

Minutes of the Village Environment and Energy Committee Meeting
June 4, 2021

The meeting was chaired by Marea Hatzios, E&E Committee Co-Chair, at the home of Ollie Davidson, and convened at 11:00 am. An invitation and agenda were circulated to members on Tuesday, June 1, 2021 (see email below). Those present at the meeting were: Marilyn Bracken (Co-Chair); Ollie Davidson, Betsy Stephens, Ralph Stephens, Jonathan Lyons, Sara Cooper, Emily Lawson, Gary Crockett (Board Contact) and Ellen Sands (Village liaison). Dina Lassow, Diana Pape and Lotta Kramer sent regrets.

The Chair started the meeting by introducing two new members: Emily Lawson and Sarah Cooper, and welcoming back Heloise Morgan. The chair then passed the floor to Marilyn Bracken. Marilyn announced her decision to step down as Co-Chair of the Committee after nearly a decade of service. Marilyn has agreed to continue to advise the Committee on issues related to pesticides and chemical/hazardous waste, and keep us up-to-date on legislation and key issues at the State and national levels. This includes occasional articles in *the Crier*. The Committee thanked Marilyn for her years of dedicated service and leadership in shepherding through several key achievements to make the Village a more sustainable community.

What follows is a brief summary of the outcome of discussions around the main agenda items.

1. *Improving Recycling Behavior among Village Residents.* **Issue:** Ellen Sands informed the Committee that there has been an increase in contamination of the Recycling Stream with inappropriate items (e.g., plastic film/bags, food waste, yard waste, mixed waste, and plastic waste and other ineligible items that should go into the trash or designated for special pick-up by the Village). This leads to more work for our Goode Team in trying to sort and remove ineligible material, and rejection of contaminated waste by the receiving company at the other end. **Next Steps:** A Sub-Committee comprised of Emily Lawson, Sarah Cooper, Ollie Davidson and Garry Crockett will explore options to use coded stickers on ineligible waste that is rejected for pick-up, to get residents' attention and encourage better compliance with recycling guidelines. The Sub-Committee will also follow up with Goode on a future site visit and information meeting once they are open to the public. This will help us get a better handle on contamination issues and how much of Village waste is actually recycled. The Sub-Committee will report back to the full Committee with recommendations on needed actions.

2. *Clarifying Reporting and Enforcement Procedures for Non-Compliant Leaf Blowers in the Village.* **Issue:** The procedures for reporting excessive noise related to use of Leaf Blowers whose decibel ratings exceed County and Village noise ordinances have changed recently. There has been a shift in emphasis from enforcement by Village Police to seeking better compliance by landscape operators through outreach to residents and a reporting of potential violations to the Village Permitting Officer, who will follow-up direct with landscape companies and residents. Some residents are unaware of this change in procedures; others have failed to discuss with their contractors the importance of complying with current regulations and of pending implementation of the ban on gas leaf blowers in the Village as of January 1, 2021. This ban may become County-wide if legislation being drafted in the County Executive's Office to mirror that passed in DC and in the Village is approved by the Montgomery County Council this summer. This would be a very positive outcome for the DC metro area in terms of embedding the law into local jurisdictions, helping with outreach and information campaigns to facilitate the transition to battery-operated leaf blowers, and potentially aiding enforcement efforts. **Next Steps:** A Sub-Committee comprised of Ollie Davidson, Peter Kilborn and Jonathan Lyons will follow up with outreach to residents and landscapers on the compliance issues, the availability of new battery-powered equipment that can do the average job that gas blowers can, and financing options that may be available to ease the transition for small-scale operators. They also will seek a meeting with Chief Fitzgerald to clarify how enforcement of a total ban on gas blowers, effective January 1, 2021, will be implemented.

3. *Promoting Renewable Energy and other Climate Friendly Action in the Village.* **Issue:** There are a growing number of highly cost-effective options that the Village (and Residents) can adopt to lower GHG emissions. Using renewable energy directly from green sources (solar, geothermal), paying into renewable energy generation through community solar, or offsetting emissions from fossil fuels used by utilities for electricity and heating with solar and wind power are among the most readily available options. However, uptake is still lagging, partly because of inertia and partly because information on how to make the switch has not been widely available. There may also be a group of people who prefer the status quo, even though the cost of using fossil fuels in energy mixes is steadily increasing relative to renewables. Electric Vehicles are also becoming competitive in price with Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) automobiles, and much less costly to operate and much more climate friendly. **Next Steps:** Marea Hatzios and Ellen Sands will work together to explore the possibility of the Village Hall offsetting its electricity and heating costs with the aim of reducing net GHG emissions to zero. The costs to the Village should be minimal, particularly if a community solar option is included. In any case, this year's budget has a healthy surplus, some of which could be used to offset the carbon footprint of Village operations. This would need to be approved by the Board. Marea will also look into disseminating information to residents about electric vehicles through articles and posts in the list-serve, and working with owners of e-vehicles in the Village on a possible e-car fair featuring demonstrations and test-drives for interested residents.

4. *Planning our Next Youth-Oriented Activity:* **Issue:** Our recent Bike Recycling Event was very successful, however there is a lot of untapped potential to engage young people in the Village in a range of activities. These include another series of recycling events including gently used athletic and sports equipment, gently used medical equipment that meets state and Health Board standards, and other equipment that could be collected and refurbished for reuse and distribution by a local Non-Profit. Other activities include planting a native pollinator and butterfly garden in green space on the West and East sides of the Village, and conserving our native firefly populations through better protection and restoration of their breeding habitats. Related to this is the control of bright nightlight in the Village. This has environmental as well as human health impacts. Light pollution and habitat destruction have resulted in the disappearance of native populations of fireflies along the entire Eastern Seaboard of the US. **Next Steps:** A Sub-Committee comprised of Ralph Stephens, Marea Hatzios, and Heloise Morgan will follow up on the idea of installing a native pollinator garden with guidance from the Village and County, as well as from expert groups like the Audubon Society's local chapter and native plant nurseries in the area. Heloise will also follow up with Pepco to get more information on the wavelength of current street lighting in the Village and what is being proposed under a new initiative to replace these incandescent bulbs with LED lights. That information will help inform the Board's position vis a vis the proposal by Pepco to replace existing lights in the Village with lower energy-using but much brighter and harsher LED lights.

5. The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m. Our next formal meeting will be held sometime in early September. However we may choose to meet again virtually before then, if need be. Meanwhile, Committee Members are urged to form groups as agreed and report back when there is information with sharing.