

Somerset Environment Committee
Regular Meeting, May 5, 2022
Minutes

Present were: Barton Rubenstein (chair), David Kathan, Véronique Maier, Kumar Vaswani, and Ralph Wooden. Also Robin Barr, representing the Town Council

The meeting opened promptly at 8:00 PM by Barton Rubenstein.

Minutes of the March 2, 2022 meeting were approved unanimously.

Barton reminded the committee that, since we do not have a recording secretary, we had agreed to rotate the responsibility of taking minutes among committee members. He asked for a volunteer to take minutes for this meeting, and I ~~was drafted~~ volunteered.

Barton averred that the membership of our committee is under the ideal strength and announced that we hoped to secure two new volunteers, to move us from seven to nine members.

It was noted that the committee has delivered flyers about the Town's gas leaf blower ban (in both Spanish and English) to all residences. Most residents are in favor of the ban, though there has been some push back. A discussion ensued about adding other types of 2-stroke engines to the ban, and after a short discussion we voted to recommend to the Town Council to extend the leaf-blower ban, to also cover gas-powered weed whackers (string trimmers), beginning September 1, 2023. The motion passed unanimously.

Barton has received a note from Laurent Guinand, a Town resident who is interested in recycling used wine corks. He wants to put a small bin for cork recycling on the porch of Town Hall at his own expense, and he would maintain it, empty it, and send the corks to a cork recycling program in California called Re-Cork. They would then recycle the corks into shoe soles, insulation, and other products. We briefly discussed additional locations he might try, including Somerset School. We voted to recommend to the Town Council that they allow him to place a small bin on the porch of Town Hall for cork recycling. The motion passed unanimously.

At a previous meeting the Committee had voted to recommend the Town automatically sign up all residences for Composting, and allow people who did not want to participate to "opt out" (instead of having those wanting to participate to "opt in," which is what we currently do). Unfortunately, the cost of the change would be substantial (\$36,000) and was not included in this year's budget. Instead, the Committee will continually work to encourage more people to Compost. Barton will draft a survey of Town residents to see how we might improve participation in the program.

That discussion led to more trash talk (and recycling talk) on ways we might improve the process, but since no changes are in store for this year's budget, we tabled the discussion to give it more attention as the year progresses.

It seems we've been talking about bees forever! The Environment Committee has made various proposals to sponsor one or more hives on Town land, to be maintained by a master beekeeper from the Montgomery County Beekeepers Association. The busy-bee honey flow is over for this spring, so we will continue to work on approval to set this up before next year.

There was a brief discussion on No-Mow May, where people are encouraged to let their lawns grow, pollinate, and seed naturally in May. Barton has already written an article about it in the Town Journal. An NPR story on No-Mow May can be found at <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/02/1095861475/need-an-excuse-not-to-mow-your-lawn-join-no-mow-may-and-help-pollinators>

The Town Shredding Event will be June 18 in the tennis court parking lot next to Town Hall. Residents are invited to bring papers to shred, as well as florescent lights, batteries, and other small hazardous items for disposal. We are looking into having displays on CFLs, electric cars and bikes, and other interesting topics. There was some talk about having next year's event earlier in the year, so we could use the pool parking lot and have an easier traffic flow.

The meeting was over in less then an hour! WooHoo! We closed at 8:56!

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph Wooden