

**Somerset Environment Committee  
Regular Meeting, December 8, 2022  
Minutes**

Present were: Barton Rubenstein, David Kathan, Yogesh Rajkotia, Ralph Wooden

Also attending were: Robin Barr (Town Council liaison), David Sacks (representing Equity and Inclusion Committee), Kumar Vaswani, Marnie Shaul, Emily Kunen, Paige Whitley

And looking at joining our committee: Ivar Andersen, Patty Friedman

**Opening.** The meeting opened promptly at 8:00 pm by Barton Rubenstein, Chair.

**Approval of May 5, and Oct 6, 2022 EC Minutes.** Having a quorum, we were able to approve the minutes from the two previous meetings. (Passed unanimously)

**Ban on All-Natural Gas items for New Homes.** David reported that the County Council has already passed such a law, to take effect in four years. We discussed to opt in to this county law. There was some discussion about changing the effective date to an earlier date, and about encouraging replacement of emission-producing household items.

**Action:** The EC Recommends that the Town Council opts-in to Montgomery County Bill 13-22, which begins Dec 31, 2026. In the interim although not required by law, we also recommend that owners of new home construction are strongly and actively encouraged by the Town (but not required) to consider building homes without the use of natural gas. (Passed unanimously)

• **Ban on Town Use of Plastic Cutlery, Plates, Cups, and Bottles at Town Events.** We discussed this at the October 6 meeting, but due to lack of a quorum, we were unable to pass a resolution. Of course, the problem is that plastic itself is a major contributor to pollution world-wide, including health hazards it poses for humans and other animals, and the fact that it takes hundreds of years to break down. Since Somerset has declared a Climate Emergency, signed the Maryland Mayor's 100% Clean Energy Pledge, and signed the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, it seems incongruous that we would then *provide* plastic bottles of water and plastic utensils at town events. (Passed unanimously)

**Action:** The EC Recommends that the Town of Somerset ban all use of plastic cutlery and plates/glasses for Town (including Pool) Events; we suggest the Town provide compostable items and a means to compost them. Furthermore, we recommend that no plastic bottles be provided at town events; we suggest a water cooler instead.

**Discussion of Inclusivity and Sustainability Proclamation for Town's Website.** Given the overlap of our sustainability goals and those of the Equity and Inclusion Committee, David Sacks, representing the E&I Committee introduced the topic and read part of E&I's declaration.

There are two different frameworks that we might consider aligning with: ESGs (Environment and Social Goals) and SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). The Town Council and various committees have our work cut out for us before we decide on which of those structures might be appropriate for Somerset. Barton asked David if he would check with his committee to recommend language we might use in our own declaration.

**Solar Panel Town Project.** Update. Matt has put out this project out for bid (deadline January 13, 2023). No discussion was necessary.

**Beehives/Apiary.** Update: Town is going ahead with project. Council is opening to competitive bidding with a deadline of Jan 13, 2023.

**Reduced Salt Usage for Snow Removal.** Update: Town is working with Mulheron Tree Services to reduce salt. “Pretreatment with brine” is what we’re looking for, to reduce the need of salt, which pollutes the environment.

**Introduce New (Potential) Committee Members.** Ivar Andersen and Patty Friedman have both expressed interest in joining our Committee. They must be recommended by Mayor Slavin.

**Future Meetings.** Should we continue to meet by Zoom, or start meeting in person? Decision: Let’s wait; there’s too much illness going around.

**LED Street Lights.** Update: No News: We’re still waiting for PEPCO. But we discussed it, anyway.

**Closing.** They say, “*Close* only counts in Horseshoes and Hand Grenades.” With that in mind, we were “close” to ending on time. The meeting was closed at 9:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted (and *close* to on-time),

Ralph Wooden