

Somerset Environment Committee  
Regular Meeting, October 6, 2022  
Minutes

Present were: Barton Rubenstein (chair), Patty Friedman, Kumar Vaswani, Ralph Wooden. Also Robin Barr, representing the Town Council. We lacked a quorum.

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

We were unable to approve minutes from the last meeting, because we lacked a quorum, so this will be an “unofficial” meeting. (Kinda makes you wonder how official *these* minutes will be, eh?)

Leaf Blower Ban Update. Several members still hear gas-powered leaf blowers, Barton in particular has been proactive about putting flyers into people’s hands. All are encouraged to engage violators in conversation and be sure people know about the ban. Also to give out flyers to landscapers; carrying Spanish flyers are a good idea.

Plastic Cutlery Ban. The idea was presented about asking the Council to ban plastic cutlery at town events. (a no-brainer in this secretary’s opinion) Everyone thinks we should do it, but we can’t do it officially without a quorum, so the idea is tabled until next meeting.

Solar Panels. We heard an update and had some discussion on our progress on putting Solar panels on some town buildings.

Apiary. “We’re on our way!” They’re putting out a request for a beekeeper to run the hives. The beekeeper would receive a small stipend, so they would be covered by town insurance.

Street Lights. It seems PEPCO, who will do the work, own the fixtures, and own the bulbs (monopoly, maybe?) only offers 3000 K bulbs. The new LED bulbs are directional, and pointed downward, and their brightness can be individually controlled, so there will be less light pollution. Nevertheless, there was some feeling expressed that 2700K bulbs might be better for the Town (these might not be available to us). The Public Safety Committee—represented tonight by Kumar—has made a list of eight recommendations they would like us to sign off on (golly! the things we can’t do without a quorum!); they think that closer to 2000K would be preferable. Neither the committee nor the Town residents are unanimous on what our needs are (brighter for safety, more ambient for ambiance, less light pollution, etc.). Still, if PEPCO only offers one product our hands may be tied. So far, no contract has been signed, but the Town has set aside \$230,000. For the record, the Environment/ Environmental Committee has been working on this *forever!*

Unit-Based Trash/Recycling. Robin reported that Montgomery County is studying Unit-based pricing (“Save-as-you-throw”) for trash and recycling (you get charged for how much you throw out). As we study our own trash/recycling contracts, we’re keeping an eye on unit-based as one

option. This was also mentioned at our last meeting, but we have not yet focused on it at one of our meetings.

Cork Recycling. At our last meeting, this committee unanimously passed a motion accepting an offer from Town resident Laurent Guianon to recycle corks, free-of-charge to the town. He was seeking permission to place a bin on the porch of Town Hall. The Town Council was concerned that since this was a private enterprise, it would not be appropriate for a municipal government to show preference to one company (even though it's not a money-making proposition). Laurent has spoken with Barton and plans to put a bin on his own porch....

Canopy Trees. Patty brought up one resident who does not want a canopy tree near her house, because it might block her solar panels in 50 years. Canopy trees live longer, provide more shade, provide more habitat, and provide better storm water management. There's a law that we can't plant canopy trees near wires. We are losing canopy trees quickly. We plant only native trees except for cherry.

The meeting was adjourned at precisely 8:59 and 59.9 seconds!

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph Wooden