



Community Development Department

Leaf Blower Community Workshop



Monday, September 24, 2012

6:00 - 7:30pm

San Mateo City Hall

330 W. 20th Avenue, 94403

Introduction: Workshop attendees were asked to discuss the Pros and Cons of two leaf blower revision options presented by City Staff. The options are:

Option 1: Leaf Blower Certification Program

- a) Prohibit the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers that exceed a 65 db (A) noise threshold, and;
- b) Require that all gasoline-powered leaf blowers that meet the 65 dB (A) noise threshold be certified by the City of San Mateo, and;
- c) Establish a fine, to be issued by Code Enforcement Officers, for operators who use leaf blowers outside of the provisions as specified in Chapter 10.80 Operation of Leaf Blowers, and;
- d) Establish a fine, to be issued by Code Enforcement Officers, for operators whose leaf blowers have been determined to not have been certified.

Proposed Costs: Approximately \$223,000 per year

- a) Employ one (1) Part-Time, Per Diem employee for one year to oversee certification program. After year one (1), certification program will be administered by a City Department.
- b) Employ one (1) Full Time Code Enforcement Officer to provide ordinance enforcement.
- c) Employ one (1) Part-Time, Per Diem employee to provide administrative and clerical support.
- d) Purchase one (1) vehicle for enforcement and patrol use.
- e) Development of outreach and educational materials.

Option 2: Leaf Blower Ban

Prohibit the use of all motorized leaf blowers within the City of San Mateo

Proposed Costs: Approximately \$304,000 per year

- a) Employ two (2) Full-Time Code Enforcement Officers to provide ordinance enforcement.
- b) Employ one (1) Part-Time, Per Diem employee to provide administrative and clerical support.
- c) Purchase two (2) vehicles for enforcement and patrol use.
- d) Development of outreach and educational materials.

Small Group Reports

Group A

Facilitated by Ron Munekawa, Community Development

- Option 1-Leaf Blower Certification
 - Pros:
 - Addresses noise complaints
 - If certified, current leaf blowers can continued to be used
 - Less expensive to leaf blower users
 - Cons:
 - Why limit to 65 decibels vs. another decibel threshold?
 - How is noise being addressed at the 65 decibel level?
 - Some equipment may become obsolete
 - Enforcement should focus on not using more than 1 leaf blower at a time on property
 - Does not address the health of leaf blower users
 - Continued impact of leaf blowers on the environment
 - Projected cost to enforce is to high
- Option 2-Leaf Blower Ban
 - Pros:
 - Better for health—decrease in air and noise pollution
 - Creates employment
 - Reduces churn
 - Health benefits for everyone & the environment
 - Increased quality of life, soil not blown about, less air borne pollutants
 - Cons:
 - Take longer to complete work/clean up
 - Homeowners may not be able to afford increased costs for landscape services
 - Impact on other areas of the City i.e. maintenance workers and street cleaning
 - Does not address other garden equipment
 - Training/educating gardeners and leaf blower users

Group B

Facilitated by Lisa Grote & Sandy Council, Community Development

- Option 1-Leaf Blower Certification
 - Pros:
 - The ability to collect data on the # of leaf blowers being used in the City
 - The opportunity to educate users on the proper use of leaf blowers
 - Sets a standard to be followed (certification and decibel levels)
 - Cons:
 - The cost to implement and enforce option 1 is an additional cost to the City, in addition to the cost to gardeners and/or homeowners
 - The option does not include electric blowers
 - Leaf Blower ordinances are not consistent County-wide.
 - The possibility of multiple complaints being filed against the same user
 - Does not change peoples behaviors

- Option 2-Leaf Blower Ban
 - Pros:
 - Level playing ground
 - Reduce of noise and pollution
 - Less dust and turbidity in the air
 - Cons:
 - Additional costs to the City, including costs to Parks Maintenance and Code Enforcement
 - Increased cost to consumers (residents)
 - Too drastic a measure
 - Too immediate-should think about a phased approach to implementation
 - Not a county-wide ban

Group C

Facilitated by Gary Heap, Public Works

- Option 1-Leaf Blower Certification
 - Pros:
 - Potential noise reduction
 - Compliance by all users
 - Allows use of blowers
 - Cons:
 - Continued noise pollution
 - Continued air pollution
 - Continued noise degradation
 - Affects on asthma sufferers
- Option 2-Leaf Blower Ban
 - Pros:
 - Health benefits for gardeners
 - Noise reduction
 - Reduction of hazardous particulates (circulating in the air)
 - Health of the soil
 - Cons:
 - Educating clients on diff
 - Potential of increased costs to clients for the use of gardening services

Q&A Summary

Q: Is there ability to explore a third option that is a compromise of both during the small group discussions?

A: Yes, but only after each small group has discussed the Pros & Cons of two options presented first.

Q: Is the City considering changing the current hours of operation?

A: The City is not recommending amending the current hours and days for leaf blower use as established in the municipal code, but if there is interest, include it in your small group discussion. This was not included as an option because the feedback from the July workshop groups didn't seem to support limiting the current hours of operation.

Q: How did the City get to these two Options?

A: The Option 1 was formed from comments/feedback received during the July workshop. Option 2 formed from the petitions for a leaf blower ban the City has received since the July workshop.

Q: Regarding the hours of operation, did the City look at reducing days?

A: We didn't hear from the participants at the July workshop that there was a lot of interest in reducing the days of operation. A lot of the small groups were vocal about not limiting that because it would be difficult to administer. But if you want, you can include this as a recommendation in the small group discussion.

Q: How many petitions has the City received?

A: As of September 24th:

- 151 petitions have been received from Change.org
- 352 petitions have been received from Cool Cities
- 295 petitions were signed from people in San Mateo
- 208 petitions were signed from people who live outside of San Mateo

Q: Is there going to be way to certify the amount of particulate emissions from leaf blowers?

A: It may be a difficult to determine and/or certify the particulate emissions; you can discuss this in the small groups.

Q: Why can't the Police do the enforcement?

A: Right now the Police do respond to leaf blower complaints, but it is a level 3 response, it is not a life threatening situation.

Q: What would be the process to file a complaint?

A: Residents would call an established Code Enforcement number for leaf blower complaints and provide the address of where the violation is occurring, and Code Enforcement would respond.

Q: With Option 2, a leaf blower ban, would the complaint process be the same?

A: Yes, but there is also the ability to cite the property owner in addition to the user.

Q: Can the City use volunteers to enforce and issue citations?

A: That may be a possibility to be explored, but volunteers would not have the authority to issue citations, as only City personnel can do that.

Q: Can the costs associated with either a leaf blower certification program or a leaf blower ban be paid entirely by the fees it generates?

A: Yes, there is some possibility to use the fees and/or fines to offset a portion of costs, but the fees will most likely not fully fund the cost of enforcement.

Q: Does the City propose to conduct leaf blower enforcement on all 6 days of the week?

A: Yes.

Q: What are the impacts to the Parks, City facility maintenance, and the school district?

A: The Parks Department is currently conducting analysis on the impacts of both options on operations, staffing and potential budget impacts. This information will be presented at the study session on November 5. The school district would have to abide by whichever amendments to the city ordinance that would be put into place.

Q: Does the cost for each of the Options presented, include the additional costs for the maintenance of City parks, etc?

A: No.

Q: Tree services use chain saws that generate the same amount of noise as leaf blowers, are you looking at restricting the use of chain saws too?

A: At this point the City Council has asked staff to only include leaf blowers in its analysis and recommendations.

Q: Will either of these two options affect the City's use of leaf blowers?

A: Yes, the City would be subject to any changes and/or amendments to the current leaf blower ordinance as well.

Q: Once the complaint has been made to Code Enforcement, what would be the procedure?

A: A Code Enforcement Officer would go out to the site/location to verify that there is a violation occurring. If the blower certification sticker is not there, then the officer will issue a warning. If there is another incident at the same location, then a citation and a fine will be given.