

To: Bristol RI Town Council

Re: Support for Initiative to Restrict Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers

May 17th, 2025

As George Voutes's petition makes clear, there are many negatives associated with gas-powered leaf blowers. I want to focus my comments on the noise pollution issue for Bristol residents. I don't think anyone would disagree that the situation with gas-powered leaf blowers just keeps getting worse every year. Just 40 years ago we could've taken a walk any day of the week, and except for the occasional lawnmower or construction site, it was pretty quiet. People could hear the birds and the wildlife and more importantly, hear themselves think. Now we take a walk, and for a good nine months of the year, the noise of 2-stroke gas-powered leaf blowers is near-daily and increasing. Even on a good day in the spring or fall, as the noise of one begins to fade into the distance, you find yourself approaching another, and it's only getting louder. I'm not exaggerating when I say that there are times when my daily walk from Town Beach to Audubon on the bike path have been entirely noise-linked in this way. It's not uncommon to run across a property where 2 or 3 blowers are all going at once. Several weeks ago I witnessed a 4-blower noise party at the corner of Asylum Rd and Harborview Ave, practically in the park. Think about the distance covered by this amount of noise: I could still hear it clearly after rounding the corner to the boat ramp at Town Beach, which is half a mile away. You can hear one gas-powered leaf-blower a couple blocks in advance, and more than a block past it — if you're walking, that's a quarter to a half mile of noise for just one gas-powered leaf blower. Here's something even more weird and extreme, and yet most of us have witnessed this: a property where someone is blowing a pile of wet leaves dry, just standing there for 10-15 minutes, blowing a rain-soaked area dry so that they can then use the blower to corral the leaves elsewhere.

It has become ridiculous how much of our peace and quiet we residents have gradually had to give up, and for the sake of what? For lawn care. Not for saving lives, like an ambulance siren; not for responding to a fire or for arresting a criminal; not even as important as the flyover noise of a commercial jet. The sacrifice of peace and quiet is for a faster way to do lawn care. I understand the work-saving argument: I own a home here with a 16 thousand square foot lot with a dozen big trees, and I don't employ a lawn care service. But if I did, I wouldn't allow them to use gas-powered leaf blowers. I wouldn't think of inflicting that on my neighbors. So when people push back, and ask for a little sanity in prioritizing life over lawn care, please don't act like we're trying to take your business away. We wish you well and want your business to thrive — we just want you to do it with tools that aren't harmful to our health and enjoyment of our own property and town. Bristol already has noise-nuisance ordinances and so noise pollution is a recognized problem that detrimentally impacts life, liberty, and enjoyment of property. We've all seen the sign by Sip and Dip: riding loud motorcycles here is against the law. We have the right to live in peace, and it's not less important than someone else's right to make their business more profitable.

The lawn care business existed long before gas-powered leaf blowers and it did fine. My first job in 1971 at age 13 was lawn care for two apartment buildings, and no one had even heard of, let alone owned, leaf blowers. None of us were injured by using a rake, or less-perfect lawns, or less-spotless driveways, and no one went out of business because they couldn't figure out how to clear leaves away. The lawn care industry is like any other, they maximize profits and try to minimize the charge to clients by adopting the fastest, cheapest solutions. But let's be clear — they are not saving lives or doing critical work that would justify the harm they are causing to the quality of life for residents, especially retired folks and people who work from home. Gas-powered leaf blowers, even outside of the important air pollution concerns that the petition addresses, clearly violate the spirit and the intent of existing town ordinances on noise pollution, and they harm residents' enjoyment of their property and town. Given that we don't have the police staff or willpower to enforce existing noise laws, the best solution — which so many other cities and towns have adopted — is to ban the devices that create the public nuisance, especially when a quieter alternative exists.

Thank you for your consideration.

Scott Pepper
64 Duffield Rd
Bristol, RI 02809



10:08 AM
MAY 19 2025
BOSTON, MA