

MODERATOR'S COMMITTEE ON LEAF BLOWERS
June 8, 2016 Minutes

The Moderator's Committee on Leaf Blowers held a meeting on June 8, 2016, 8am – 10am, in the Denny Room of the Health Department. Present were Committee members John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Jonathan Margolis, Faith Michaels, Neil Gordon, and Maura Toomey (at 8:40); and member of the public Lou Edgers.

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the April 28, 2016 meeting and, by a vote of 5-0, approved an amended version.

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the May 2, 2016 meeting and, by a vote of 5-0, approved an amended version.

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the May 16, 2016 meeting and, by a vote of 5-0, approved an amended version.

The bulk of the meeting was comprised of a recap of committee activities to date and a brainstorming session regarding the plan for identifying solutions — including recognizing that no recommendations may be deemed necessary. The brainstorming involved several distinct areas:

PROBLEM

Table 1 shows a summary of the committee's thinking about the relative priorities of the three major problems identified during its data collection phase and the implications for general Quality of Life as well as Health/Safety.

| PROBLEM | Quality of Life | Health & Safety |
|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| Noise | High | Low |
| Emissions | Low | Low |
| Particulates | Medium | Low for the public; Higher for the operator |

Table 1

TIME OF YEAR

The committee considered whether to revisit the existing by-law with respect to the time of year restrictions. Neil pointed out that the time of year issue was recently voted by Town Meeting and thus should not be a major initiative of this committee in and of itself. There appeared to be some support for acknowledging what appears to be a regional weather shift and consider moving the legal dates from Sep 15 - Dec 15 to Oct 1 - Dec 31.

TIME OF DAY

The current restrictions are 8am-8pm M-F and 9am-8pm on weekends and holidays. No one on the committee saw any major issues with this.

GAS vs. ELECTRIC

A large portion of the discussion was devoted to examining the current by-law distinctions between the use of gas-powered and electric-powered leaf blowers. The committee recognized that there are many electric-powered leaf blowers that are noisier than some gasoline-powered leaf blowers, leading to several questions: Is the dBA level a good guide for less noise? Should there really be a distinction between them in the by-laws? Should blowers be approved explicitly and maintained on an official list? Is this practical?

The committee reviewed the findings of the Health Department which showed that there was no significant distinction between gas or electric blowers with respect to particulates dispersed from use. There is a significant distinction in emissions, although the total amount of emissions from gasoline-powered blowers is very small.

TYPE OF USE

It was repeatedly noted that there are many uses of leaf blowers which seem undesirable, such as using them to “chase” a single leaf around a property. However, the committee believed that attempting to restrict use to certain types would be impractical (at best) to enforce and so the general sense was that this should be addressed through education. Faith pointed out that currently she has only managed to reach perhaps 60% of the landscapers doing business in the town, leaving ample room for improvement.

POPULATION DENSITY

As many of the complaints about leaf blower use seem to come from residents who live in the more densely populated areas of the town, there was a discussion about whether any restrictions could be based on population density. Questions of practicability and fairness were raised with no obvious answer.

MULTIPLE USE

The committee noted that two leaf blowers operating on the same leaves are not twice as effective. (This is distinct from two leaf blowers operating independently within the same property.) Thus, the question of what a reasonable operating restriction might be, for example, only one leaf blower per 7,500 sf. This will be re-examined at a later meeting.

The committee decided to hold its next meeting on June 21, 2016 with the agenda of:

- Enforcement questions
- Landscaping Services Company registration