

Worksession

Agenda Item #	1
Meeting Date	January 21, 2009
Prepared By	Jessie Carpenter City Clerk
Approved By	Barbara B. Matthews City Manager

Discussion Item	Discussion of Residents' Request to Ban Leaf Blowers
Background	<p>On October 13, 2008, a number of Takoma Park residents presented a letter to Mayor Williams requesting that a worksession be scheduled "as a first step in city action to phase out the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in Takoma Park." The letter states that harmful emissions, energy inefficiency, and noise results from the use of the leaf blowers. A copy of the residents' letter is attached.</p> <p>Takoma Park Law</p> <p>Chapter 14.12 of the <i>Takoma Park Code</i>, Chapter 14.12, Noise Control, addresses leaf blowers.</p> <p>14.12.080 Leafblowers and other power lawn tools.</p> <p><i>A. Except as provided in this section, a person must not sell, buy, offer for sale, or use a leafblower at any time that has an average sound level exceeding 70 dBA at a distance of 50'. This requirement is in addition to any other noise level or noise disturbance standard that applies under this chapter.</i></p> <p><i>B. The City may inspect, and upon request, a person must produce, any leafblower that is sold, offered for sale, or used in the City, in order to determine whether the leafblower complies with this section. A person who relies in good faith on a manufacturer's written representation of the sound level of a leafblower that has not been modified is not subject to a penalty for violating this section.</i></p> <p><i>C. No person shall use a leafblower or other power lawn tool outdoors during the daytime for more than 2 hours of accumulated time during any 24-hour period on any individual lot or parcel of property and no leafblower or other power lawn tool shall be used outdoors during the nighttime. (Ord. 2002-35 § 1(8), 2002/Ord. 2000-22 § 1(8), 2000)</i></p> <p>The Police Department is responsible for enforcement of the Noise Control Ordinance.</p> <p>Communities With Leaf Blower Bans or Limitations</p> <p>A number of communities have enacted bans or limitations on the use of leaf blowers. Many of these are in California. To illustrate the diversity of approaches that have been enacted, staff selected four communities to profile: Berkeley and Palo Alto in California; Township of Montclair, New Jersey; and Cambridge, Massachusetts.</p> <p>City of Berkeley, California</p> <p>Berkeley has a ban on use of gasoline powered machines to blow leaves, dirt, and</p>

	<p>other debris off sidewalks, driveways, lawns, or other surfaces within the City limits.</p> <p>City of Palo Alto, California In 2005, the City of Palo Alto banned the use of gas powered leaf blowers in residential zones and placed limits on their use in non-residential zones. Use is permitted in non-residential zones Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., but is prohibited on Sundays and holidays. The City does not use leaf blowers. Electric leaf blowers may be used in residential zones, subject to noise and hour restrictions.</p> <p>City of Cambridge, Massachusetts As of March 1, 2008, the City of Cambridge restricts the dates and hours when electric and gas powered leaf blowers may be used. Leaf blowers must meet EPA emissions standards and cannot emit sound over 65 decibels. Commercial operators must submit an operations plan for approval by the City Manager if they wish to use leaf blowers of any kind. Limitations are placed on the number of leaf blowers that can be used at one time, depending on the size of the property.</p> <p>Township of Montclair, New Jersey In 2008, Montclair Township placed restrictions on leaf blower use by residents and landscapers. Operation is limited to use between March 1 and June 30 and between October 1 and December 15. The Township is phasing in decibel limitations as well as emissions regulations which comply with the EPA latest regulations “Standards for Small Spark Ignition Handheld Engines.”</p>
Policy	The City Council is the policymaking body for the City of Takoma Park.
Fiscal Impact	None–For Discussion Only
Attachments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter from residents proposing leaf blower ban • Memo dated January 15, 2009 from Public Works Director Daryl Braithwaite regarding operational impact of proposed ban • Information on leaf blower regulations in other communities: City of Berkeley, City of Palo Alto, City of Cambridge, Township of Montclair
Recommendation	Discuss the proposed ban on leaf blowers and provide direction to staff.
Special Consideration	

The Honorable Bruce R. Williams
Mayor, City of Takoma Park
7500 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912

October 13, 2008

Dear Mayor Williams:

We write to request that you schedule a City Council worksession as soon as practicable as a first step in city action to phase out the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in Takoma Park. These devices rely on remarkably inefficient, two-cycle gas-oil engines. Their loud whine can be heard for blocks. But as annoying as their noise is, it is the machines' contribution to air pollution that leads us to conclude the city should ban them.

Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett has recommended that residents stop using gasoline-powered lawn care equipment, one of the top contributors of ozone-causing pollutants. The county has described the harmful effects. Here is an excerpt from one county pamphlet:

"Emissions from lawn and garden equipment like lawnmowers, chain saws, leaf blowers, string trimmers and other gasoline-powered outdoor equipment are a significant source of pollution. The small engines that power today's lawn and garden equipment are not controlled or maintained in the same way that engines on cars are, so they emit high levels of carbon monoxide (CO), volatile organic compounds (VOCs) as well as nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter (PM). These pollutants have negative health effects, and VOCs and NOx are the primary contributors to the formation of ground-level ozone, a key component of smog. Ground-level ozone is a particular problem in this region."

Numerous studies have documented the negative impact of the emissions on all types of vegetation, including trees, and on the wildlife that use the plants for food, shelter and breeding. Conversely, no studies or data demonstrate that leaf blowers are more efficient than rakes or brooms in gathering leaves.

We cannot delay addressing the problem of airborne emissions. Two recently promulgated federal regulations will require 1) that the D.C. metropolitan area significantly reduce harmful ozone levels, and 2) that manufacturers reduce emissions from small engines such as leaf blowers.

The first rule -- certainly the most nettlesome -- will force regional jurisdictions to search high and low for ways to cut VOC and nitrogen oxide emissions. The second offers a perfect opportunity to get people to switch to alternative methods of lawn care.

Takoma Park must ban gasoline-powered leaf blowers, whose costs -- to public health, the environment, and our quality of life -- far exceed real or perceived benefits. It is up to you and the City Council to act, hence our request that you schedule a worksession that will be a next step in formulating the right, environmentally friendly stance. We are at the Council's disposal to assist in that effort.

Sincerely,

Steve Davies, 6717 Poplar Avenue

Seth Grimes, 7300 Willow Avenue

Takoma Park environmental professionals/activists: Margaret Bowman, Franca Brilliant, Paul Chrostowski, Jim Epstein, Melanie Fosnaught, Phil Friend, Susan Harris, Ann Hoffnar, Pat Howell, Bill Hutchins, Sat Jiwan Ikle-Khalsa, Marty Ittner, Joseph Klockner, Peter Lane, Diane MacEachern, Peter Marra, Alden Meyer, Brenda Platt, Dick Rice, Scott Schang, Bruce Sidwell, Greg Smith, Eileen Soback, Mike Tabor, Betsy Taylor, Mike Tidwell, Dave Tilford, Monique Tilford, Chris Victoria

MEMORANDUM

TO: Barbara Matthews, City Manager
FROM: Daryl Braithwaite, Public Works Director
SUBJECT: Impact of a Leaf Blower Ban on Public Works Operations
DATE: January 15, 2009

On October 13, 2008, Mayor Williams received a request that a worksession be scheduled “as a first step in city action to phase out the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in Takoma Park.” This memo is in response to your request that I address the impact of the proposed ban on the operations of the Public Works Department.

The Public Works Department has five leaf blowers. Their primary uses are as follows:

- Clearing leaf debris from City gardens in the fall and spring.
- Clearing grass clippings from the street and sidewalk by the mowing crew in the spring and summer.
- Clearing dust, wood chips, leaves, or other debris from paved surfaces during specific construction projects or tree removal. This work is often performed by a contractor.

The vacuum leaf collection operation does not use leaf blowers for the curbside collection around the City. The number of staff hours engaged in the use of leaf blowers over the course of a year is estimated to be 500 to 750.

If the Public Works Department were not able to use leaf blowers for the aforementioned tasks, it would use rakes and tarps for garden leaf debris removal, brooms and grass catchers on the mowers for grass clipping collection, and brooms and street sweepers for surface clearing after construction projects. Use of these alternative means would likely require additional staffing hours to complete the tasks, which are performed by either City staff or temporary laborers.

The increase in time required by City staff to complete a task would be absorbed in the work week and would result in a decrease in productivity. The largest impact of a blower ban would occur in garden leaf removal. The use of rakes and tarps would likely double the temporary laborer hours required for this task, resulted in an additional cost of \$3,000 to \$4,000. The extra time required to clean up a street or sidewalk after construction would extend the hours of the work crew or contractor. For those projects that are performed by a contractor, the change would likely to increase the cost of each project by a modest amount.