

Environment Committee Meeting, February 10, 2021 (via Zoom)

Present: Barton Rubenstein, Jack Frink, David Kathan, Donna Harmon, Stephen Surko, Ralph Wooden, Bugs Bartley, Patty Friedman, and Marnie Shaul

1. Minutes of the December 9 meeting was approved. Jack moved their approval, and David seconded.

2. Bee Hive Apiaries/Boxes

Barton introduced a proposal to install apiaries on the town parkland, in particular in Capello park near Dorset and Wisconsin. He argued that locating an apiary here would help introduce pollinators to the area, would demonstrate the Town's commitment to local and native environments, and will be a great educational opportunity. He has been in communication with a beekeeper, Sarah Keele, from Silver Spring. Sarah is willing to work with the Town in maintaining the apiary. Barton proposes that the apiary would be enclosed behind a four-foot tall fence that it will be locked. The Committee asked several questions. Several members wondered if Capello Park would be the right place. Patty suggested that Vinton Park along the area that WSSC clear cut may be a better location. A question about who would get the honey from the bees and who would harvest the honey was asked. Jack noted that the town attorney may be asked during Council deliberations about liability. A motion was passed that the Committee supports the idea, but would like answers to several of the questions raised before the proposal is sent to the Council.

3. Environment Committee Charter

The Town is asking that all Committees prepare charters that will be approved by the Council. Barton shared a draft charter before the meeting, but most of the Committee didn't have time to review it. Barton asked for comments before he submitted it to the Town later in the month.

4. Gas-Fired Leafblower ban

Barton reported that the gas-fired leafblower passed the Council at the February Council meeting, with an amendment to delay implementation until January 1, 2023. A key part of the roll-out of the ban will be the development of educational and outreach documents for residents and landscaping contractors. Marnie commented that the Town would need to review these materials before they are distributed or published.

5. Climate Emergency Declaration

Barton proposed that the Town sign on to the Paris Climate agreement, which pledges to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 25 percent by 2025 and 80 percent by 2050. A recent meeting of mayors with the Biden Administration who have supported and signed onto the Paris agreement inspired Barton to propose that Somerset join other towns and cities. It would only apply to Town property and operations. The Committee asked several

questions, including how the Town Hall and the swimming pool are heated – they are both heated by natural gas. A motion for the Committee to propose a climate emergency resolution that commits the Town to the Paris Agreement passed. Barton would draft a proposal and send it to the Town, and will seek input from the Committee before he sends it to Matt.

6. Solar Panels for Pool Building Roof

Bugs Bartley reported on his analysis of the feasibility and economics of placing solar panels on the Pool House. He also reported the results of his investigation of whether the Town can offset its other electricity bills with excess generation from the Pool House – Maryland does allow this form of virtual net metering. Based on communications he had with one solar installer and a quick examination of amount of generation possible, Bugs noted that the project could be economically feasible if the Pool House roof is only partially shaded. However, according to the solar installer and their quick assessment, the roof is shaded for parts of the year and day. Bugs' analysis indicates that if the level of shade is large, the economics of the project are not as favorable. Bugs also reported on the possibility of participating in a community solar project. An open question raised by Bugs is how to finance the project – should the Town buy the panels outright or should it finance the project through a loan or a lease. The Committee agreed that we need to continue to look at this project in greater detail, including having a solar installer come on-site and do a more in-depth assessment. David Kathan offered to help Bugs to further develop this project.

7. Charging for a Landscaper's Trailers in the Town Hall Parking Lot

Barton reported that he was approached by a landscaping contractor, MutedMower about whether the Town would be interested in allowing them to park their trailers in two spots at the Town Hall parking lot and charge their battery-operated mowers and leafblowers. The Committee had multiple questions about how this arrangement would work, how they would compensate the Town for the use of the parking spots and electricity, and whether this would create a problem for Town Hall and Tennis Court users. The Committee expressed an interest in further discussions, but was not currently interested in proposing this concept to the Town.

8. Composting

Barton reported on a conversation he had with Compost Crew, the company that provides the composting service for Town residents. Barton reports that 40 percent of the Town do compost. Compost Crew indicated that it would be better if the percentage could get closer to 50 percent. Barton sought suggestions on how to increase the percentage, especially since the service is free for Town residents.

9. Stormwater

No new news was reported on the Town's Stormwater Committee effort. Barton did report on the efforts that he has taken in his backyard to build a fence and plantings to limit the flow of water downhill.

10. LED Streetlighting

Marie reported that there have been further discussions with Pepco about LED options, but there is nothing new to report until the rate case is approved by the Maryland PSC.

11. Salt on Roads

Barton raised this as an issue because of the negative impact of excess salt on dogs, plants, and the local streams. David pointed Barton to Little Falls Watershed Alliance for more information and activities. Little Falls Watershed Alliance has a whole project devoted to measuring salt levels in the Little Falls Branch.

12. Protecting Native Species

Barton expressed a need to promote planting of native species and protecting native species in the Town. Patty noted that this is in purview of the Parks and Natural Resources Committee, and that Committee has led efforts to remove ivy from trees, etc.. The Committee agreed that Committee is the proper body to focus on this issue.

13. New Items

Ralph asked if meetings, at least during the pandemic could start at 7:30. The committee agreed.

14. Public Comments

No public comments were offered.

15. Meeting was adjourned at 9:25 pm.