

Minutes of the Environment and Energy Committee Meeting
Friday, June 26 at 2 pm

1. The Environment and Energy (E&E) Committee met virtually on Friday, June 26 from 2pm- 3:15 pm. The meeting was convened via Zoom and chaired by Marilyn Bracken (Committee Co-Chair). Those participating included Oliver Davidson, Ralph and Betsy Stephens, Charlotte Kramer, Dina Lassow, Jonathan Lyons, Gary Crockett (Board Contact), Ellen Sands (Village Contact) and Marea Hatzios (Committee Co-Chair).

2. An agenda for the meeting was circulated prior to the meeting and posted on the Village website. Marilyn opened the meeting with a brief recap of E&E Committee activity since our last meeting. This included submission of a comprehensive Annual Report to the Board in April; a formal request to the Board that the Village “opt in” to section 33b of the Montgomery County Healthy Lawns Act, which is now in force in municipalities under County jurisdiction as well as in many other independent municipalities, like Gaithersburg, which recently opted in; the Committee’s work with counterparts in neighboring communities to get traction on key issues, including a possible Ban on Gas Leaf Blowers in the Town of Chevy Chase, similar to the one passed last fall in the Village (<https://wjla.com/news/local/town-of-chevy-chase-may-ban-gas-powered-leaf-blowers-amid-loud-noise-pollution-concerns>); the Committee’s education and public outreach efforts; and liaising with “Quiet Communities,” a national NGO that advocates for quiet and clean landscaping practices in communities across the country.

3. The Chair then went on to introduce the main items for discussion. These included: (i) status of implementation of the Montgomery County Healthy Lawns Act and next steps in the Board’s decision to “opt in” or not to section 33B of the Act; (ii) an update on leaf blower enforcement and compliance in the Village and additional risk factors that exhaust from Gas Leaf Blowers might pose for COVID 19; (iii) Food Composting and ways to increase uptake in the Village; and (iv) outreach and suggestions to the Board on these issues. A summary of key points raised and agreed follow up actions is included in the section below.

4. **Village Opt-in to Section 33b of the Healthy Lawns Act.** Residents appear confused about how they should respond to the new Act in the absence of official guidance about its enforcement status in the Village. Gary noted that the Board is reluctant to opt in in the absence of a public hearing on the subject, which has been complicated by COVID 19 restrictions on public gatherings. Zoom and other virtual meeting platforms remain an option to get resident input on this and a virtual hearing on this topic may be scheduled in the fall.

Action: It was agreed that Marilyn would write up a short information piece for the *Crier* clarifying points for residents related to pesticide use and licensing requirements (including a link to the State website listing licensed pesticide operators <https://egov.maryland.gov/MDA/Pesticides/>), enforcement tips and County resources to support compliance, and best landscaping practices that residents could adopt whether or not the Act is legally in force in the Village.

5. **Ongoing issues with Gas Leaf Blowers:** Ollie reported that non-compliance with the Village's and the County's Noise Ordinance continues to be a problem with use gas leaf blowers (GLBs). He also noted that Chief Fitzgerald encourages residents to call in to the Village with complaints of excessive noise from blowers. These will be responded to by Village police, who will issue citations for repeat offenses. If the situation deteriorates further in the fall, we will consider submitting a proposal to the Board that all commercial blowers operating in the Village be required to have an inspection sticker (tamper-proof and clearly visible from a distance), indicating they are in compliance with the County and Village Noise Ordinance. E&E Committee members and other volunteers could help with the inspection process.

6. Apart from compliance issues, gas leaf blowers are associated with high emissions of pollutants, including microscopic particulate matter (PM 2.5), which can penetrate deep into the lungs, infiltrating the air sacs responsible for oxygen exchange and compromising respiratory function. A number of studies have linked cumulative exposure to such pollution with additional risk factors for COVID 19 (including complications from the disease and negative outcomes for those infected). "Quiet Communities" issued a White Paper (attached as Annex A) on this topic to inform decision makers across the country, from local government to federal level officials about the added risk posed by GLBs to respiratory health and COVID-19 outcomes for those who may be exposed to the novel coronavirus. The brief notes the disproportionate risk of COVID-19 related illness to landscape workers who work with GLBs and recommends a moratorium on their use until a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available. Marilyn and Marea provided comments on an early draft. The final paper was circulated to officials in the Village, and to representatives in the County, State Legislature and the US Congress. The County Executive's office has commented on the timeliness of the brief and although it is unlikely a County-wide moratorium will be enacted, there is wider recognition of the added risk to public health posed by these polluting engines, and the need for stricter enforcement of regulations governing their use.

Action: Marea to draft a piece for the Village Blast, recapping the issues associated with leaf blowers and asking residents to discuss with their lawncare providers limiting the use of all leaf blowers at this time.

7. **Promoting Food Composting.** Ollie summarized recent postings by residents on the CCV list-serve about their experience with Compost Crew and the results of a Zoom Q&A with Compost Crew, both of which indicated a growing interest in composting in Chevy Chase. The Town of Chevy Chase, Somerset and now Section 3 have all signed contracts with Compost Crew to have food scraps collected as a municipal service to residents. In the Village, there is no sponsored service, but 70 households (up from 40) now subscribe to Compost Crew or another provider. A proposal to capitalize on this new interest by organizing a Village-sponsored promotion to increase uptake in the Village was circulated by the Co-Chairs in advance of the meeting. The promotion would subsidize the first 3 months of new subscription fees and would run for three months, starting in October. It would be limited to the first 50 households to sign up, thus limiting the cost to the Village to \$3,000 (at cost of \$20/household). New subscribers

would simply submit receipts for up 3 months of subscription costs to the Village for reimbursement. No procurement would be involved and residents could sign up with the provider of their choice.

Action: Marea to finalize the draft proposal, taking into account comments from the E&E Committee (and a subsequent discussion with Elissa Leonard, who she said she was open to discussing this with the Board in the fall).

There was no further business discussed. The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marea Hatzios, PhD
Co-Chair

Attachments:
White Paper by Quiet Communities on GLBs and Covid-19