December 2, 2017

Supervisor Chris Burdick,
Town Board,
Elected Officials,
and
Water and Land Use Taskforce
Village of Bedford, NY

RE: http://www.bedfordny.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/10.31.17-Supervisors-Monthly-Report.pdf

Supervisor Burdick:

I see from the above monthly report that Bedford is contemplating legislation to control leaf blowers. Clearly there are some people that want leaf blowers to go away. Many negative things are being said about them, however, not everything is the truth. I can provide you with facts that you should have before making any decision regarding leaf blower legislation.

I am a retired Vice President of Engineering for ECHO Inc., a leading manufacturer of gasoline powered lawn care products. As an expert on the subject of leaf blowers, I have disseminated 'up to date' and accurate information to more than 160 cities throughout the United States. More information on my qualifications can be found at: http://leafblowernoise.com/about%20the%20author.pdf

Let me start by saying that a reasonable solution to the leaf blower issue in your village can be found. But, opposing stakeholders on this issue are highly polarized and are generally intolerant of each other's point of view, making the issue quite controversial. Regardless what you may hear about gasoline powered leaf blowers, the one and only true issue with them is noise. Since in most cases sound is not a viable reason to ban blowers, you will hear calls to ban them for reasons other than sound. Supporting arguments presented are based on opinion, anecdotal assertions, and outdated or unsubstantiated quotations. Repeating someone's opinion several times does not necessarily make it fact as some people would have you believe.

An example of an unrealistic claim, is that hydrocarbon emissions from a two-stroke leaf blower running 30 minutes is the same as a Ford pickup running from Texas to Alaska (3900 miles), per a website called edmonds.com. Even if you take into consideration that the blower they tested was 11 years old at the time and did not meet current emission standards, this is an unbelievable statement and quite frankly, ridiculous. In 30 minutes a leaf blower will burn less than a half-gallon of fuel. At 18 miles per gallon, the pickup will burn 217 gallons in 3900 miles. Edmonds' remarks cannot be justified because it is impossible to compare these two vastly different engines using the equipment available in their test lab. Check it out at: http://leafblowernoise.com/edmonds%20test%20response2.pdf).

Regarding exhaust emission, all leaf blowers must meet a very strict EPA mandated exhaust emission Standard. Since January 2005, exhaust emission has been reduced by as much as 85 to 90%, depending on engine displacement. You should know that if you write an ordinance to ban gasoline powered leaf blowers because of exhaust emission, you will be in direct violation of the Federal Clean Air Act, 1990. http://leafblowernoise.com/Taken%20from%20the%20Federal%20Clean%20Air%20Act.pdf However, you can require that they meet current emission Standards by allowing only units built after January 2005. The date of manufacture is available on the unit. http://leafblowernoise.com/Mounted%20emission%20Label.jpg

According to a flier from the website bedford2020.org, someone is convinced that it is “Time for a Change”. It is curious that only the gasoline powered leaf blower is the scourge of the planet. First the author comments that gasoline powered leaf blowers spread plant disease, damage plants, destroy habitats, remove top soil, compact surfaces, propel particulates and dangerous contaminants such as dirt, dust, pollen, fecal matter, mold, fungus spores, pesticides, herbicides, lead and organic and elemental carbon. Whew! In the next paragraph he says, use electric leaf blowers. I don’t see the difference. Fact is, a lawnmower is far worse than either.

If this type of material is present and being dislodged, then it will be distributed by whatever means is used to clean an area, including brooms, rakes and electric blowers. Water is the only remedy for this, but that method has its own issues, among which is washing debris into the sewer system.

On a technical level, according to the EPA, the particulate matter that is potentially harmful to someone’s health is known as PM-10 and PM-2.5. These numbers represent the particle size, which is 10 microns and 2.5 microns respectively. A micron is a meter divided by one million (1/1,000,000 meter). PM-10 has a diameter of 0.00001 meter (0.0004 inches or one-seventh the width of a human hair). They are similar in size to the dust you see in a ray of sun light, right within your own living room. For the most part, PM-10 is otherwise invisible. Leaf blowers deal with a much larger sized particle, one that falls back to the earth within a few feet of the nozzle.

PM-10 particles originate from a variety of mobile and stationary sources (diesel trucks, woodstoves, power plants, etc.), their chemical and physical compositions vary widely. Particulate matter can be directly emitted or can be formed in the atmosphere when gaseous pollutants such as SO_2 and NOx react to form fine particles. Gasoline powered leaf blower engines do not produce these chemicals.

As for leaf blowers raising this particle into the air, PM-10 is already in the air. Because it is so small and lightweight, the wind keeps these particles suspended. The brown haze you see over a city is comprised of these particles.

You can learn more about PM-10 at the following sites:

http://www.epa.gov/air/airtrends/aqtrnd95/pm10.html

http://www.epa.gov/air/particlepollution/health.html

Regarding sound, I know that there are leaf blowers in use that are very noisy, some over 77 dB(A) measured at 50 feet, but there are also extremely quiet gasoline powered leaf blowers, which measure 65 dB(A) per the industry Standard. This represents more than a 75% reduction in sound pressure over older designs and is the quietest gasoline powered leaf blower universally available.
http://leafblowernoise.com/Measuring_Sound.pdf If you don’t have a feel for this difference, you owe it to yourself and your constituents to attend a comparative noise demonstration. I know you’ll be impressed.

Since noise can be the only issue and the driving force behind any attempt to ban gas leaf blowers, I propose that you consider requiring that all leaf blowers used in Bedford display the manufacturer applied sound label stating that it meets 65 dB(A). (http://leafblowernoise.com/Sound%20label%20mounted.jpg). It will be a simple and effective directive. Take advantage of the millions of dollars the industry has spent overcoming the leaf blower noise issue.

This type of ordinance works well where a total ban on gas powered units will not. Landscape contractors will readily use a quiet blower because it will allow them to adequately do their job. The gas leaf blower has become an indispensable tool for them. As for the homeowner, if a neighbor complains about another neighbor’s blower, the enforcement officer need only ask the alleged offender to show him his blower. If the 65 dB(A) label is not present, he is in violation.

Initially, you might hear complaints from lawn care providers because they don't want to discard their old noisy blowers if they are still working. But these complaints will pale compared to those you will hear if you ban them totally.

Now please don't think that I am just trying to sell ECHO leaf blowers because we have been selling quiet blowers for a very long time. Increased sales due to your ordinance would be negligible. The quiet leaf blower has been on the market for twenty years and I can guarantee that there are many already being used in Bedford. But the problem is, if there is only one noisy blower in the neighborhood, all leaf blowers are reviled. Your ordinance will only be requiring that quiet ones be used exclusively. Many cities have already taken this step.

There are more detailed facts concerning the overall leaf blower issue I would like to share with you, but for that, let me call your attention to my website http://leafblowernoise.com/. In it you will be able to read about all the false claims made by anti-leaf blower activists with links to documentation supporting my comments. You will also learn that the blower is not to blame for everything in this controversy. Often the issue is when and where the blower is being used.

Before taking the step of introducing a leaf blower ordinance, be sure to talk to cities that already have bans in place. Talk directly with their enforcement agency to see if their ban is working. Look at what's happening in Newton, MA. http://leafblowernoise.com/WBZ%20Boston%20Radio%20.pdf
For 20 years, Santa Monica has struggled with no success enforcing their leaf blower ban.
http://leafblowernoise.com/Santa%20Monica%20Report.pdf

As suggested in your report, it's a good idea to reach out to professional landscape contractors to find out what they will support voluntarily. It is an important issue to them. A special meeting for this purpose would be helpful because it will take more time than that allowed at a typical council meeting for these stakeholders to relate all their concerns.

If you should need information that is not clearly addressed on my website or need documents that I have not provided, please contact me and I will do whatever I can to help, including further research on your behalf.

Best regards,

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