



## MEMO

**DATE: FOR THE MARCH 21, 2019 ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS COMMITTEE MEETING**

**TO: THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS COMMITTEE**

**FROM: NESTOR DELGADO, ASSISTANT PLANNER/SUSTAINABILITY COORDINATOR**

**SUBJECT: ITEM 4C: LEAF BLOWER DISCUSSION**

### **Background**

At the February 20, 2019 meeting, City Council discussed the Town's leaf blower ordinance, and further requested that the Environmental Programs Committee provide assistance in researching the topic. This conversation was a result of Council request that the Town consider its ordinances surrounding the use of leaf blowers in light of recent actions by neighboring jurisdictions.

### **Analysis**

The Town of Atherton currently regulates allowable hours of operation for leaf blowers, with no restriction on the type of leaf blower (i.e. gas, electric, or otherwise powered), in accordance with Chapter 8.16.050 (B):

*"B. Power Garden Equipment.*

*1. Power garden equipment including but not limited to, leaf-blowers, vacuums, power mowers, rototillers, and other similar equipment are exempt from the basic noise regulation between the hours of eight a.m. and six p.m. Monday through Friday, ten a.m. and five p.m. on Saturday and ten a.m. and three p.m. on Sunday."*

Staff conducted a survey of surrounding jurisdictions, finding that most of them had similar regulations to the Town of Atherton for leaf blower operation. Menlo Park, San Mateo, Hillsborough, Burlingame, and Palo Alto all allow leaf blowers only during certain hours of the day. It is noted that Palo Alto does not allow gas-powered leaf blowers in residential zones. See table below containing summary of leaf blower ordinances for these surrounding towns.

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Hours of Operation</b>
<b>Menlo Park</b>	Monday through Friday 8am to 5pm. Saturdays 11am to 3pm.
<b>San Mateo</b>	Monday through Friday 8am to 5pm. Saturdays 9am to 5pm.
<b>Hillsborough</b>	Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm.
<b>Burlingame</b>	City divided into three zones. Each zone has one specific day per week to use leaf blower from 8am to 5pm. Residents can use their leaf blowers on Saturdays from 9am to 2pm and on Sundays from 10am to 2pm.
<b>Palo Alto</b>	Electric powered leaf blowers are allowed in residential zones from 9am to 5pm Monday through Friday, 10am to 4pm on Saturdays. Not allowed on Sundays or holidays. Both electric and gas-powered leaf blowers may be used in non-residential zones from 8am to 6pm Monday through Friday and 10am to 4pm on Saturdays.

The Town of Portola Valley recently enacted a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers, except of emergency basis', citing both noise and pollution concerns. The ban will be effective in two years' time, in order to give gardeners time to replace gas-powered equipment with electric powered equipment. Their Ordinance Amendment, also included direction to to create an incentive program to foster the switch since it was acknowledged the switch would be costly.

With their decision, Portola Valley joins 19 other communities in California including Berkeley, Los Altos, Palo Alto, Carmel, Mill Valley and Malibu prohibiting the use of gas-powered leaf blowers. Five of those communities ban all blowers, including those powered by electricity. Fifty-nine (59) communities in California restrict the use of blowers to particular times of day. Atherton is one of the 59 communities that restrict the use, based on noise.

Gas-powered leaf blowers can be a source of air pollution. Most gas-powered leaf blowers have two-stroke engines, which mixes fuel with oil. Additionally, over 30 percent of the fuel that the engine uses fails to completely combust, releasing a number of air pollutants such as carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, and hydrocarbons.

The Committee may wish to discuss how best to analyze and research this issue further, in order to best obtain data/information related to cost, pollution, noise, outreach and education efforts, how any modifications may be considered in light of the Town's adopted Climate Action Plan and other issues associated with gas-powered and electric leaf blowers. Ultimately, the EPC should work towards preparing a summary report of their research efforts and recommendations to the City Council which would be presented through staff.