

Mayor Jorge O. Elorza

Leah Bamberger



CITY OF PROVIDENCE

November 1, 2021

Dear Chairman Narducci and members of the Providence City Council Ordinance Committee;

The Office of Sustainability applauds the City Council for addressing noise pollution from leaf blowers. Many cities across the U.S. have similar policies in place to protect neighborhoods from unnecessary noise, especially in the early morning. The Office of Sustainability also suggests expanding this policy to encourage a transition away from gas-powered lawn and garden equipment. This will help align the policy with the City's climate goals outlined in the Climate Justice Plan and the City's Code of Ordinances.

Gas-powered leaf blowers, lawn mowers, and other small engines used for lawn and garden care have a significant negative impact on air quality. According to the California Air Resource Board, **using a gas-powered leaf blower for an hour emits as much smog-forming pollution as a 2016 Toyota Camry does driving for 1100 miles.** The Office of Sustainability has done a quick scan for other communities that have adopted similar policies and found the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- California's recent ban of gas-powered Small Off-Road Engines (SOREs), which include leaf blowers and lawn mowers will go into effect in 2024.
https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB1346
- Washington, D.C. has prohibited the sale of and use of gas-powered leaf blowers beginning January 1, 2022 (passed in 2018). <https://www.scribd.com/document/390990052/B22-234-Leaf-Blower-Regulation-Amendment-Act-of-2018>
- The City of Aspen banned gas-powered leaf blowers through the noise code in 2003.
<https://www.cityofaspen.com/329/Noise>
- Palo Alto has banned the use of gas-powered leaf blowers in residential zones since 2005
<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/20458>

Electric leaf blowers and lawnmowers have zero emissions, and they are much quieter than their gas-powered counterparts. The Council could consider exempting electric options from restrictions as one way to encourage the transition. Furthermore, costs have come down substantially. Electric leaf blowers and mowers are roughly the same price as a comparable gas-powered engine. When you incorporate the savings on refilling the gas tank, electric quickly becomes the more cost-efficient option for residential applications.

Lastly, we would like to emphasize the enforcement challenges that other cities and towns have experienced and shared with us in our research. Other cities pointed to significant challenges getting landscaping companies to comply, even when fines were issued. Campaigns that targeted residents to ensure that their landscape companies were in compliance with the law proved to be the most effective. The City of Aspen, for example, launched an ad campaign titled, "Does your landscaper illegally blow?" and saw an uptick in community calls regarding this issue, as well as an uptick in compliance conversations with landscapers. The Council should consider who would be responsible for enforcement of such a policy and ensure that resources are available for education and enforcement.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to participating in further stakeholder engagement to ensure Providence strikes the right balance and phasing for a policy that will have a significant impact on improving both noise pollution and air quality across the city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leah Bamberger".

Leah Bamberger,
Director

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