

Environment Committee Special Meeting, August 26, 2020 (via Zoom)

Present: Barton Rubenstein, Jack Frink, David Kathan, Stephen Surko, Ralph Wooden, Veronique Marier, Patty Friedman

1. Minutes of the August 12 meeting was approved.

2. Committee Member Introductions

Veronique Marier, who recently joined the Committee, was introduced.

3. Leaf blower Pilot Program

Committee discussed the creation of a pilot within the town for quieter, electric-driven leaf blowers. Barton and Jack started the discussion with a report on the battery-operated leaf blower (EGO with 600 cfm capability) demonstration that occurred at the Town Hall on August 21. They reported that the town maintenance head, Enrique, was initially enthusiastic, but after testing it, felt it would not do the job adequately, particularly because it was not powerful enough. However, the 700 cfm blowers that Enrique uses operate at 73 dB, which exceeds the legal dB limit set by Montgomery County. Barton also reported that he spoke with Ollie of the Village of Chevy Chase. Ollie walked around the Village and interviewed about 100 different landscapers and their machines. He found that most of them (85 percent) exceeded the legal dB limit.

Barton argued that since the town already uses an illegal leaf blower, it needs to be replaced, and that we need to move forward with the pilot study. He reported that Council members Surko and Barr agree. The Committee discussed whether we need to get a 600 cfm or 700 cfm blower, and whether it is worth it to pay more for a higher capacity blower. The discussion included the value of mulching leaves instead of blowing them, referencing recommendations from the Town's landscape consultant, and whether a strategy of introducing battery-driven blowers into the set of blowers available for the Town maintenance staff would be advantageous. The Committee reached a consensus on a recommendation to mulch leaves in Town parks and property with mowers, along with the use of a lower cfm battery-powered blower on flat surfaces, like the basketball court. The Committee agreed to propose a pilot program that would transition from gas-powered blowers over to one or two battery-powered blowers. Barton will draft a recommendation to be presented at the September Town Council meeting.

4. World Climate Strike – Friday, Sep 25

Barton decided not to promote a parachute parade in Town on September 25 due to COVID concerns. His Mother Earth Project will be doing a Zoom event. The Town could recommend the event to residents, but it may not need to take any official action. Barton noted that Steve Surko supported Barton's proposal.

5. Climate Emergency Declaration

Barton recommended that the Town issue a climate energy declaration. As an example of a declaration, Barton distributed Takoma Park's declaration that Somerset could adopt or create their own. The Committee recommended that a Somerset-specific version be developed, but keep the declaration at a high level set of actions. Barton suggested that two documents be prepared: a letter and a resolution. The team will work on drafting these over the next couple of months.

6. New Items

No new items were offered.

7. Public Comments

No public comments were offered.

8. Meeting was adjourned at 9 pm