

**Somerset Environment Committee  
Regular Meeting, March 9, 2023  
Minutes**

Present were: Barton Rubenstein, David Kathan, Patty Friedman, Ralph Wooden

Also attending were: Robin Barr (Town Council liaison), Kumar Vaswani

**Opening.** The meeting opened as soon as a quorum was achieved— at 8:06 pm—by Barton Rubenstein, Chair.

**Approval of December 8, 2022 EC Minutes.** Minutes were approved unanimously.

**Beehives/Apiary.** Update: Robin reported that the Town has now received two additional bids from companies/individuals interested in running our hives (Abeole and Backyard Apiaries), who have proposed a contracts involving many more bells and whistles (100 free jars of honey, more signage, public meetings) at a significantly higher cost to the town (up to \$8400), in addition to Elizabeth Harris.

We have been working with Elizabeth for two years to establish this bee project, and she has been willing to do whatever we've asked. Furthermore, she is a former resident of Somerset and currently living in Drummond. The committee felt strongly that we should pursue having her install and maintain the bee hives.

**Solar Panel Town Project.** Update. We want to have a Zoom panel discussion for people interested in installing solar panels in their homes along with people who have installed solar panels. After some discussion about available dates (we have very busy people on our committee and a full schedule of town meetings, as well), we decided on March 22. Barton will get the date approved, put the panel together, and publicize the meeting.

**LED Street Lights.** Update: The Town is going ahead with installing LED street lights town-wide. They will be 3000 k, because PEPCO only offers 3000 k. (At our October meeting there was a preference expressed that we might prefer 2700 k or even closer to 2000 k, but those preferences are moot. If smaller bulbs one day are made available, we may have the opportunity to trade out the bulbs for a cost.) Note: LED lights have been on this committee's plate for more than a decade.

**Accomplishments Somerset's Declaration of Sustainability.** Barton has been working on a Declaration of Sustainability that we can post on the Town's website for all to see. He shared his work, and several people suggested modifications. Below these minutes, is the new/improved version. (Bear in mind, this is a dynamic document which will change over time.)

**Ban Wood Fireplaces in new houses.** At our December meeting, we recommended that the Town opt in to the County bill to require new construction to use all electric (i.e., no natural gas) energy sources. We briefly discussed whether we should ban wood-burning fireplaces in new houses. No clear consensus was reached. We will revisit the topic again at a future meeting.

**Ban on Gas Powered Weed Whackers.** We mentioned this a while back, but wanted to give people an opportunity to get used to electric leaf blowers first. Do we want to put this out now? Again, no clear consensus was reached.

**Sidewalk Safety and Keeping Sidewalks Clear of Debris.** PNRC has made some recommendations they want money from town budget to cut back shrubs from sidewalks of offending homes. Public Safety Committee supports this action. Is it in our purview? Probably not!

**Solar Panel Town Project.** Barton met with Celestial Solar who thinks it is feasible to put on pool roof (maybe 60 panels), That would offset about 20% of the electricity the Pool uses. If we put solar panels on roof of Town Hall and part of garage, we could offset 70% of electricity used by Town Hall.

Solar panels on Town Hall and Garage would cost \$50- 60,000. Solar panels at Pool would cost about \$70,000. Town saved lots of money on snow removal this year, so maybe some of that saved money could be diverted to solar panels.

**Good News.** Town has started process of purchasing an electric truck next year.

**Nature Playground.** Patty reported that there is in the works an idea for a “nature playground” using natural materials. Early planning stages.

**Closing.** The meeting was closed at 9:21 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph Wooden

## **Somerset Declaration of Sustainability**

The Town of Somerset is focused on creating a sustainable town and becoming carbon neutral, aligning itself with the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, by reducing 50% of CO2 emissions by 2030 and 100% by 2050. Toward this goal, Somerset has “Declared a Climate Emergency,” has signed the Maryland Mayor’s 100% Clean Energy Pledge and has signed the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

### **Accomplishments:**

The Town of Somerset has opted into Montgomery County’s ban of lawn pesticides (2021) and requirement for all-electric new construction (2026), has banned the use of gas-powered blowers (2022), uses up to 60% less salt on streets during snowstorms (2022), has a free compost program for its residents (2015), and has created a town apiary in its forest (2023), a home for bees to help pollinate the immediate region. In the works are solar panels for the Town Hall (2024), LED streetlights for the entire town (2024), and a ban of the use of plastics for all Town events (2023).