

**Somerset Environment Committee
Regular Meeting, May 18, 2023
Minutes**

Present were: Barton Rubenstein, chair; Ivar Andersen, Patty Friedman, Yogesh Rajkotia, Ralph Wooden

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

Opening. The meeting opened at 8:12, as soon as a quorum was achieved.

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Approval of March 9, 2023 EC Minutes. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Solar Panel Panel Discussion. Report. The Zoom panel discussion on solar panels was a resounding success. Lots of people—members of this committee and others—shared experiences they had had installing solar panels on their homes, and many residents asked questions.

Bee Update. Elizabeth Harris will be installing bees in the hives next week. There is also talk about having a “bee hotel” (whatever that is!) for native bees. Elizabeth is interested in doing that after the hives are buzzing. Barton is interested in having Somerset certified as a “Bee City.” We will probably pursue that designation in the fall.

LED Street Lights. Update: There are currently four demonstration LED streetlights in place in the Town, and some residents petitioning the Council to have the bulbs: a) *brighter*, and b) *dimmer*. And, of course, there are good reasons for both! At present, it’s unclear how many people are favoring changes and in what direction (nor has an actual survey been conducted to register Town opinion, so the loudest voices are the ones being heard). The first step is to find out from Town Hall exactly where each wattage bulb is installed, so people can make more informed comparisons. (In the following week, a rash of emails was sent with incorrect, corrected, and finally correct information as to the location of each demonstration bulb. That correct information was delivered in an email to residents from Town Hall and is printed in the June “Town Journal.”)

Recommendation to Town Council: Clearly, from an Environmental point-of-view, the less artificial light, the better; natural lighting is healthier for insects, birds, and other wildlife, as well as—in our opinion—for our own wellbeing. While there are good reasons that public safety should be paramount, and that some streets and intersections should be better illuminated, we urge the Council to refrain from going overboard; we did not, after all, choose to live downtown. If we use present levels of illumination as a baseline, and only increase those levels where there is a need, we feel the job will be done well.

The motion was passed unanimously.

No-Mow May. This is an idea that's been around awhile. But it has never been an "official" Town policy. Urging residents to mow less often and keep their grass higher might be generally more practical. And we should look into Town policy about length-of-grass requirements. At any rate, May is almost over, so we can address the concept more thoughtfully next year. (Barton also mentioned that he has created an Environmental Action Bingo game which will be in the next Town Journal.)

Ban Planting of Invasive Species. We certainly have a problem of invasive species in town. But should we be banning planting them? Who is to determine what is invasive; what is invasive as distinguished from non-native? And some residents really love their bamboo and English ivy! Patty mentioned that a few years ago, the Parks and Recreation Committee attempted a similar ban and got a lot of push-back from Council and residents. Bottom line: we want to make a difference; what will be the most effective way to do that? Banning, education, resource page, an educational meeting (like the solar panel meeting)? In the meantime: Barton will write an article with resources for residents to use as they consider their own landscaping, and ...

Motion: The Environment Committee recommends that the Town Council add a requirement that for New Construction, only non-invasive species be used in landscaping.

The motion passed unanimously.

Despite having hundreds of items left on our Agenda, we had been meeting for an hour, and it was time to go. The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph Wooden