

To: Bristol RI Town Council
Re: Support for Initiative to Restrict Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers
May 21, 2025

TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE
BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND
2025 MAY 21 AM 9:41

Dear Town Council,

I am writing to express my concerns about the widespread use of leaf blowers and the negative impact they have on my health and well-being, as well as the well-being of others in our community.

As a resident of Bristol, I have experienced firsthand the significant problems associated with leaf blower usage. The noise pollution caused by these machines is intolerable, disrupting the peace and quiet of our neighborhoods and making it difficult to focus on daily tasks or enjoy outdoor activities. The incessant roar is particularly disturbing as I work from home and have had *not* just my focus but also meetings interrupted. Putting my own needs aside, the unsettling scream from leaf blowers can disturb children's sleep patterns, affect their ability to concentrate, and potentially lead to stress and anxiety in addition to potential hearing issues. For anyone with ASD (autism spectrum disorder), the din of leaf blowers can be overwhelming and lead to serious distress and negative behavioral outcomes.

The emissions from these machines contain harmful pollutants such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter, which can exacerbate respiratory conditions and contribute to cardiovascular problems. Those who suffer from asthma and respiratory problems, particularly children, are especially vulnerable to the effects of poor air quality.

On any given late spring, summer, or fall morning while walking, jogging, or biking on the east bay bike path, I easily spend 30%+ of my outdoor time breathing in the toxic fumes at a time I should be enjoying and breathing in fresh air. The noise is exasperating. I want to hear the birds, the breeze, and the water, but instead I'm relegated to hearing the annoying din of those machines. There is no relief from this noise except in the winter when the cold is a deterrent from spending time outside.

The consequences of leaf blowing are also devastating to wildlife. The shrieking and booming generated by leaf blowers disrupt wildlife habitats, causing stress, disorientation, and even physical harm to animals in affected areas. The obliteration of critical understory where birds, frogs, fireflies, bees, caterpillars and small mammals forage, nest and overwinter gets destroyed. Vital insects get displaced and harmed. The force of the air and debris propelled by leaf blowers can directly injure beneficial insects, particularly those with delicate bodies or wings, leading to physical harm or death.

In addition to the health and wildlife concerns, leaf blowers contribute to environmental degradation and the depletion of natural resources. The reliance on fossil fuels to power these machines contributes to climate change, while the indiscriminate blowing of debris disperses dust, allergens, and other pollutants into the air and onto nearby surfaces, harming ecosystems and wildlife.

I urge you to take action to address these issues and support measures to regulate or restrict the use of leaf blowers in our community. This could include implementing noise ordinances to limit the hours of operation for leaf blowers, incentivizing the use of quieter electric models, educating the community on why this issue matters, or promoting alternative methods of leaf removal such as raking or sweeping. I lived in Italy for a few years, and there landscapers and public workers use *rakes*. I've read studies where raking is more efficient, which is easily demonstrated here in Rhode Island. Here, I've seen guys standing in the same area for several minutes with their blowers, a cloud of dust surrounding them (and floating along with the wind current), and debris barely moving from one place to the next. If landscapers think blowers save them time (money), I'd like to see the impact studies. Because what I often see is time wasted by drying off wet leaves with the blowers prior to blowing them to a different location.

There's a movement of ecological landscapers who see the value in recreating outdoor spaces from sterile poison-laden yards to rich flourishing properties. These folks work with the environment—thus helping native flora and fauna while creating inviting, rich, biodiverse, and healthy spaces for property owners and their families. Landscapers who depend on chemicals and gas-powered equipment will—

sooner than later—find their models outdated and unsustainable. So, while there may be pushback now from landscaper companies, it's the forward thinkers who will win in the end. As a city, we can take proactive steps toward supporting those companies who want to be sustainable, who want to consider their impact, yet don't have the resources for doing so. One day, *they* will be leaders.

By taking proactive steps to mitigate the negative impacts of leaf blower usage, we can improve the quality of life for all residents and protect the health of our environment.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I hope we can come to a solution that supports the local landscaping businesses while protecting the health of our community members and the wildlife whose survival depends on us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenda Swartz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kenda" being more prominent than the last name "Swartz".

Kenda Swartz
64 Duffield Road
Bristol