

**Somerset Environment Committee
Regular Meeting, December 7, 2023
Minutes**

Present were: Barton Rubenstein, chair; Ivar Andersen, David Kathan, Ralph Wooden. (Just enough for a quorum, whew!)

Also attending was: Anjali Kumar and Robin Barr (Town Council liaison).

Opening. The meeting opened at 8:03, the moment a quorum was achieved.

Approval of May 18, 2023 EC Minutes. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Patting Ourselves on the Back: Montgomery County has voted to ban gas-powered leaf blowers county-wide (with the exception of farmland). The ban begins July, 2025. We can be proud of Somerset's leadership in that endeavor.

Solar Panel Report: Barton reported that Solar panels have been installed on the Town Hall roof. Solar panels at the pool are the next project. He noted that the pool is the town's largest user of electricity, by far.

LED Street Light Report: The first phase of LED street light installation is complete. There were problems with PEPCO not having the right kind of bulbs and installing 100-watt-equivalent bulbs where they were not wanted (there may still be some of the wrong bulbs on upper Cumberland). For the most part, in most places, the bulbs are perhaps a bit dimmer than what we had, but since they are pointed down, they provide as-good-or-better lighting. Light replacement should be complete by this time next year.

Pool Composting: Golly! Households all over town send their compostable waste off to the Compost Crew, but the Pool doesn't! Think of parties and events and families eating meals. Think of the pizza boxes. As much as we would love to do something about that, it's not really our place, so David will contact the Pool Committee and see if they can organize composting at the pool starting next season.

Muriatic Acid Disposal: Wow: Our very own chemical spill! Some workers were using Muriatic acid at the pool, spilled some, cleaned it up as best they could, and washed the remainder into the drains. Where did it go? Into the Little Falls Branch, killing fish downstream. The Town received a slap on the wrist (\$500 fine) and has made some structural changes to send floor-drain water into sewer system instead of into creek. (David reported)

Composting for All: (recommended by resident Ava Beckman) Realizing that compostable materials constitute a significant percent of landfill, we discussed how to more effectively encourage more residents to take advantage of our FREE composting program. Harking back to the beginning of recycling in the town, everyone was given a bin, and gradually more and more families began recycling until it has become almost universal. So, it stands to reason that if

families have the bucket in their possession ... sure, they won't all use them at first, but with time, participation should increase, precipitating real benefit to the environment.

Motion: The Environment Committee recommends that the Town distribute composting buckets to every household that does not already have one—unless the family indicates they do not want one—and sign them up for composting. The Environment Committee will coordinate an education campaign on composting, and bins will be distributed so the expanded program can launch in conjunction with Earth Day, 2024.

The motion passed unanimously.

Bee Update: Barton reported that one of the hives has died, but the other is in good shape. Elizabeth Harris has asked that we add mulch to the area inside the apiary. Mayor Slavin has indicated that he would like Somerset to be certified as a “Bee City” (and perhaps a “Dark-Sky City” and a “Sustainable City”). Anjali has some experience with these kinds of certifications and spoke to the committee about how to proceed.

Ban on Gas-Powered Weed Whackers: Given the success of Somerset's ban on Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers, and how the County has followed suit (Linda Foley is even trying to do it at the state level), we discussed what might come next. While weed whackers are not quite the problem that leaf blowers were, they are still noisy, and it phasing them out both by landscapers and families should be easily accomplished without much hardship.

Motion: For the purpose of further reducing the amount of noise that residents of the town must tolerate, the Environment Committee recommends that the Town add gas-powered weed whackers to our existing ban on gas-powered leaf blowers. The ban would begin on January 1, 2025.

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph Wooden