



SomerSet TOWN JOURNAL



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March 2023

LED Streetlights Are Coming to Somerset— But Challenges Abound

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

Last year, building on the outstanding work of our Town's Environment Committee and its chair, **Barton Rubenstein** (Dorset), the Public Safety Committee (PSC) proposed that the Town Council appropriate \$235,000 for the conversion of our current streetlights to LEDs (light emitting diodes). The Council approved the PSC recommendation, and our excellent **Town Manager Matthew Trollinger** and Council Member **Robin Barr** (Essex) are leading the charge to convert our lights.

Converting to LEDs could provide several public safety benefits. As former PSC Chair **Bruce Tully** (Warwick) noted last year, "New Pepco LED streetlights will not only benefit all of our residents but be better for our environment, reduce our town energy bill and go far to assist your safety in the overnight hours" (from *Town Journal*, January 2022, <https://bit.ly/3xIQkQF>).

But this monumental change will affect our Town's residents and wildlife for years to come and poses numerous challenges. For starters, Pepco has not disclosed specifications of the lights we will receive. The devil is in the details.



Characteristics of the light itself matter. For example:

- **Brightness and glare.** Lights that are too bright or that produce too much glare can actually blind drivers or make it harder to get a description of a fleeing criminal.
- **Color temperature is critical.** Higher color temperature bulbs emit more blue light and have a whiter, more

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MARCH 2023 TOWN CALENDAR

(Stay tuned for Town Hall email announcements of other committee meetings and events in March)

MONDAY, MARCH 6

Town Council Meeting
7:00 p.m., Town Hall (in person)
and via Zoom^o*

MONDAY, MARCH 13

Council Work Session
(Budget)
5:30 p.m., Town Hall (in person)
and via Zoom^o*

MONDAY, MARCH 13

Pool Committee Meeting
7:30 p.m., via Zoom*

MONDAY, MARCH 20

Council Work Session
(Budget)
5:30 p.m., Town Hall (in person)
and via Zoom^o*

^oThe Town Council has instituted "hybrid" meetings starting in September, to allow residents to attend both in-person at the Town Hall, or to continue to participate via Zoom.

*Login information for Zoom meetings will be sent via email the week prior to the meeting. Residents may also email town@townofsomerset.com for login and dial-in information.

CONTACT SOMERSET

MAYOR

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

TOWN COUNCIL

Steve Surko, Council President
5500 Uppingham Street
301-656-5004
ssurko@townofsomerset.com

Robin Barr
4706 Essex Avenue
301-656-7358
rbarr@townofsomerset.com

Debbie Heller
4803 Falstone Avenue
301-654-5497
dheller@townofsomerset.com

Kabir Kumar
5415 Trent Street
202-830-4905
kkumar@townofsomerset.com

Shannon Rovak
4517 Cumberland Avenue
608-334-2306
Srovak@townofsomerset.com

TOWN MANAGER

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

TOWN ARBORIST

Tolbert Feather
town@townofsomerset.com

TOWN HALL

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

SOMERSET TOWN JOURNAL

EDITOR

Leslie Caplan
LeslieCaplan.townjournal@gmail.com

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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)

SEA COLONY - BETHANY BEACH - OCEAN FRONT APARTMENT - EDGEWATER BUILDING: 2 bedrooms plus 1 tiny one with bunk bed and 2 full baths. Immaculate and all updated. Has a few summer weeks available. Contact **Luba Marx** at 301-233-2727 (7/22)

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.

LED Streetlights Are Coming to Somerset—But Challenges Abound

“clinical” appearance. Lower color temperature bulbs appear “warmer.” Medical experts have warned about the detrimental effects of blue light on humans and wildlife. (According to experts, it is the blue light in our phones and tablets that disrupts our sleep.)

- While opinions differ, the Sierra Club recommends a color temperature of 2700 K (Kelvin) <https://bit.ly/3lp3NCp>. A 2700 K bulb would still have a higher color temperature—and appear whiter—than the current “orange-ish” high pressure sodium lights that predominate in Somerset.

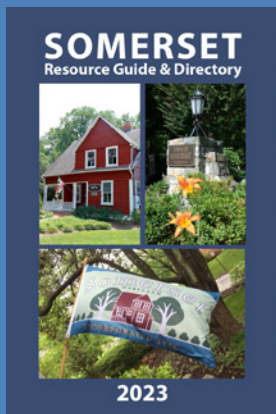
Municipalities that have engaged in a transparent and informed conversion process have benefited from public input. For example, when Washington, D.C., residents complained about the harsh glare of demonstration LED lights, the city took a step back, formed a citizen advisory panel, and chose 2700 K to light residential streets last year. Los Angeles, Davis (Calif.), and Phoenix have also selected 2700 K.

At its February meeting, after receiving public input, the PSC recommended that the Town Council:

- **Obtain the specifications for the LEDs that Pepco plans to install in Town.**
- **Solicit residents’ suggestions for additional lights in dark areas of Town.** The PSC has identified several “dark spots” that could benefit from new lights. Residents may have additional suggestions.
- **Consider installing additional lights — and situate them lower to the ground — specifically for sidewalks.** Our streetlights are often above the tree canopy, so they sometimes fail to light the sidewalk.

Our LED conversion could offer significant benefits. There’s no reason we can’t obtain vastly improved lighting while still protecting both the environment and human health.

If you’d like more information, please contact me at kumarvas655@gmail.com.



The new *Somerset Resource Guide and Directory* is out!

Have you received yours in the mail? If you have not received it, or if you have questions, please contact Linda Williams, Administrative Assistant, at town@townofsomerset.com or 301-657-3211.

Brian Frosh Retires As Maryland Attorney General

By John Barry, Member, Communications Committee,
Cumberland Avenue

PART 2

[Editor's note: The first part of this two-article series appeared in the February 2023 issue of the Town Journal (see <https://bit.ly/3Z6VYrC>). Both articles are based on an interview with Brian Frosh. All quotations are Mr. Frosh's.]



To **Brian Frosh** (Grantham), now retired as Maryland's Attorney General (AG), daily commutes to his Baltimore office were a voyage between worlds: from the prosperity of Somerset to a city where tens of thousands are "ground down by poverty."

Too few of us, he believes, grasp those grim realities.

"There are many in our state who are poor, desperately poor. We have whole neighborhoods where people live in extreme poverty. Folk who don't know where they are going to sleep tonight. Folk who have jobs, but worry if their kids get sick, they can't afford to take time off to get them to a doctor — that's if they have any healthcare."

Among Baltimore's nearly 600,000 residents, one in five lives in poverty — one in four if they are Black, one in three under 18. And those 2021 Census estimates, Frosh says, don't capture the devastation of COVID.

He points to office blocks around the AG's building. "Remote working meant that month after month they were empty. The snack bars, the restaurants, the little shops depending on those absent workers have been decimated and with them their jobs. It's hard to recover from something like that."

The consequences? "There are places that are becoming uninhabitable. In Baltimore City, you see whole blocks where house after house is vacant, boarded up. Brick houses. Without jobs, the tenants couldn't afford the rent, so they were evicted. What were homes are now occupied by squatters, and with them come the associated crimes of drugs and prostitution. Vacant housing leads to crime. Pretty soon you have areas in irreversible decline."

Even before COVID, Frosh saw the State government increasingly unable to cope. Only on taking office did

Governor Wes Moore's team learn that 6,500 positions in the state's executive agencies are unfilled — 900 in Health; nearly 1000 in Human Services; almost 400 in Juvenile Services. Other departments are another 1000 short. A further 2,500 State jobs had been eliminated during former Governor Larry Hogan's administration.

As AG, Frosh could combat poverty only indirectly. Conscious of the spiraling catastrophe of a low-income family losing its breadwinner, he fought "the criminalization of poverty." He persuaded judges to eliminate cash bail for defendants who weren't violent or a flight risk. For those ultimately found guilty of minor offences, he urged judges to consider non-custodial sentences. He also learned that drivers late in paying traffic-related fines had been losing their licenses. Frosh pushed through legislation to abolish that practice, at least for non-life-threatening offenses: "For a lot of people, it was a killer. If they didn't pay, the fines increased. But for many it was a choice between paying the fine or paying the rent, or paying the fine and putting food on the table. And what if they had to drive to work, or to take their kids to school?" His decision gave 130,000 Marylanders their licenses back.

His most enduring struggle was against rapacious landlords. Frosh discovered that for every 1000 rented units in Maryland, 925 notices of eviction were being filed in court each year — an astounding rate, the highest in the country.

Why? The overarching reason, he realized, was a practice common among Maryland's landlords. Minority tenants, Frosh found, were worst hit. "Those 925 writs weren't against 925 tenants. They were suing the same tenants time after time." The consequences? "Yes, some tenants were struggling. Others just had pay-days, or got their Social Security checks, later in the month. But if you were five days late with the rent, they would issue a writ on the sixth day. And do the same the next month and every month. And each time, put an extra five percent on

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Brian Frosh Retires As Maryland Attorney General

that month's rent for late payment." In 2019, Frosh sued Westminster Management, the most relentless landlord, for multiple violations of tenants' rights; last September, Westminster (while admitting no wrongdoing) agreed to a fine of \$3.25 million.

That was Frosh's last victory. Now, from retirement, he sees "a scary prospect." "Federal housing assistance has dried up. For three years, it's been helping folk pay the rent.

Now it's stopped. I think there's going to be a tidal wave of evictions."

But evictions, he points out, are symptoms of deeper troubles. "Billions and billions of dollars have gone from the Federal Government for rent relief. And it hasn't solved the problem." To really impact poverty, he says, "the basics need to be in place." He ticks them off: "Housing, healthcare, food, education." Pause. "I think we are failing in all of them."

2023 TENNIS FEES

Please pay your 2023 Tennis Fees to Town Hall
\$25 per family

TWO WAYS TO PAY:

- (1) Drop off a check or cash to Town Hall or
- (2) Pay by Venmo: @TownofSomerset-MD. Be sure to write "Tennis Fees" and your name and address in the "notes" section, so the Town knows what the payment is for.

How Somerset Won Its School

By Patricia Barry, Member, History and Archives Committee, Cumberland Avenue

In January 1928, a few Somerset mothers braved wintry weather to go door to door throughout Somerset, Friendship Heights and the communities now known as Kenwood and Chevy Chase West to determine how many children of elementary school age lived in the area. Their purpose was to convince the County education authorities that a new school was desperately needed.

At that time, most Somerset children attended the overcrowded E.V. Brown school on Connecticut Avenue in D.C. They hiked a mile across Wisconsin Avenue (which then had no sidewalks), across open fields and a stream, and past an open sewage dump. "Somerset mothers often organized relay services to see the children safely home," one resident later noted.



Original Somerset Elementary School. In later years, the school was frequently improved and extended with new buildings; the original block was demolished in 1971.

From Simmons, L.A., & Harman, D.K. (2005). Somerset: One Hundred Years a Town, Arcadia Publishing, Charleston SC. Page 55.



Edna Gish, with her son Donald.

From Simmons, L.A., & Harman, D.K. (2005). Somerset: One Hundred Years a Town, Arcadia Publishing, Charleston SC. Page 56.

The mother who led the survey, **Edna Miller Gish** (formerly Essex), acted fast. On February 6, she persuaded a meeting of Somerset Town Council to urge the Montgomery County Board of Education to establish a new school. By then, she had already:

- demonstrated that over 330 eligible children lived in the area;
- discussed the issue with the County's Superintendent of

Schools, citing his preferred policy of small schools located within walking distance of students' homes; and

- opened talks with a land agent to purchase a lot owned by Grace Shepherd Merchant (daughter of a notorious D.C. governor) at the top of Cumberland Avenue.

The project then progressed rapidly. In May, the County bought Mrs. Merchant's land for \$38,500, with the stipulation that her house there would not be demolished

until January 1, 1929. In the late summer of 1928, with the school still being built, her porch was used to enroll its first students. In October, the eight-room building was still not finished, but it opened with 138 students and six teachers.

The school's first principal – the beloved Kathryn Bricker, who ran it for 37 years – later described the red brick building as "hideous." She recalled that it had no paint or ceiling lights and only two lavatories. But the community finally had its own school, and Mrs. Bricker soon introduced a then-novel policy that brought the community even closer together: She insisted that PTA meetings be held in the evenings instead of afternoons, so that fathers could attend.

Edna Gish, who in 1928 also became the first woman elected to Somerset Town Council, is now recognized as the energizing force in the establishment of Somerset Elementary. Trained as a scientist, she graduated with a master's degree in chemistry from the University of Nebraska on June 9, 1915, and married Oliver Holmes Gish, a noted geophysicist and one of her former professors, later that same day. They lived on Essex Avenue, from 1922 to 1944, when he worked at the Carnegie Institution, and raised their four children there. Later they moved to Florida and finally to Athens, Georgia. But Mrs. Gish never forgot Somerset. After she died in 1990, just short of her 101st birthday, her family gave a generous bequest to the school in her honor.

SOMERSET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WILL SOON HAVE A NEW PRINCIPAL

Travis Wiebe is a 20-year veteran of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) elementary schools. He will be taking over from Cynthia Houston, who came from semi-retirement last September to serve as acting principal after problems at the school. With degrees from American University and Johns Hopkins, Mr. Wiebe has taught at Burning Tree Elementary School, was assistant principal at Wood Acres Elementary School, and principal at 700-student Wyngate Elementary School in Bethesda 2016-2021. He was then promoted to run MCPS's recruitment and training of teachers. But he told Somerset parents, who met him during MCPS's search for a new principal, that he had applied to leave administration and get back to working with students.



From <https://bit.ly/3Kvkyyc>

A Second Childhood

By Atsuko Horiguchi, Essex Avenue



As crocuses peek-a-boo on Essex Avenue, I begin to anticipate spring, the season of rebirth. I wonder if you've had this fantasy: *What if I could redo my youth, but with the wisdom that I have now?* A year ago, I learned that you can be born again – no religious awakening required – in my own cultural heritage.

Who knew that in Japan, all that's needed to be a child again is to stay alive to see your 60th birthday? I was about to cross that milestone when I made this serendipitous discovery. Staying alive that long used to be a rarity, even in Japan, where the current life expectancy is 88 years for women, 82 for men. Compare these to the numbers immediately after WWII: 54 for women, 50 for men. Statistically, I would have been dead six years already.

In Japan, your 60th birthday is called *kan-reki*, *return-calendar*, a major celebratory occasion. Once you return to your unique [zodiac animal + natural element] combination, you start a new life cycle. Let me explain.

Growing up in Japan, I knew the 12-year Chinese zodiac cycle, each year represented by an animal. My father and I were Tigers, born 36 years apart; my mother was a Wild Boar; my siblings a Sheep and a Horse. Zodiac animals were sometimes evoked to explain a personality quirk. If my mother was acting stubborn, someone might say, "such a wild boar she is." We were called Year Woman (*toshi-*

onna) or Year Man (*toshi-otoko*) every 12 years: at age 12, 24, 36, etc.

What I *didn't* know was that the zodiac interacted with five natural elements: earth, fire, metal, water, and wood. The elements were assigned to the 12 animal signs, creating 60 characteristic combinations. I was a Water-Tiger, a combination last seen in 1962. If you live to cycle through all 60 combinations, you get to be a baby again. Babies in Japan are called *aka-chan*, little red ones. So for your 60th birthday, you wear a red hat, a red vest, sit on a red cushion, and you are fed festive food.

I was ridiculously happy to learn about this tradition. For my 60th, I decided, *everybody* would wear red. Because of COVID, I kept my celebration modest in scale but obsessive in the red theme. I was giddy with excitement.

The celebrations came and went, but I've continued to embrace my second childhood — celebrating the sheer miracle of being alive. I've welcomed every chance to learn and do new things with a sense of wonder: I've jumped off a 25-foot pole, read *The Iliad* out loud with a friend (in Oslo, via weekly Zoom), gone go-karting with my teenager, taken my first voice lessons. Soon, I'm headed to Telluride CO, hoping to step up my skiing. I'm enrolled in a moguls camp and a women's ski clinic, where my instructor is 62, and fellow participants range in age from 39 to 74.

To all the Water Rabbits (born in 1963) out there: Happy 60th Birthday, and a happy second childhood to you!

Atsuko Horiguchi is a facilitator, leadership coach, and pianist. She is the inaugural Chair of Somerset's Equity and Inclusion Committee.



Neighbor News

Your "Wild Neighbors"

As many residents have observed, Somerset is home to many species of wildlife. The following excerpt from the Town Highlights section of the recently released *Somerset Resource Guide* describes these neighbors (see page 3 for the announcement regarding the *Resource Guide*):

We are a Tree City U.S.A. Somerset has been a Tree City for many years. We love our beautiful tree-lined streets and our well-established urban forest. Our trees protect our air quality, abate noise, mitigate stormwater runoff, and provide habitat for our wildlife. We share our home with roving platoons of deer, two or possibly three families of foxes, and perhaps even an elusive coyote, while rabbits munch contentedly on our lawns — and all too often on our roses and lilies. Above us we see and hear turkey vultures, two sorts of hawk, the Eastern wild turkeys unique to Maryland, barred owls exchanging hunting cries in the night, posses of crows, and even that blue heron waiting motionless for lunch in Little Falls

Branch. There is a kaleidoscope of garden visitors: blue jays, cardinals, the occasional oriole, catbirds, and a ceaseless myriad of sparrows and wrens. The Somerset we are privileged to see every day is home to so many more families than our own.



Many Somerset residents who participate on a community listserv have enjoyed a video posted by **Peter Dewees** (Warwick), showing the activity of animals who visited his yard, set to music. If you missed it the first time, here it is again (thanks to Peter): <https://youtu.be/vh68SKnZtk>. Look for raccoons, foxes, deer, and opossums!

[Editor's Note: The Town Journal encourages Somerset residents to submit Neighbor News articles (not longer than 300-500 words) to share news about neighbors (including themselves) with others in the Town. Please send your submission to the Editor, Leslie Caplan at lesliecaplan.townjournal@gmail.com. You may include photos to accompany your submission.]



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

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

Send an email to HHSomerset@gmail.com or call **Barbara Zeughauser** at 202-368-9986 **Kathleen Kenyon** at 202-368-9986 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.



Report from the Mayor

By Mayor Jeffrey Slavin

What's Up This Month...

- Attended the annual Maryland Mayor's Association (MMA) winter meetings in Annapolis where we met new **Governor Wes Moore** and his team along with **Comptroller Brooke Lierman**. This year there were workshops on many interesting topics, such as cybersecurity and public safety
- I am planning to revive the Brown Bag lunch series, so look for notices in the near future.
- As the Council has shown interest in my idea to improve the appearance and signage at our four Town entrances, I am still looking for input and suggestions from our citizens.
- I am pleased that our Town Council wants to again participate in the Maryland Municipal League's "If I Were Mayor..." essay contest for our fourth graders and that we will have a complementary competition among students at Somerset Elementary School.
- The Kenwood Citizens Association (KCA) has filed a lawsuit against the County's Planning Department, which has jurisdiction over Little Falls Parkway. The suit claims that a federal law wasn't followed when recent temporary changes were made. Given that area residents haven't been assured that there will be appropriate process and necessary data provided to the public before final decisions are made nor that there will be an adequate number of hearings, I hope that the legal proceedings instituted by KCA will help resolve these concerns.
- Thanks to the Town Hall staff for suggesting the Town Council approve some upgrades to the technology at Town Hall so that Zooming into meetings will be more accessible and of a higher quality. Hope to see more of you at the meeting in March!
- As a member of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, I have signed a pledge to proclaim May 2023 in Somerset as Jewish American Heritage Month. With the rise of anti-Semitism across the country and especially in our County, such a proclamation is of vital importance at this time and I look forward to Council approval of this action at the March meeting.

And What Happened Last month...

- Montgomery Municipal Cable (MMC) held its annual meeting in Kensington in January and I was able to Zoom in. As most citizens know, Somerset is a "part owner" of this valuable Channel 16 which has an interesting schedule and sometimes provides content on Somerset issues or events. I am delighted that **Town Manager Matt Trollinger** is continuing as a member of the board of directors. I urge everyone to learn more about this organization by checking the website from Montgomery Municipal Cable (mmctv.org).
- Don't forget to sign up for daily news at Montgomery County Media (mymcmedia.org).
- Many residents were dismayed that a photo of the Town entrance was featured recently in a *Washington Post* front-page article about the continuing existence of (non-enforceable) racial and religious covenants for Somerset land. Many believe that this creates a very unwelcoming message to our guests and future property owners. Our Equity and Inclusion Committee will be addressing this in the future. In addition, there are several pieces of legislation pending in this session of the State Legislature that we will look at as we consider support for making changes in removing these covenants.



Solar Panels For Your Home! A Neighbor's Experience

I wanted to share our experience of going solar this year. After a lot of research, we found, contracted, and installed a 12kw solar PV system on our roof. Even in these gloomy first weeks of winter it has produced almost half the power we are consuming. It feels great to be lowering emissions, and you can rapidly save and even earn money. Interested? Read on! There are links throughout and please feel free to contact me with any questions.

EnergySage: This is a terrific, free service provided by the U.S. Department of Energy to help consumers find and select a solar installer (<https://www.energysage.com>). They basically help you figure out what you want, then help you get quotes for it and help you analyze the quotes (size, costs, equipment, financing) to pick the best one for you. They are unbiased, knowledgeable, helpful — and will take as many questions as you can think of (believe me, I tried). If you do use the service, please consider using my referral (<https://bit.ly/3lo0meT>). We would both benefit — I would donate my benefit to a cool renewable energy project. Again, it's **FREE!**

Choose a Quote/Provider: After a lot of comparison, we selected Green Brilliance (<https://greenbrilliance.com>). They were highly rated and had a good offer: good financing, good equipment, etc. I also had lots of questions for them in finalizing the deal, and they were patient and great to work with. It is very turnkey. They get all the permissions (government, utility, etc.) and do all the work. The only thing I was a bit unhappy about was that the process from signing the contract to installation took longer than they had outlined. The delay was probably more due to bureaucracy and supply chains than to lack of efficiency.

Costs and Rebates: In addition to turning sunlight into emission-free energy,* the economics of this at the moment are pretty amazing. First, the cost of solar panels has gone way down in the last decade (<https://bit.ly/3XYcWHA>). Second, the federal government gives a **30% tax rebate** on the full cost of the system, a huge discount. Maryland also gives a \$1000 rebate. Third, there is (or was in July) decent financing available.



**Yes, there is a cost of solar energy to the environment from raw materials to production, and human rights abuses in some manufacturing. You can take account of these when purchasing — but in the long run, using solar energy is likely much less destructive than fossil fuels.*

Make Money?! But wait, there's more! Your system will produce Solar Renewable Energy Certificates (SRECs; <https://bit.ly/3lIUfrH>) which you can sell each year. They are like carbon credits (you earn one for every megawatt hour you produce). At the moment, they sell for \$60 each in Maryland and \$375 each in DC (Somerset homes on Dorset Avenue and south toward DC receive the DC amount). So if you produce 10 per year, you can earn between \$600 and \$3750 per year at current rates. Green Brilliance is taking care of the tracking and selling as well, so you don't have to navigate these strange markets on your own

[Editor's note: for more information on SRECs, please see Sustainability Corner article in the March 2022 issue of the Town Journal (<https://bit.ly/3EtUw15>)]

Net Metering: Another cool benefit of going solar now in Maryland is net-metering (<https://bit.ly/41jDaXW>). This means that when we need extra power, it comes from the

Continued on page 11

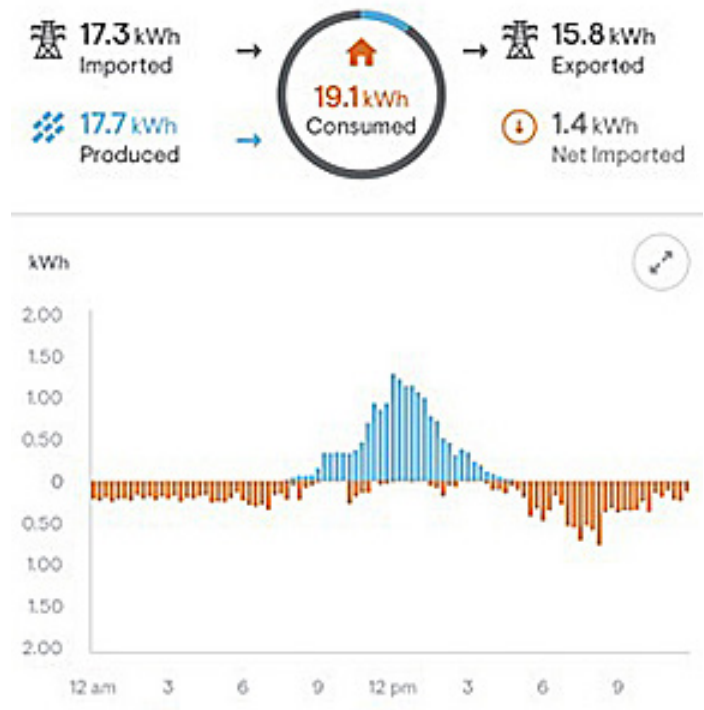
Solar Panels For Your Home! A Neighbor's Experience

grid, and when we produce extra power, it goes back to the grid — and we get a credit. So some of the energy you get on a sunny day could be coming from your neighbor's roof. What is amazing about this is that the grid essentially acts as a giant virtual battery — so you don't need to purchase your own storage (which is expensive and uses lots of precious minerals at present). And if you consume less than you produce, you can actually get paid!

Watch the Magic Happen: When our system went live, we were given an app that tracks our energy production and consumption to the minute. Here's a screen shot of a day last week when we almost produced as much as we consumed (net).

Contact Alex with questions at jalexanderthier@gmail.com.

If you have any sustainable stories to share, please contact the Environment Committee at tos.environmentcommittee@gmail.com.



One Small Step to Reduce Plastic Pollution

By Robin Barr, Council Member, Essex Avenue

The Town Council has introduced legislation to ban single-use plastics from Town government activities at the Town Hall, the Pool and tennis courts, as recommended by the Environment Committee. We encourage Town committees and the swim teams to follow suit though we recognize that circumstances may prevent full adoption.

Single-use plastics include bottles, cups, straws, cutlery, bags, and any other plastic items intended for single use.

Why is the Town taking such a step? Surely plastic has been the wonder of modernity, being lighter and more flexible than almost all other alternatives. It has been the oil in our tanks, the grease in our wheels, and the unsung hero of packaging for almost a century. Can we not continue to enjoy its everyday convenience? We are conscientious recyclers. Our plastic does not go to waste.

Unfortunately, most plastic does find its way to landfills (<https://bit.ly/3KoZedO>). The problem is that even when we place it in recycling bins, re-use markets do not exist for these thin, single-use plastics. These items arrive in landfills

anyway and the story darkens from there. Unlike organic material, plastic does not decompose. Instead, it breaks into smaller and smaller pieces, becoming micro- and nano-particles. These particles float in the air and arrive in the ocean. They are ingested by animals and fish and, yes, they enter our bodies too. As they are derived from petrochemicals, they are bad for our health. It is best to steer clear of plastics as much as possible, especially when trying to conceive or when pregnant (see <https://bit.ly/3loRkP1>).

It is a small step then to ban single-use plastics from Town events. It is the beginning of a transition. We hope that residents will support this small change and recognize the importance of moving away from plastic's convenience. The action affects only the Town's own operations. Residents' use of plastics remains open... and at your own risk! For more information on the problems with plastic, the Plastic Pollution Coalition (an international group of artists, scientists, and leaders) has an informative blog post on its ills (<https://bit.ly/3XWf42C>).



Manager's Corner

By Matt Trollinger, Town Manager

Every year the calendar has its natural flow, and March is always a busy time of year, primarily driven by two important items: the Town Budget and the Election, both of which culminate in May.

Budget

As a reminder, the Town's fiscal years run from July 1 – June 30. At the April Council meeting, the Mayor will present his proposed budget and five-year plan, and the Council will, after consideration, adopt the budget at the May meeting. With the help of our committees – especially the Budget Committee – the Mayor and staff put together a draft budget in February based on current expenditures, revenues, and projections for the remaining months, and for anticipated capital and operating costs for the next year. The Town has two major capital projects that will greatly impact the budget in the coming year — road maintenance and pool renovations.

- **Repairs and repaving of streets, sidewalks, curbs & gutters.** This spring, the Town will work with an engineering firm – whose contract will be approved at the upcoming Council meeting – to put together a multi-year plan to ensure that the Town roadways remain in good shape. To limit disturbance and to spread the cost of such an expensive project, the Town will complete the work over several years, starting in the upcoming fiscal year, either in fall of 2023 or spring of 2024. For each of the next several years we can anticipate some road repairs, until all of Somerset has been repaved.
- **Pool renovations.** For several years, the Town has been working on a plan to do major repairs of the Town Pool deck, the piping underneath the pool, and some minor work on the pool itself. Additionally, the Town plans to replace other elements such as ladders, lifeguard stations, the diving board, etc. That work will begin post-Labor Day. The pool is scheduled to close Sunday, September 10, with the repair work starting shortly thereafter. We anticipate completing the renovations in the off-season, so the pool will open on time in May 2024 and will look and function good as new. This project will not be inexpensive, however, and is likely to cost upwards of \$750,000. The Town will draw on its reserves to complete the project, which have been filled over the past decade or so due to prudent fiscal

management from the Town Council and Mayor, and with the advice of the Budget Committee.

Election

Council Members. The seats currently held by Councilmembers **Debbie Heller** (Falstone), **Kabir Kumar** (Trent), and **Shannon Rovak** (Cumberland) will be up for election in May. The Board of Supervisors of Elections will take nominations at the top of the March Council meeting, and the election will be held on Tuesday, May 16. The Board is still considering whether the election will be partially in-person or entirely mail-in.

Voting age. This year's election will also include a non-binding resolution on whether to amend the Charter to lower the voting age for municipal elections in Somerset to 16. I encourage all residents to read up on this topic to inform their vote. Although the results of this election are non-binding, they will certainly be taken under heavy consideration by the Council.

Other News

Stormwater mitigation. The Town will consider proposals in March for shared infrastructure projects on private property between Dorset Avenue & Essex Avenue and Warwick Place & Surrey Street this year, with the anticipation that additional work will take place for the many "micro watersheds" that were identified in the LIDC report as presented by the Stormwater Study Committee. The Committee recommended the Town continue to invest in such projects to improve flooding and stormwater management.

[Editor's note: The LIDC report is available at <https://bit.ly/3uUADp8>. For more background, see also the article on stormwater intervention projects in the July 2022 issue of the Town Journal, <https://bit.ly/3IM2DSU>]

Staffing. Many Town residents may remember Larry Plummer, who, as a retired State Highway engineer, served the Town as its building administrator and code enforcement officer. Currently, the Town has a contracted building administrator but is in need of a code enforcement officer.

The Town's Code has expanded and requires more oversight and review. Having someone in the office will

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Manager’s Corner

save the Town the expense of permit review, which is currently done by our contracted building administrator, and will also help coordination among applicants, utility companies, and some of the major infrastructure projects which we have on deck. Furthermore, the office receives complaints about parking, noise, and building construction violations, among others.

We are a small town, and anyone we hire needs to be flexible and versatile. So while the focus of the job will be permitting review, code enforcement, and public works and utility oversight, the person will also be expected to assist our maintenance staff on certain projects, and coordinate with our police officers and public facilities (pool and tennis courts) maintenance contractors as well, among other duties that meet the needs of our small team.

Streetlights. The Town has made major progress on this project, which has been on the docket for nearly two

decades. In February, the Town staff met with Pepco officials to review a plan to install new LED streetlights throughout Town over the next year, in three tranches. Work is expected to begin this spring.

[Editor’s note: See related article on page 1.]

Website. The Town’s new website should be made public soon. Town staff will begin training on the new beta site in March and make minor improvements and updates before the public launch later in the spring.

Solar Panels. The Council is considering proposals to install solar panels on the Town Hall roof, which will help offset utility costs and reduce the Town’s use of fossil fuels. After contract approval at the March meeting, the project will likely take several months, but the Town Hall will soon be reaping the benefits of clean energy!

GENERAL PERMITS		
DUMPSTER PERMIT 4713 Essex Avenue	4515 Dorset Avenue Arborvitae (14”) – Tree has lost 75% foliage and will not revive.	5505 Greystone Street (Town tree) Red Maple (34”) – Tree is becoming too large to be supported in median, evidence of decay at the base of main trunk, a crack in a primary leader (branch) and is hazardous.
TREE REMOVAL PERMITS 5530 Warwick Place Nellie Stevens Holly (16”) – Tree is hazardous.	4900 Falstone Avenue (Town tree) Red Maple (29”) – Tree has many dead branches, decay at base of the trunk and hazardous.	
5519 Uppingham Street White Oak (15”) – Tree is in decline with decay at base of trunk and hazardous.		

Council Meeting Actions

The Council took the following actions at its monthly Council meeting, held Monday, February 6.

- Approved Mayor Slavin's nominations for unfilled committee terms:
 - **Jill Herscot** (Cumberland) — Equity & Inclusion Committee
 - **Ivar Anderson** (Essex) — Environment Committee
 - **Joanne Steller** (Greystone) — Communications Committee
- Nominated Council member **Shannon Rovak** (Cumberland) to serve on the Friendship Heights Transportation Management District Advisory Committee
- Rescheduled the July Town Council meeting to Monday, July 10 due to July 4th holiday travel.
- Approved a contract with AV/DC Audio Visual Design Consultants to design and procure audio procurements for the Town Hall meeting space and outdoor space for an amount not to exceed \$33,000.
- Approved a request to remove the condition of the tree removal permit for the removal of two trees at the property located at 4906 Falstone Avenue, to no longer require replanting of a canopy tree, but to encourage the applicant to participate in the Tree Montgomery County program.
- Approved the following Town tree removals, as recommended by the Town Arborist:
 - 4900 Falstone Avenue — 29" Red Maple — decay at base of trunk; and
 - 5505 Greystone Street — 34" Red Maple — hazardous with decay in trunk and main branch
- Introduced a Resolution prohibiting the purchase of single-use plastic (e.g., plastic cutlery and water bottles) by the Town government, as recommended by the Town Environment Committee



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., March 6
- Mon., April 3
- Mon., May 1
- Mon., June 5
- Mon., July 10
- Mon., August 7
- Tues., September 5
(Sept. 4 is Labor Day holiday)
- Mon., October 2
- Mon., November 6
- Mon., December 4

WORK SESSIONS

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

- Mon., March 20
- Mon., April 17
- Mon., May 15
- Tues., June 20
(June 19 is Juneteenth holiday)
- Mon., July 17
- Mon., August 21
- Mon., September 18
- Mon., October 16
- Mon., November 20
- Mon., December 18

LINKS TO COMMITTEE-PROVIDED RESOURCES

STORMWATER STUDY COMMITTEE

- Stormwater Study Committee Report: <https://bit.ly/3M7R9b4>
- FAQs for Somerset Residents: <https://bit.ly/3uVIX96>
- Resource Guide to Green Infrastructure: <https://bit.ly/3MhYnsW>
- LIDC Final Report — Stormwater Master Plan 1/20/2022: <https://bit.ly/3uUADp8>
- Recording of May 10, 2022 Stormwater Study Committee Town Forum: <https://bit.ly/39FMAr3>

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

- Ban on Certain Pesticides: <https://bit.ly/3MKQpt5>
- Resolution Declaring Climate Emergency: <https://bit.ly/38DGIz>

- Sierra Club Maryland Mayors for 100% Clean Energy Pledge: <https://bit.ly/3NuCeZ5>
- 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://bit.ly/3be19SN>

EQUITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

- Resolution Condemning Anti-AAPI Hate: <https://bit.ly/38I0t7r>
- Recording of January 18, 2022 Slavery & Segregation History Forum Recording: <https://bit.ly/3MHSV3o>

VIDEO RECORDINGS OF 2022 TOWN 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 March 6, 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, March 6, 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

Agenda and updates are posted on the Town website: www.townofsomerset.com

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://bit.ly/3iWEfnd> 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

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF ELECTIONS

7:00 p.m. The Board of Supervisors of Elections will take nominations for three (3) Town Council seats

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

7:15 p.m. Public Comment Period
Opportunity for residents to make public comments*

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: to consider approval of agenda as presented

CONSENT AGENDA

7:20 p.m. Motion: The Town Council will consider approval of the following items without discussion:

- Approval of Declaration declaring Friday, April 28, 2023 as Arbor Day
- Approval of Council Liaison Assignments for 2023

NON- CONSENT AGENDA

7:22 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of a building permit application for the replacement of a rear deck at the house at the property located at 4719 Cumberland Avenue

7:35 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of a building permit application, submitted by David Kelly, for the demolition and construction of a new single-family home at the property located at 4815 Cumberland Avenue

7:55 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of a building permit application, submitted by **Maeva Michaelis**, for the demolition and construction of an accessory building at the property located at 4816 Essex Avenue

8:15 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval a request from Chris Conlan of CM Conlan Contractors, to remove the permit requirement for a permeable paver at the property located at 5506 Trent Street, due to site conditions and driveway slope, and in compliance with the Town Code

8:40 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of a contract to complete a Roadway Master Plan at a cost not to exceed \$50,000

8:55 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of a contract to install solar panels at the Somerset Town Hall at a cost not to exceed \$35,000

9:10 p.m. **Public Hearing/Motion:** To consider approval of a contract to provide beekeeping services for the Town of Somerset

9:20 p.m. **Discussion:** Manager Report

9:30 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 or 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) seven days prior to the meeting. A copy is also posted on the bulletin board on the Town Hall porch.