

MODERATOR'S COMMITTEE ON LEAF BLOWERS
May 16, 2016 Minutes

The Moderator's Committee on Leaf Blowers held a meeting on May 16, 2016, 8am-10am, in room 408 of Town Hall. Present were Committee members John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Neil Gordon, Jonathan Margolis, Faith Michaels, and Maura Toomey; Dr. Alan Balsam, Director of Public Health; Dr. Tony Schlaff; Erin Gallentine, Director of Parks and Open Space; Mike Bartlett, operations manager; and member of the public Lou Edgers.

The Committee reviewed documents provided by John Doggett, which summarized emissions and particulate data from gas powered lawn and garden equipment. (Data originally from Quiet Communities of Newton and Mass DEP.) Gas powered lawn and garden equipment produces, in aggregate, 0.3% of CO₂ emissions and leaf blowers in particular only 0.03%. The analysis seems to show that there are not any serious air quality issues contributed to by leaf blowers. The Committee accepted this analysis and considered it likely that recent advances would produce improved test results if the tests were repeated today.

The Committee then heard from Dr. Alan Balsam. Dr. Balsam presented a list of issues that the Health Department has been asked to investigate, including field turf, nail salons, particulates in the old Lincoln School, feces from the Green Dog programs, vaccine distribution, the Children's Hospital BioLab, clay tennis courts, and leaf blowers. Dr. Balsam pointed out that in all of these cases, the responsibility of the Health Department is to assess what risks are serious risks and what mitigation (if any) is reasonable. The Health Department held a public hearing in 2015 regarding the health issues associated with leaf blower use and concluded that although leaf blowers do kick up particulates and are noisy there is no compelling public health threat from their use. There is occupational risk for people who use leaf blowers during their work; the Health Department recommended the use of ear and respiratory protection for those workers. For the general population, the Health Department supports noise-based controls (for nuisance control), enforcement of the existing laws, and would support limits on the numbers of leaf blowers used simultaneously in a given area. In addition, the Department was concerned about the use of leaf blowers for debris sweeping of sidewalks and parking lots as opposed to their recommended use in clearing yards. The Health Department believes that a total ban on leaf blowers is unnecessary.

There was Committee discussion concerning requiring a recommendation for leaf blower operators to use both ear and respiratory protection while using leaf blowers. It was discussed that if a registration system for leaf blowers were to be imposed this could be a valuable component.

The discussion then shifted to a more detailed review of the demonstration presented by Erin Gallentine, Director of Parks and Open Spaces. Some of the topics discussed during this review included:

- ∇ Two leaf blowers operating together in the same small space don't help much at all. Leaf blowers operating in parallel, some distance apart, on a large property do save labor.

- ∇ A 2dB difference is hard to discern. Two leaf blowers do not result in twice the noise.
- ∇ Erin Gallentine reported that the operator of the Echo liked using it a great deal. It was light and easy to use.
- ∇ Ms. Gallentine also reported that that the Redmax is the best overall performer (in terms of cleaning power, especially with respect to clearing slip hazards and hedge rows).
- ∇ The Redmax was considered to be the noisiest leaf blower. The only leaf blowers in the demonstration that would be allowed during the summer months were the worst overall performers and a very annoying electric model, leading to some speculation that perhaps the regulations are contributing to the problem.
- ∇ Education remains important; education works.
- ∇ Registration will be valuable.
- ∇ Ms. Gallentine asserted that basing any leaf blower regulations on zoning will not result in an easy to follow bylaw.
- ∇ Ms. Gallentine defended the current exclusions for the Town by reminding the Committee that her department is responsible for the public safety of tens of thousands of people every day which results in an operation that is uniquely different than individual landscapers. With that said, the Department of Parks and Open Spaces is happy to have an open discussion with the Committee regarding the feasibility of extending certain restrictions to the Town.

The Committee discussed the mechanisms by which it would propose solutions and make recommendations. The first step is defining the framework for assessing regulations and recommendations. In other words, knowing what the measurable objectives of the plans are. During the next meeting, scheduled for June 8, 2016, the Committee will agree upon the framework and then begin the brainstorming process around solutions. It was also noted that deciding that there is “no compelling need for changing the bylaws” is a perfectly valid conclusion.

Documents reviewed:

- ∇ Particulate studies summarized by John Doggett
- ∇ Brookline Parks and Recreation Leaf Blower Test Results
- ∇ ACPH October 2015 Hearing Report