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Cc: Marea.hatzios@gmail.com; Marilyn Bracken; Davis-Cook, Shana; Sands, Ellen; Jonathan Lyons
Subject: Proposed Agenda item for July 8 Board Meeting--discussion of an action plan to consider phasing out gas-powered leaf blowers
Attachments: Noise Reduction Proposal for CC Village v 6-18-19-2.docx
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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[EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Dear Board Members,

After many unsuccessful attempts to address the issue of noise and other health impacts from gas-powered leaf blowers in the Village, the Environment and Energy Committee believes the time is right to consider phasing out these irritants in favor of quieter and less polluting alternatives, including battery and electric-powered models or simply manual equipment. The Government of the District of Columbia recently passed legislation banning gas-powered leaf blowers—effective January 2022. The proposal attached, was endorsed by the full Environment and Energy Committee and developed as part of an inter-neighborhood Committee on the Environment drawn from residents of the Town of Chevy Chase, Somerset, and Chevy Chase Village. A similar proposal has already been presented to the Town Council of the Town of Chevy Chase in an initial vetting last week. This will be followed by an education and outreach campaign and a series of public hearings to encourage feedback from Town residents.

We propose to do something similar, starting with a brief presentation to the Board at the next Board meeting (July 8, 2017). We would like to get the Board's approval in principle of the approach outlined in the attached proposal. This would include a series of articles, workshops and demonstrations followed by a Town Hall meeting to allow public comment, and a decision by the Board on whether or not to adopt the proposal. We feel there is a clear business case to be made to Landscape Companies working in the Village who also operate in the District, as they will need to invest in new equipment to comply with DC's regulations. If the Village (and surrounding communities) signal their intent to enact (or consider enacting) similar legislation, this may speed up the process of transitioning to battery or electric-powered machinery, particularly if current equipment is near its replacement date (typically five years).

We look forward to engaging with the Board and Village Management on this important issue.

Thank you for your attention.

Marea Hatzios and Marilyn Bracken (Co-Chairs, Environment and Energy Committee)

Proposal to Address Noise and other Impacts from Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers

Summary of proposal:

The Chevy Chase Village Environment and Energy Committee proposes that the Village take actions parallel to those recently implemented by the Washington, DC Council, which are:

- ◆ to ban gas-powered leaf blowers effective no later than January 1, 2022, or earlier if there is support for this, and
- ◆ prior to that time to conduct an educational and outreach campaign to facilitate a shift to battery-powered or electric-powered equipment.

Summary of problem that the proposal intends to address:

Village residents regularly complain to Environment and Energy Committee members and to Village Management about the noise from gas-powered leaf blowers. Many landscape maintenance service providers in our area continue to use two-stroke gas powered leaf blowers that generate noise and harmful pollutants. This practice comes with high costs for our health, environment, and enjoyment of the benefits of living in the Village. This is even more true as more and more people in the Village are working from home.

Noise: Gas leaf blowers produce noise levels that greatly exceed those recommended by the World Health Organization. Noise from leaf blowers ranges from 102–115 decibels (“dBs”) at the ear of the operator. The Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health have declared noise levels above 85 dBs to be harmful. Because dBs are measured on a logarithmic scale, a difference on the order of 17 or more dBs represents a large change in the intensity of noise and in the potential damage to a person’s hearing. This level of noise can damage hearing, interfere with sleep, and increase blood pressure, adrenaline, and heart rates, violating the peace of neighborhoods.

Toxic air pollution: Gas-powered leaf blowers emit large quantities of harmful air pollutants that can affect landscaping company workers as well as our neighbors. The two-stroke engines used in gas-powered leaf blowers burn their fuel less completely than the four-stroke engines typically used in cars and other larger equipment. Gas-powered leaf blowers emit relatively large quantities of ozone-forming chemicals, fine particulate matter, carbon monoxide and a variety of other toxic air pollutants. These chemicals can be inhaled by equipment operators and nearby residents, as well as contributing meaningfully to regional air pollution problems. When compared to an average car, one hour of gas leaf blower use emits 498 times as many hydrocarbons, 49 times as much particulate matter, and 26 times as much carbon monoxide. Gas-powered leaf blowers also emit a larger quantity of greenhouse gases than battery-powered blowers.

Harmful health impacts: Air pollutants emitted by gas-powered blowers are well known causes of, or contributors to, premature mortality, cardiovascular disease, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, premature births, and other adverse health impacts. Even short-term exposure can be harmful. Workers, children, seniors, and people with chronic illness are at greatest risk.

Existing enforcement: Currently the County regulates noise from landscaping equipment through its general decibel-level noise restrictions. Decibel-based regulations are difficult to enforce, in part because most potential citizen complainants lack the ability or knowledge to accurately measure and record noise levels. The impracticability of its existing decibel-based noise regulations was a driving factor in DC's enactment of a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers.

Alternatives to gas-powered leaf blowers now include more efficient battery-powered or electrical leaf blowers which get the job done but are significantly less polluting. They are quieter (decibel levels are typically 65 dB or less at a distance of 50 ft); do not emit toxic pollutants; and are potentially carbon neutral if users offset their electricity source with renewable energy. Hand raking is also an option.

Proposal:

The Environment and Energy Committee recommends that the Village follow in the footsteps of the District of Columbia, as well as other communities across the country, to ban gas-powered leaf blowers. In the two and a half years before the ban would go into effect, the Village should also conduct an informational and outreach campaign to both homeowners and contractors to encourage the use of much quieter battery-powered or corded electric-powered landscape equipment or manual landscape equipment in preference to gas-powered equipment. Our outreach efforts could potentially ride the coattails of the campaign that DC will be conducting, and use the resources that they and others will be developing.

While gas-powered *lawn mowers* also create substantial noise and pollution, the committee is recommending that the ban specifically address gas-powered *leaf blowers at this time*. We think addressing leaf blowers will encounter less resistance than tightening restrictions on lawn mowers because we will be following the path that Washington, DC has already taken and because many view gas-powered leaf blowers as less necessary (and therefore more bothersome) than lawn mowers, particularly in the spring and summer, when leaf blowers did not use to be in such prevalent use. In the last decade, however, they have become a year-round tool for landscapers. While the current proposal addresses only gas-powered leaf blowers, it may have knock-on effects for gas-powered mowers and other landscaping equipment. First, the educational campaigns we propose could highlight the benefits and effectiveness of a variety of types of electric and battery-powered landscape equipment, not only leaf blowers. Second, when landscapers and homeowners become familiar with battery-powered blowers once a ban is in effect, they will likely also become more interested in and comfortable with other electric or battery-powered landscape equipment and the companies that sell that equipment.

The environment committees of the Town of Chevy Chase and Somerset are presenting a proposal similar to this one to their governing bodies and have expressed interest in coordinating on educational initiatives mentioned below.

Our proposal would look like the following:

- a. Town Council enacts **ban on gas-powered leaf-blowers to go into effect in on January 1, 2022**, mirroring the DC ban. Prior to the ban going into effect, we could take the actions listed below.
- b. Phase in the ban by expanding quiet periods prior to January 1, 2022. For example, in the fall of 2020 battery-powered leaf blowers could be banned prior to noon. The goal would be that landscapers who wanted to work during the quiet hours would be motivated to purchase a battery-powered leaf blower for use during that time, thereby encouraging gradual transitions to battery-powered equipment.
- c. Educational campaign for residents about the environmental and quality of life-related implications of landscape choices, including landscape equipment. The campaign could include workshops and handouts or mailings for residents, including a list of “quiet landscape contractors.” (Could coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions.)
- d. Educational campaign for landscapers about battery-powered equipment. (Could coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions.)
- e. Help Village management prepare Terms of Reference to contract with a quiet landscaping company when the new contract comes up for bid (Could coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions.)
- f. Explore group purchase discounts for quiet landscaping equipment. (Could coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions.)
- g. Design enforcement protocols for the ban.