

## Environment Committee Meeting, August 12, 2020 (via Zoom)

Present: Barton Rubenstein, Jack Frink, David Kathan, Stephen Surko, Donna Harman, Ralph Wooden

1. Minutes of the June 10 meeting was approved.

2. MC Healthy Lawn Initiative Opt In

Steve Surko reported that the Council's unanimously approved opting-in to the County's Healthy Lawn Act. The law will become effective on December 1 so that it will not disrupt contracts that town residents had signed with lawn care companies this summer. It will be in place in the town by next summer. The Law is already in operation in the rest of the County.

3. Committee Member Introductions

While two new members have joined the Committee, they were unable to attend. Barton will defer these introductions to the next meeting.

4. Leaf blowers

Barton led a discussion of shifting leaf blowers in town from noisy gas-powered blowers to electric blowers. He reported on a discussion he had with Chuck Elkins, who is a DC Councilmember. He has also been in discussions with Maria and Ollie at the Village of Chevy Chase. Both of these jurisdictions have passed laws outlawing gas-powered leaf blowers. Barton thought that it might be useful to get someone like Chuck to present their experience at a future Council meeting, similar to how Montgomery Council member Hucker participated in a Zoom call with the Council last Spring. Barton also reported that the Chevy Chase Village representative shared the new town code amendments they adopted with him. These laws are being phased in over the next two years. Barton would like the Town to adopt a similar ban and two-year phase-in. The Committee then discussed the best approach to propose a similar ban in Somerset. Ralph noted that Town residents could use either a battery-operated or an electric-corded blower to comply with the ban, the Committee agreed that was a good suggestion. Another suggestion was made to have a conversation with the town landscaping employees to get their input on the use of electric blowers and how many hours they use them in a day. Barton agreed to do additional research and talk with the town manager to set up these discussions with the employees. Due to limited time before the fall, the Committee agreed that a pilot (where one or two leaf blowers would be purchased) was the best near-term approach to gauge their ability to meet the Town employee needs during this coming fall, and that a pilot should be proposed and voted on at the September Town Meeting. Barton offered to write an article in the Town Journal so it would be ready for the September Council meeting and do additional research. If necessary, he may call a special Environmental Committee meeting on how to proceed.

5. Batteries and Single Stream Recycling

Ralph reported that Montgomery County will be classifying all batteries as hazardous waste. This means that Shady Grove Transfer Station will now take alkaline batteries, and encourages residents not to put batteries in their trash. For the Town, this will change our message at shredding events – we would now take all batteries. Otherwise, he doesn't think we need to do anything specific now on batteries.

With regards to recycling, the town may have to reconsider our current single-stream recycling approach. Ralph noted that our contractor is telling other of their jurisdictions that they will no longer take glass in recycling. Since the Town's trash and recycling contract has been extended until May 1, 2021, Ralph noted that the Committee has additional time to develop a recommendation on recycling in town. Hence, he proposes that the Committee discuss possible options and policy at the next Committee meeting. Everyone agreed to defer this discussion.

6. Stormwater Study Committee

Steve Surko reported that the Council approved the creation of a Stormwater Study Committee at the last Council meeting. The version that passed has a more narrow focus than the original proposal, which also included tree canopy – it will now be focusing only on stormwater. Steve stated that the volunteers for the committee have been sought, and that due to overlap of this new committee with the Environmental Committee, the committee will be asked to have a liaison on the committee. Barton proposed delaying deciding on how to participate and who will be the representative until the next meeting. It was noted that the Mayor will be proposing people at the next Council Meeting, so time is of the essence. Steve suggested that the latest we could provide input on the committee members would be September 15. Consequently, Barton suggested discussing this at a special meeting. Everyone agreed to defer the discussion to the Special Meeting.

7. Declaring a "Climate Emergency"

Barton proposed that given the urgency associated with climate change, that the Town should declare a climate emergency. He noted that other communities have done this already, and this typically involves a resolution or proclamation by the Town government. When asked if there are examples of these proclamations that the Town could use as a model, Barton offered to research the text of already adopted Climate Emergencies. The Committee agreed to continue discussing this issue at the next meeting.

8. World Climate Strike – Friday, Sep 25

Barton suggested that the Town participate in the World Climate Strike on September 25. His Mother Earth Project will be actively participating in the event. He was wondering if the Town may be interested in having a march in town where people have their parachutes. Steve noted that the Council approved a similar event for school graduations, and indicated that the Council may be in support of activities in town. The committee agreed that a proposal needs to be drafted to discuss and vote on at the September Council Meeting. Steve volunteered to take this forward at the next Council meeting.

9. New Items

No new items were offered.

10. Public Comments

Kumar provided information through the Zoom chat feature on how students can receive SSL hours. Otherwise, there were no additional comments.

11. Meeting was adjourned at 9:10 pm