



CITY OF MEDINA

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Date: November 14, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

From: Stephen R. Burns, City Manager

Subject: Gas-Powered Leaf Blower – Follow-up

At the October 10, 2022, Medina Council Meeting, staff was given direction to research several questions from Council regarding gas-powered leaf blowers.

This memo will address those issues.

Council directed staff to come back to Council at a future meeting with the following:

1. How is the current code working?
 - a. Were noise complaints received?
 - i. *City staff has received noise complaints specific to gas-powered leaf blowers and lawn equipment. Complaints have been after-hours and equipment exceed noise restrictions. The complaints have involved work done by landscapers and the golf course.*
 - ii. *In 2021, the Medina Police Department responded to 42 noise complaints – statistics are not broken down so these include lawn equipment, loud parties, barking dogs, music, etc.*
 - iii. *Through October 2022, police had responded to 33 noise complaints - statistics are not broken down so these include lawn equipment, loud parties, barking dogs, music, etc.*
 - b. What is the city doing (or what did the city do) to educate the public on the updated noise ordinance?
 - i. *In November 2020, City Manager Michael Sauerwein sent a letter to all the landscaping companies working in Medina notifying them of the changes in hours.*
 - ii. *An ordinance summary was published in the Seattle Times on October 19, 2020, and the updated code amendment was posted on the city's website on October 28, 2020*
 - iii. *Staff met with Overlake Golf and Country Club to ensure they knew of the new noise restrictions at the end of 2020.*
2. What is the current market for electric equipment?

- a. What is the lifecycle for such equipment?
 - i. Staff researched commercial grade battery-powered leaf blowers technology as directed. It is still too new to fully determine how long they will last. Current battery equipment should last roughly five years but with advancements it is expected to last longer. The batteries will need to be replaced after three to four years.
- b. Can it be financially neutral for the city to move to electric equipment?
 - i. Medina Public Works does not have immediate need to replace gas-powered leaf blowers. Purchasing battery-powered leaf blowers would be additional equipment costing the City approximately \$4,000 to \$5,000 per unit for commercial grade. Replacement batteries cost around \$1,800 per unit.
- c. What are the long-term impacts?
 - i. The technology is still too new to have an accurate study on the long-term impacts.
- d. Will entities and residents move towards electric equipment naturally because the market is shifting that way anyways?
 - i. *According to tool manufacturer Stanley Black & Decker, 85 percent of personal-use blowers on the market now are electric. "That's been pretty steady over the last five years," says Christine Potter, president of the company's outdoor business unit.*
 - ii. *Surrounding cities, like Mercer Island and Tukwila, are discussing the move toward battery powered leaf blowers and banning gas-powered leaf blowers.*

3. For jurisdictions that have adopted restrictions on blowers, what has the impact been on residents and businesses?

Staff contacted the following agencies: San Clemente, CA; Santa Monica, CA; Aspen, CO; Highland Park, IL; Bronxville, NY and Dobbs Ferry, NY.

- a. Are neighbors fighting?
 - i. Each jurisdiction is in different stages of having an ordinance banning gas-powered leaf blowers but there haven't been any reported fights because most complainants call the City to report the violations on their neighbors.
- b. How effective is enforcement?
 - i. In all the jurisdictions that were contacted, enforcement is handled by code enforcement officers and not police officers. It is complaint driven and, when after hours, it is generally handled the next day as follow-up with either the violating resident or landscaping company.
 - ii. In two jurisdictions, police will contact the violator to stop the action and provide the information to code enforcement for follow-up.

- iii. In one jurisdiction, they ask for photos of the violation and a photo of the landscaping company.
- iv. Most jurisdictions use education at first with limited enforcement. All contacted jurisdictions have issued tickets for multiple violations – most have been landscaping companies.
- v. Most jurisdictions felt that compliance was high, especially with landscapers.
- vi. In New York and Illinois, they allow gas-powered equipment for City parks and golf courses year-round because of the size of the property.

4. Environmental/health impacts

- a. Is there a public health emergency related to the noise and air pollution from blowers? (Would need to have an expert speak to the public health concerns)
 - i. There are not any public health emergencies specifically to gas-powered leaf blowers.
 - ii. State of Washington Department of Health does not have a health emergency regarding gas-powered leaf blowers but recognizes the emissions from this type of equipment has indicated substantial contributions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and fine particulate matter (PM2.5), and it is well-documented the air pollutants are generally associated with health impacts along with varying noise impacts to the user.
 - iii. The EPA has reported that leaf blowers and other gas-powered lawn and garden equipment expose workers and the public to high levels of toxic and carcinogenic emissions such as benzene, butadiene, formaldehyde and fine particulates.
 - iv. The American Lung Association, American Heart Association, World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention have reports on the dangerous health risks associated with exposure to high levels of toxic and carcinogenic emissions including cancer, lung disease, respiratory illnesses, and dementia.
 - v. Gas blowers produce high levels of noise which have been shown to pose serious health risks including hearing loss, hypertension, and productivity loss. Not a high priority in enforcement for them.
- b. What is the environmental impact from creating/developing batteries and then throwing away old batteries as well as throwing away gas-powered blowers?
 - i. While studies vary, the main concern with replacing fossil fuels in the transportation and electric generating sector with electric vehicles and renewable energy where lithium, cobalt and other critical metals are needed to produce these

technologies. Mining, processing, and disposing of these metals can contaminate drinking water, land and the environment if done improperly as seen from several studies.

5. State/County Level

- a. Is there any state funding available for businesses impacted by blower restrictions?
 - i. Currently there is no funding available at the State or County level for businesses impacted by banning gas-powered leaf blowers.

- b. Is the state/county taking any action to restrict or prohibit gas-powered blowers?
 - i. There is no legislation to restrict gas-powered leaf blowers.
 - ii. CORRECTION from my previous statement at the October 10, 2022, City Council meeting – the City of Seattle did pass a resolution on September 6, 2022, to phase out gas-powered leaf blowers – see attached.
 - iii. SCA City Manager/City Administrator Meeting – currently, there are no cities moving forward with an ordinance. The issue has come up in nearby jurisdictions but have been tabled for a variety of reasons – impacts to small businesses, waiting until the State acts, waiting for technology to get better, etc.
 - iv. Municode’s online ordinance bank check of Washington cities and towns did not find any ordinances banning gas-powered leaf blowers in Washington state.
 - v. I checked with King County Council Chair Claudia Balducci’s office, there are no immediate plans to pass restrictions on gas-powered leaf blowers at the county level.
 - vi. SCA reported there aren’t any specific agenda items at the state level for gas-powered leaf blower restrictions, but a bill did get started last session that did not make it out of committee. They expect it will be brought up again in 2023 session but don’t have any idea where it will end up.