

Commentary: Newton landscapers offer alternative leafblower plan

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By Jon Sneider

On Jan. 17, the City Council approved an ordinance that limits the times of day and year that a leafblower can be used. The ordinance also regulates the type of blowers that may be used.

A coalition of more than 30 landscaping companies has informed several city councilors that they have been misinformed. Landscapers were not given the opportunity to have experts in the leafblower industry to testify on the noise, pollution and health issues allegedly caused by blowers, even though every blower is EPA-certified. One city councilor was notified several times prior to the hearing that she was disseminating inaccurate information to the public and to City Council members would be voting. This was misleading and unfair. We asked for sources and proof and were never answered.

We would like to appeal the vote on leafblowers, as we feel the decision makers were not well informed and do not understand our equipment, the way it works, and the various uses we and other industries have for them, in addition to the schedule we follow.

We ask Mayor Warren to do all in his power to appeal to city councilors to do what is most logical, practical and to be open-minded. Whether we use battery or electric blowers, we need a power source of some sort to either use or charge. Most battery-operated blowers need up to two or three hours of charging for a mere 20 minutes of use. We will need a generator constantly going to charge batteries and/or use for electric blowers, and we know that this is even louder than the blowers, with more emissions that have been deemed "annoying" and "unhealthy." This is why we propose the following:

We the landscapers suggest the following plan (which includes fewer hours of use than the current vote as it stands allows):

Jan. 1 to Feb.29: Only one gas blower per property (65 decibels allowed)

March 1 to May 15: No more than three gas leaf blowers per property (77 decibels allowed)

May 16 to Sept. 14: Only one gas blower per property (65 decibels allowed)

Sept. 15 to Dec. 31: No more than three gas leaf blowers per property (77 decibels allowed)

Hours of use:

Monday-Friday: 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (refers to leaf blower use only)

Saturday: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (refers to leaf blower use only)

Sunday: 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. (refers to homeowner leaf blower use only)

Exemptions: (same as current vote)

City of Newton may use blowers Monday to Friday starting at 5:30 a.m. for village greens.

A minimum of 30 acres used for institutional or recreational purposes between 9:30 a.m. and 12 p.m.

How last week's vote will affect you

The current vote is actually worse for everyone. With the current ruling, the noise and pollution amount will stay the same or be greater due to generator use during the non-gas-blower days. The amount of labor will have to increase significantly to get the work done in compliance, so everyone who lives in Newton will be affected since we all pay taxes and the cost to maintain the city will increase. Additionally, 70 percent of residents who use landscapers will be paying significantly more for their services. Currently there will be no lessening of noise in the summer months - this is because the focus and goals of the councilors were not aligned.

How our ordinance would be better

We propose a bill that limits the amount of leafblowers used per property. We also reduced the number of days that you can use a leaf blower as well as the amount of daytime hours it can be used. Overall, our proposal is better for

everyone. We can continue to do our job in a quick manner and move on, as opposed to using equipment that is 50 percent to 75 percent less powerful, which will just increase the duration of a job with an 80-decibel generator replacing a 65-decibel blower. How does can one argue that the current ruling makes sense?

Our compromise

We the landscapers are willing to reduce the number of daytime hours available to use leafblowers. We are emphasizing that a small compact backpack or handheld gas leafblower is necessary for the summer and winter months to expedite the cleaning and clearing of all hardscapes. This will also allow for sealcoating, tree service, gutter cleaning, and construction companies to make their work satisfactory. Also, many homeowners, commercial spaces, and camps use powerful blowers during the summer months to dissipate water off tennis courts to eliminate the possibility of injury. It is imperative that we have access to the equipment we need at certain times of the year.

Final point

This current bill is one of the strictest regulations of leafblowers in the entire United States. Many commercial properties and cities and towns are exempt. In some cases, the city and towns are not only exempt, but they are allowed to use more powerful equipment than homeowners and landscapers (such as is the case in Brookline). The town of Arlington has recently retracted parts of its ban since residents and officials determined they weren't practical.

We encourage you to visit newtonleaves.org and to email city councilors to tell them you disagree with their recent vote.

Written by Jon Sneider on behalf of a coalition of landscape companies who service clients in Newton