



Item No. 16 Town of Atherton

CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT – REGULAR AGENDA

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
GEORGE RODERICKS, CITY MANAGER

FROM: ROBERT OVADIA, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

DATE: JULY 21, 2021

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF BATTERY-OPERATED LEAF BLOWER PILOT PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive a report on the battery-operated leaf blower pilot and provide feedback and direction.

BACKGROUND

At the January 20, 2021, the City Council considered the amendment of Atherton Municipal Code Chapter 8.16 “Noise”, pertaining to leaf blowers. Though the Council did not approve amendment of the Town’s noise regulations at the time, the Council approved the initiation of a pilot program evaluating the use of battery-operated leaf blowers and restricting the use of leaf blowers on Spair the Air Days through Fall 2022.

ANALYSIS

Pursuant to Council direction, Staff purchased an EGO Power+ backpack blower with a 7.5 Ah battery, a spare 5 Ah battery and a rapid charger for use by MCE staff. The use of the blower began at the end of March 2021.

MCE reports that the battery-operated blower is lighter than the gas-powered blower typically used for park and street maintenance and that the unit was easy to use and a bit quieter than the gas-powered blower. As the selected unit includes an adjustable harness and waistbelt and attached blower arm, there was no additional strain associated with operation.

Though the unit information indicated a run time of up to 180 minutes, field usage indicated a substantially lower runtime. In typical use scenarios, where the operator frequently ranged from low to turbo modes, the operating time of the 7.5 Ah battery was between 30 – 40 minutes and between 15 – 20 Minutes for the 5.0 Ah battery. Both batteries, if sufficiently charged, would just be adequate to blow the main pathway loop around the park if there were limited heavy debris or wet areas. Additional capacity is needed if there were heavy debris or additional areas were to be

blown concurrently. The blower was effective in addressing blowing of the tennis court. The blower appeared to be underpowered in moving heavy debris, larger piles and wet material as compared to the gas-powered blower. Though direction has been given to use the battery-powered blower as the primary blower in the park, this has not always been the case. This has been reiterated to MCE staff and we anticipate an increase in the use of the battery-powered blower. The mowing subcontractor will continue use of their gas-powered blower to clear mowed grass from the pathways and other areas.

There were three Spare the Air Day noted in June and blowing was suspended on those days.

With regards to noise levels, there was a difference in dBA level and pitch. Noise levels can vary based on use and user. The battery blower operated at a lower dBA level and at a higher pitch, lowering its perceived noise level. PD assisted with the dBA measurement of the devices which resulted in the following ranges:

Batter-Operated:	60 dBA – 80 dBA
Gas-Powered:	70 dBA – 85 dBA

An additional benefit of the battery-powered units is related to air quality. The battery-powered units do not expose operators, nearby people, or the environment to the type of exhaust generated by gas-powered blowers.

It is important to note that though blowing is a regular operation, the test period has been during the spring when the weather is drier and trees, trees are retaining most of their leaves and there have been limited Spare the Air days. According to the Spair the Air website, cars, light duty trucks, and other vehicles are the biggest source of air pollution. As we enter the summer and fire season, and as more and more employees return to their workplaces, we anticipate additional Spare the Air days. Though we anticipate some impact to blowing associated with park maintenance, the key will be whether or not the days are consecutive, which would be the case if there are major fires that impact air quality.

From November to February, the primary air pollutant is particulate matter. This period coincides with the leaf drops of deciduous trees which affects the streets and rights-of-way and could affect stormwater collection if not cleared in advance of expected rains.

POLICY FOCUS

The Council's policy focus should be on the continued use of battery-powered leaf blowers and how information gathered through the pilot program can be shared with residents to support of the use of battery-operated or electric leaf blowers.

FISCAL IMPACT

None at this time.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting in print and electronically. Information about the project is also disseminated via the Town's electronic News Flash and Atherton Online. There are approximately 1,200 subscribers to the Town's electronic News Flash publications. Subscribers include residents as well as stakeholders – to include, but be not limited to, media outlets, school districts, Menlo Park Fire District, service providers (water, power, and sewer), and regional elected officials. The Town maintains an active and up to date Project Website at <http://ca-atherton.civicplus.com/index.aspx?NID=290>.

COMMISSION/COMMITTEE FEEDBACK/REFERRAL

This item ___ has or X has not been before a Town Committee or Commission.

- Audit/Finance Committee (meets every other month)
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee (meets as needed)
- PMC & Civic Center Advisory Committee (meets as needed)
- Environmental Programs Committee (meets every other month)
- Park and Recreation Committee (meets each month)
- Planning Commission (meets each month)
- Rail Committee (meets every other month)
- Transportation Committee (meets every other month)

ATTACHMENTS

None.