

MODERATOR'S COMMITTEE ON LEAF BLOWERS
April 28, 2016 Minutes

The Moderator's Committee on Leaf Blowers held a public demonstration and meeting on April 28, 2016, 8:15am - 10am, at the Transportation Museum at Larz Anderson Park. Present were Committee members John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Jonathan Margolis, Faith Michaels, Maura Toomey, Neil Gordon, and Benedicte Hallowell; Erin Gallentine, Director of Parks and Open Spaces; several DPW staff members; and many members of the public.

From 8:15 until 9:30 the Committee observed a comprehensive demonstration of leaf blower effectiveness and noise. The DPW measured decibel levels for all tests. The demonstrations included:

- A single-blind noise evaluation of 7 different leaf blowers, in which committee members stood with backs turned while DPW staff ran each leaf blower for 30 seconds. Subjective impressions were recorded by each member.
- A test in which an operator was given a fixed amount of time to use each leaf blower to clear a delineated swath of lawn. Committee members were free to move about to assess the sonic qualities. At the end of each test the DPW recorded the amount of leaves moved during the test period.
- A test in which two leaf blowers were operated simultaneously for a period and then each was independently stopped so that the committee could assess the sound impact of combining multiple leaf blowers.

All test results were compiled by the DPW for presentation and review at the meeting scheduled for May 16th.

At 9:30, the committee moved indoors for a presentation on the "Future of Technology" with respect to Leaf Blowers. This was mainly in the form of a Question and Answer session hosted by Joe Passarello from Stihl.

The discussion was mostly around the relationship between noise and power (quieting a leaf blower reduces power or increases fuel consumption) and around the advances in battery technology. Today's battery-powered leaf blowers can operate for 45-60 minutes at full boost; at the slightly reduced setting, possibly as much as 90 minutes (as per claims from the manufacturer). Newer batteries are getting somewhat better. Batteries can cost as much as \$899 (whereas the blowers might cost \$359).

Batteries are rated for 500 charging cycles and can be recycled at the end of their life.

There was also a discussion about the uses of leaf blowers in the Town. Ms. Gallentine pointed out that leaf blowers are used to clean courts, ball fields, paths, sidewalks and streets, etc. Ms. Hallowell also talked about the role of leaf blowers with respect to allergy sufferers.