



## Town of Atherton

Introduction of Amendments to  
Atherton Municipal Code (AMC)  
Chapter 8.16 "Noise", Pertaining to  
Leaf Blowers

*continued from the 11-18-20 City Council Meeting*

City Council Public Hearing  
January 20, 2021

# Existing Regulations

- Atherton Municipal Code regulates leaf blowers through the Noise Ordinance - allowable hours of operation, with no restriction on the type of leaf blower (i.e. gas, electric, or otherwise powered).
  - ❖ *Chapter 8.16.050 (B): “B. Power Garden Equipment. 1. Power garden equipment including but not limited to, leaf-blowers, vacuums, power mowers, rototillers, and other similar equipment are exempt from the basic noise regulation between the hours of eight a.m. and six p.m. Monday through Friday, ten a.m. and five p.m. on Saturday and ten a.m. and three p.m. on Sunday.”*

# Background

- November 2020 – EPC reviewed and recommended Council adopt a Leaf Blower Ordinance with a series of revisions.
- Prior public meetings held by both the City Council and EPC from February 2019 – February 2020.
- City Council public hearing November 20, 2020 considering amendments to the Ordinance.
  - ❖ Amendments presented at November meeting were more restrictive on use and type of leaf blowers.
  - ❖ Council continued to the item with direction to tonight's meeting.

# Council Direction – Ordinance Revisions

The Council was supportive of a possible ban on gas blowers to some capacity and shift to electric blowers over some period of time in the future, but not right now.

Council's "common ground" principles for Ordinance revisions included:

- Prohibition of leaf blower use on Spare the Air days.
- Further restrict allowable hours for leaf blower use to try and make immediate improvements related to potential issues of noise and pollution, while making sure leaf blower use on weekends is continued to be allowed.
- Revisions should not include any restrictions immediately prohibiting the use of gas leaf blowers in any Town zoning district.

# Proposed Ordinance Revisions

- Proposed Revisions: Further restrict allowable hours for leaf blower use to try and make immediate improvements related to potential issues of noise and pollution, while making sure leaf blower use on weekends is continued to be allowed.
  - ❖ 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. on Saturdays, prohibited on Sundays, legal holidays as defined by Town, and on “Spare the Air” days (new restrictions).
    - ✓ Reduced by 1 hour on weekdays.
    - ✓ Reduced by 2 hours on Saturdays.
    - ✓ Prohibited on Sundays, “Spare the Air Days” and legal holidays defined by Town.
- Added purpose and intent statements, definitions, and responsibility sections to better clarify applicability and goal of Ordinance.
- No restrictions on the type of leaf blower allowed in Town.

# Council Direction – More Information

- Provide more specific costs directly from retailers on 2-stroke and 4-stroke gas blowers and electric blowers, including battery costs for electric blowers.
- Provide more info, as feasible, on the average amount of time a landscaper (residential and others) are spent leaf blowing during landscape maintenance.
- Prepare an analysis of costs and scope of a Town piloted program to use electric leaf blowers for existing Municipal Operations.

# Cost Differences – Gas vs. Electric Blowers

- Gas Blowers – ranged from \$339 - \$648 per unit.
- Electric blowers (including one replacement battery for each unit) varied in price from \$318 - \$1780 per unit.

# Landscape Maintenance - Time Spent Using Leaf Blowers

- Residential landscapers: 30-60 minutes per property. Increase time during fall and winter months when there is a lot of more landscaping debris.
- Municipal Operations: In November/December 2020, ~ 140 hours/month, which was an increase from the preceding months of August through October which averaged closer to 60 hours a month.
- The Circus Club, Menlo School, Sacred Heart Schools: Used every day and length of time varies.
- Menlo College: Used 3 – 4 days a week and/or as needed, for ~ 24 hours a week.

# Town Pilot Program – Electric Blowers

- Scope and costs to implement a temporary Town sponsored pilot program; which would include the purchase & use of, battery-operated electric leaf blowers for existing Municipal Operations at both Holbrook Palmer Park and public streets.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of battery-operated leaf blowers for general municipal use.
  - ❖ Ease of use, noise, effectiveness, comparative time per task, battery operating and charge times.
- Noted that batteries drain quicker when operated above the lowest settings.
- Estimate is purchase cost only.
  - ❖ Staff time to complete the work tasks can be evaluated after the pilot comparison is complete.

# Town Pilot Program – Electric Blowers

- Estimated initial pilot program is recommended to include the purchase of one battery-operated backpack blower with two spare batteries and two rapid chargers.
- Estimated cost of equipment purchase for pilot program is ~\$1,210.00.

**Staff requests Council direction as to whether or not to move forward with a Town piloted gas leaf blower program.**

# Possible Future Public Outreach & Education

- In interim, the Town could develop a community education and outreach program on leaf blowers:
  - ❖ Inform residents of (any) new Ordinance restrictions on their use.
  - ❖ Differences between gas and electric blowers.
  - ❖ Provide educational resources.
  - ❖ Provide other information such any rebate programs available, etc.
- Could be developed in coordination with the Environmental Programs Committee (EPC).

**Staff requests Council direction as to whether or not to move forward in developing a public education and outreach program to the community on the use and impacts of leaf blowers, with or without the support of the EPC.**

# Public Comment

- Few items of Public Comment received. Distributed to Council members.
  - ❖ Concern on restriction on Sundays and more limited hours on Saturdays.
  - ❖ Some reference information from CA Air Resources Board (CARB).

# Recommendation

Introduce Ordinance and read by Title only, amendments to Chapter 8.16 “Noise” of the Atherton Municipal Code (AMC), pertaining to leaf blowers. This Ordinance has been determined to be exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to CEQA Section 15308, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for protection of the Environment.