

MODERATOR'S COMMITTEE ON LEAF BLOWERS  
May 2, 2016 Minutes

The Moderator's Committee on Leaf Blowers held a meeting on May 2, 2016, 8am-10am, in room 408 of Town Hall. Present were Committee members John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Neil Gordon, Benedicte Hallowell (at 8:30am), Jonathan Margolis (until 9am), Faith Michaels, and Maura Toomey; and member of the public Lou Edgers.

By a vote of 4-0-1, the minutes from the April 11th meeting were approved.

There was a discussion regarding how to provide public access to the variety of documents the Committee has collected. John Doggett has been uploading these to Google Drive. Unfortunately, Google Drive does not provide an "open to the public in read only mode" capability, although it DOES allow individual members of the public to be added with read only status. The Committee agreed that adding members of the public on a case by case basis was acceptable, if not the ideal solution.

The Committee discussed the content of a preliminary report proposed by John. Committee members volunteered their "lessons learned." Neil summarized the concerns by saying "My takeaway is that we learned that there are as many facets as there are interested parties: power, emissions, time of day, time of year, and enforcement issues. All previous solutions have been simplistic; we may need a less simplistic approach." This was echoed by Jonathan. Many committee members pointed out that the demonstration day opened their eyes (and ears!) to the realization that absolute decibel levels are not the answer. Some leaf blowers simply sound significantly more annoying than others. And leaf blowers do seem to have a more irritating sound than other lawn equipment.

This led to a long discussion about possible reasons why complaints are down in 2016. Possible explanations include Faith spending time doing outreach to landscapers and the fact that the weather is unusual. Committee members universally praised Faith's efforts but also said that it was unreasonable to rely on the efforts of a single individual as the eventual solution.

By a vote of 6-0-0, the Committee voted to accept the preliminary report as drafted with additional paragraph called "learned to date," with final edits from Neil and John.

The next segment of the meeting was a recap and discussion of the "demo day." The measurements taken by the DPW were not available and would be discussed at the following meeting. Most committee members found the demonstrations to be interesting; with the observation that it underplayed the actual sound impact by being held in a wide open space rather than in the "urban canyon" setting of North Brookline. Each committee member gave his or her notes from the demonstration to John for his summary and collation.

The committee discussed the outline for upcoming meetings. The next meeting would be a discussion of health issues with the Health department, followup discussions around the

demonstrations, and preliminary discussions about possible solutions. The following meeting will be about education and enforcement.

The committee asked for input from the public. Lou Edgers said that he thinks the Committee should distinguish between “sound” and “noise”, “sound” being neutral whereas “noise” has a negative connotation, and that objective criteria for noise is hard to define.

Documents considered:

- ∨ Minutes from 21 March meeting
- ∨ Preliminary report