

From: [Emily Conn](#)
To: [Anthony Suber](#); [George Rodericks](#)
Cc: [Diana Hawkins](#)
Subject: Leaf Blower Statement
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Hello All-

I will be speaking at the 2/16 Town Council Meeting and will read the following statement, which I am submitting in advance for public record.

Thanks,
Emily Conn

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I am speaking today both as an Atherton resident and as Chair of our town's Environmental Programs Committee to advocate for the outright ban of gas-powered leaf blowers on residential properties in Atherton. I was surprised to see that the Town of Atherton's proposed gas-powered leaf blower ban will only be instituted on weekends. This seems like an ineffective half-measure in the face of the health risks and climate risks associated with pouring additional gas fumes into our lungs and into the atmosphere.

I realize that the Town sponsored a pilot program with electric blowers in Holbrook Palmer Park and that the maintenance crew found them less efficient than gas-powered blowers. This is not a reason to discourage residents from switching to electric blowers. Residential properties are smaller than the park and therefore require less maintenance. Why couldn't the Town have a gas-powered leaf blower regulatory carve-out for larger properties like the park, schools, clubs and other multi-acre properties?

Our family switched over to a battery-powered electric leaf blower on our one-acre property a few years ago. Our electric leaf blower is odor-free, healthier and quieter than the gas-powered models. I simply leave it plugged in to charge in my garage, and my gardener uses it to clean both hardscape and other areas for the entirety of his weekly visit. I like that it is healthier and quieter for the wonderful people who take care of our garden and landscaping as well.

If a privileged community like Atherton can't ask its residents to buy electric leaf blowers, then what does that say about us? Residents in the most expensive zip code in America aren't willing to spend \$99-200 (the cost of an electric blower at Home Depot) to reduce noise and air pollution for our children? Children who are already going to be forced to confront the climate crisis previous generations have saddled them with? As a mother, it feels extremely frustrating and disheartening to me that the Town can't even take this one small step to improve our beleaguered environment.

What's more, other towns have shown us that it CAN BE DONE. Portola Valley banned gas powered leaf blowers last year. Los Altos banned gas-powered leaf blowers in 1991, Palo Alto in 2000, and Los Gatos in 2014. They all seem to have survived the transition! In fact,

residents are reported to be enjoying less noise, quieter neighborhoods and fresher air.

Additionally, our state has just passed a law that will soon ban the sale of gas-powered leaf blowers anyway. Let's help our residents transition to an inevitable change by being trend setters rather than laggards. Most people feel great desperation and despair over our climate crisis – a crisis we in California feel most acutely. Let's help our residents feel a small sense of pride in making a simple lifestyle change that will benefit all of us.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

If you aren't aware of the possible pollutants we could be protecting the vulnerable residents of our community from, including children and the elderly, more information is detailed below:

*The most noticeable consequence of gas-powered leaf blowers is the obnoxious noise, which is not only annoying for neighbors, but also harmful for our health. According to a 2017 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report, leaf blowers create a common noise that can contribute to permanent hearing loss. Additionally, noise pollution can cause stress, headaches, difficulty sleeping, productivity loss, higher heart attack rates, and more.

*As leaf blowers generate wind speeds of around 180 miles per hour, they propel into the air potentially hazardous substances such as dirt, mold, pollen, animal feces, and pesticides. Exposure to these dust clouds, which take hours to settle, damages people's respiratory systems and may cause irritation, allergies, and disease.

*Lastly, gas-powered leaf blowers are detrimental for the environment. The emitted air pollutants include carbon monoxide, which contributes to ground-level ozone; nitrous oxides, which contribute to smog formation; hydrocarbons, which can be carcinogenic; and nitrous oxides, which can cause acid rain.