkTNZ>
- LIDC Final Report – Green Stormwater Infrastructure Master Plan – 1/20/2022: <https://bit.ly/3QH58s4>
- Recording of May 10, 2022 Stormwater Study Committee Town Forum: <https://bit.ly/3Fx71CM>

### ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

<https://bit.ly/45FAghD>

- Ban on Certain Pesticides: <https://bit.ly/3MVYQUt>
- Resolution Declaring Climate Emergency: <https://bit.ly/47Kign8>
- Sierra Club Maryland Mayors for 100% Clean Energy Pledge: <https://bit.ly/3s593qr>
- Fossil Fuel No-Proliferation Treaty: <https://fossilfuel treaty.org>

- Ban on Gas-Powered Blowers: see Chapter 140, section 3 (§140-3) of the Town Code (<https://bit.ly/3LDF1xR>)
- Recording of June 7, 2022 Bee Forum: <https://youtu.be/VTqMlxCn-xU7>

### EQUITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

<https://bit.ly/3qMoblz>

- Resolution Condemning Anti-AAPI Hate: <https://bit.ly/3QMhb7H>
- Recording of January 18, 2022 Slavery & Segregation History Forum Recording: <https://bit.ly/3MHSV3o>
- Declaration of Inclusion: <https://bit.ly/3qMoblz>
- Resolution denouncing Anti-Semitism: <https://bit.ly/3sLZNrD>
- Resolution supporting Black Lives Matter: <https://bit.ly/40RDRI4>

### COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

- Somerset Resource Guide <https://bit.ly/459MgHK>
- Somerset Town Journal <https://bit.ly/3urVeDz>

## VIDEO RECORDINGS OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

All Town Council and Work Session meetings are available for viewing on the Town of Somerset YouTube channel:

<https://bit.ly/3Uq7Tz4>

# Preliminary Agenda

(The final agenda is available and emailed to Town residents on the Friday before the monthly Council Meeting.)

## Regular Somerset Town Council Meeting December 4, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.

The Somerset Town Council will hold a "hybrid meeting," both in-person at the Town Hall and simultaneously cast via Zoom on Monday, December 4, 2023 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://bit.ly/3TEP2Av> Meeting ID: 836 4271 5125 Passcode: 287338

Dial by your location: +1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)

### Somerset Town Council

- Steve Surko, Council President
- Robin Barr
- Debbie Heller
- Kabir Kumar
- Shannon Rovak

#### PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

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

#### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

7:05 p.m. **Motion:** To consider approval of agenda as presented

#### CONSENT AGENDA

7:06 p.m. **Motion:** To consider the following agenda items:

- Minutes from the November 6, 2023 Council Meeting
- 2024 Town Council Meeting calendar
- The appointment of Youth Council members (applications still being accepted at the time of journal submission)

#### NON-CONSENT AGENDA

7:05 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of a permit application for the construction of a rear-yard deck, and the relocation of an HVAC unit on the property located at 5529 Surrey Street, as submitted by **Robert Herman**

7:15 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of a building permit amendment request submitted by **James Gillis** and **Alison Hooker** for the extension of a front porch on the property located at 4816 Essex Avenue. The applicant is seeking two variances from Sec. 11-14(C)(1)(c) of the Town Code as part of the application amendment:

1. A 10.3' variance from the front setback for the extension of the existing non-conforming front porch; and
2. A 7.8' variance from the front setback for the extension of the existing non-conforming eave.

7:35 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** Building Administrator's Report

7:40 p.m. **Motion:** To consider the introduction of a Resolution establishing a Consent and Release form for the use of residents' photographs in media, as recommended by the Communications Committee

7:45 p.m. **Motion:** To consider the Introduction of a Resolution establishing Reasonable Accommodation procedures

7:50 p.m. **Motion:** To consider the Introduction of a Resolution in support of the Maryland Municipal League legislative priority advocating for a State bill that would allow municipalities to issue citations for red light cameras; and advocating for municipalities to use stop sign cameras, as recommended by the Traffic Committee

7:55 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider the Adoption of an ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to add intents and purposes; add building height requirements applicable to main and accessory buildings; add definitions; clarify the applicability of existing provision; add a grandfathering provision for buildings; and amend provisions for internal consistency

8:15 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider the Adoption of an ordinance to amend the Code of Ordinances to provide that notice of planned removals of trees in the public right-of-way will be issued by the Town to abutting owners

8:30 p.m. **Discussion:** Manager/Staff Report

8:40 p.m. **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.