



MEMO

DATE: FOR THE MAY 16, 2019 ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS COMMITTEE MEETING

TO: THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS COMMITTEE

FROM: NESTOR DELGADO, ASSISTANT PLANNER/SUSTAINABILITY COORDINATOR

SUBJECT: ITEM 4B: LEAF BLOWER DISCUSSION

Background

At the February 20, 2019 meeting, the City Council discussed the Town's leaf blower ordinance, and requested that the Environmental Programs Committee (EPC) review the Council staff report and explore the issue further. This conversation was a result of Council request that the Town consider its ordinance surrounding the use of leaf blowers in light of recent actions by neighboring jurisdictions.

During the March 21, 2019 EPC meeting, staff presented the Committee a staff report regarding the Town's leaf blower ordinance as compared to surroundings communities' leaf blower ordinances. The EPC Staff report available online: <https://www.ci.atherton.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/6307/EPC-Item-4C-Leaf-Blower-FINAL>. The Committee directed staff to further research gas and electric leaf blowers to present at a future EPC meeting.

Analysis

The Town of Atherton currently regulates allowable hours of operation for leaf blowers, with no restriction on the type of leaf blower (i.e. gas, electric, or otherwise powered), in accordance with Chapter 8.16.050 (B):

“B. Power Garden Equipment.

1. Power garden equipment including but not limited to, leaf-blowers, vacuums, power mowers, rototillers, and other similar equipment are exempt from the basic noise regulation between the hours of eight a.m. and six p.m. Monday through Friday, ten a.m. and five p.m. on Saturday and ten a.m. and three p.m. on Sunday.”

Staff conducted a survey of surrounding jurisdictions, finding that most of them had similar

regulations to the Town for leaf blower operation. Menlo Park, San Mateo, Hillsborough, Burlingame, and Palo Alto all allow leaf blowers only during certain hours of the day, and with the exception of Burlingame, none of the cities allow their use on Sundays. It is noted that Palo Alto does not allow gas-powered leaf blowers in residential zones.

The Town of Portola Valley recently enacted a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers, except of emergency basis', citing both noise and pollution concerns. The ban will be effective in two years' time, in order to give gardeners time to replace gas-powered equipment with electric powered equipment. It is noted that with this decision, Portola Valley joins 19 other California communities in having a ban on leaf blowers.

The following table provides an overview summary of these regulations:

Municipality	Restriction on Type?	Weekdays? If (Y) -hours.	Saturdays? If (Y) - hours.	Sundays? If (Y) -hours.
Atherton	N	8 am to 6 pm	10 am to 5 pm	10 am to 3 pm
Portola Valley	Recent ban on gas powered leaf blowers to go in effect in two years.	8 am to 5:30 pm	10 am to 5 pm	10 am to 5 pm
Palo Alto	Gas powered leaf blowers not allowed on residential zones.	9 am to 5 pm	10 am to 4 pm	N
Menlo Park	N	8 am to 5 pm	11 am to 3 pm	N
San Mateo	N	8 am to 5 pm	9 am to 5 pm	N
Hillsborough	N	9 am to 5 pm	N	N
Los Altos	Gas powered leaf blowers are banned	8 am to 8 pm	9a am to 6 pm	10 am to 6 pm

Pollutants

Gas-powered leaf blowers can be a source of air pollution. Most gas-powered leaf blowers have two-stroke engines, which mixes fuel with oil. Additionally, over 30 percent of the fuel that the engine uses fails to completely combust, releasing several air pollutants such as carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, and hydrocarbons. Per a study released in 2011 [linked here](#), a gas powered two-stroke leaf blower generated 23 times the carbon monoxide, and almost 300 times the non-methane hydrocarbons when compared to a 2011 Ford Raptor truck over a 30-minute period of usage. By comparison, use of electric leaf blowers would reduce local emissions.

Cost

Per a cursory search, staff found electric powered leaf blowers to be a cheaper alternative to gas powered equipment. Prices for electric leaf blowers ranged from \$30 to up to \$300 for a battery equipped model, while gas powered leaf blower prices ranged from \$70 to over \$500. Staff notes that while gas powered leaf blowers generally do produce more wind speed, some newer electric models

have reached the same wind speed levels as the gas powered tools.

Public Outreach and Education

Any potential revisions in the Town's leaf blower Ordinance should consider implications of how and when it would implemented. Portola Valley, in their recently approved ban on gas-powered leaf blowers, enacted a two-year delay to phase out the gas-powered equipment. Portola Valley also produced a bi-lingual educational flyer for tips on using leaf blowers in Town, urging users to consider electric equipment, as well as having a specific email contact for leaf blower questions. The City of Palo Alto also enacted a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers back in 2005. Palo Alto has a web page with a FAQ regarding leaf blower operation in the city.

The Committee may wish to discuss how best to analyze how any modifications may be considered in light of the Town's adopted Climate Action Plan as well as identify any other issues then noted above that may be associated with gas-powered and electric leaf blowers. Enacting a ban on gas powered leaf blowers could address *Measure EM2. Environmentally preferred purchasing policy – energy* from the Town's CAP.

Ultimately, the EPC should work towards preparing a summary report of their research efforts and a recommendation to the City Council which would be presented through staff.