

**What You Need to Know About Westport's
Proposed Leaf Blower Ordinance**

<p>What is being proposed?</p>	<p>A <u>seasonal</u> ban on <u>gas-powered</u> leaf blowers <u>during the summer and winter</u>. Gas blowers would still be allowed during emergencies and for spring/fall cleanups, subject to restrictions on hours, holiday use, and the number of machines that may be used simultaneously. Battery/electric leaf blowers would be allowed year-round, subject to restrictions on hours and holiday use.</p>
<p>Why is this ordinance necessary?</p>	<p>Gas-powered leaf blowers have significant negative impacts on our health and quality of life. Leading commercial brands of gas leaf blowers are 100+ decibels at the source and as high as 83 decibels at 50 feet. In fact, most commercial gas blowers exceed the recommended levels for outdoor noise set by the World Health Organization (55 decibels). The decibel levels for today's gas equipment are 1000x or higher than the safe levels set by OSHA. In addition, the sound produced by gas blowers has a strong low frequency component that allows harmful levels of sound to travel long distances and penetrate walls and windows. For that reason, even one gas blower can impact an entire neighborhood.</p> <p>The noise from leaf blowers is not only a nuisance, but a health issue. Extensive scientific evidence shows that exposure to loud and/or persistent noise causes or contributes to health problems including hearing loss, hypertension, heart disease, sleep disturbance, cognitive impairment, and diminished school performance. Anything above 60 decibels increases the risk of heart disease and above 75 decibels increase the risk of hearing damage.</p> <p>The emissions from gas blowers are also a problem. Gas blowers produce copious amounts of fine particulate matter, which is linked to cancer and other health issues. Gas blowers also produce prodigious amounts of volatile organic compounds, including benzene, formaldehyde, and 1,3 butadiene, three of the most carcinogenic air pollutants in the world. Relative to their size, leaf-blowers are extremely polluting machines. Approximately, one-third of their fuel is released into the air unburned. Researchers estimate that the ozone pollution released from running one gas blower for one hour is the equivalent of driving a 2017 Camry 1100 miles. According to the American Lung Association, Connecticut already has one of the highest ozone levels east of the Mississippi.</p>
<p>Do other towns regulate blowers?</p>	<p>Yes. More than 200 towns across the country already ban or regulate blowers. Even in our region, where there are lots of leaves, the list is long and includes Greenwich (CT), Larchmont (NY), Hastings-on-Hudson (NY), Mamaroneck (NY), Sleepy Hollow (NY), Southampton Village (NY), Irvington (NY), Scarsdale (NY), Newton (MA), Cambridge, (MA), Brookline (MA), Lincoln (MA), Montclair (NJ), & Maplewood (NJ).</p>
<p>Why are we also regulating battery/electric blowers?</p>	<p>Although electric/battery blowers are quieter than gas, they are still noisy and, as with gas blowers, the noise grows when more than one machine is used simultaneously. In addition, the powerful air jets of blowers, regardless of power source, create health issues since they aerate and disperse ground source material (e.g., pesticides, herbicides, dust, pollen, heavy metals, and animal feces, etc.). Finally, all blowers disrupt animal, bird, and insect habitats.</p>
<p>Why aren't we regulating gas mowers and other equipment?</p>	<p>Given their extreme noise and negative impact on health and the environment, gas blowers are generally considered the most egregious tool in the lawn maintenance arsenal. Battery-powered blower technology has advanced to the point where it can handle most jobs and is competitively priced, so the time is ripe to make the transition away from gas blowers.</p>
<p>What would the impact be on commercial landscapers?</p>	<p>Based on the experience of the 200+ towns that now regulate leaf blowers, there is no evidence to show that a <u>seasonal</u> leaf blower ordinance will drive landscapers out of business or increase costs to homeowners. This is probably because gas leaf</p>

	<p>blowers are not really needed during the summer and winter: during those periods they are used primarily for cosmetic purposes, such as blowing grass clippings.</p> <p>Even many landscapers recognize that the “blow” part of “mow and blow” has become a routine practice they perform more out of habit than necessity. In fact, lawn experts advise against that practice and say that it’s better to leave clippings in place where they act as a natural fertilizer. And many landscapers express a desire to “go green” for the health of their workers and because their customers favor greener practices, but the landscapers want (and need) a level playing field, which this ordinance will provide.</p> <p>To the extent that a blower is needed, this ordinance would still allow electric blowers year-round, which are more than up to the task of the cosmetic blowing. Commercial-grade battery-powered leaf blowers are now very powerful and competitively priced, even considering the cost of extra batteries. And the capital cost of this equipment can be offset by the gas savings generated by <i>not</i> using gas blowers during the summer. Moreover, the operating costs of battery equipment are orders of magnitude lower than gas blowers, as they do not require the purchase of fuel or a comparable level of maintenance. The American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA) calculates that the operating cost of a battery-powered backpack blower is 24 cents per hour, versus \$1.25 per hour for a gas-powered backpack blower, resulting in an annual saving in operating costs of more than \$450 per blower.</p>
<p>How would this ordinance be enforced?</p>	<p>As with other ordinances such as the Town noise ordinance, this one would be enforced by the Police Department under a standard, state-dictated procedure. Anyone witnessing an alleged violation would notify the police, who will then investigate. The police have discretion to issue a warning to the operator rather than a fine. The objective is to create an environment of awareness and compliance, not confrontation or punishment.</p>
<p>What about the disposal of batteries?</p>	<p>Municipalities have recycling and waste programs for batteries of this type, and many manufacturers have their own disposal/recycling programs. Moreover, there is an emerging industry in recycling lithium-ion batteries. This is true for many other tools that run on such batteries, including our cell phones. According to experts, the health and environmental hazards of gas blowers far outweigh the danger of improper disposal.</p>
<p>If we limit the number of blowers that can be used simultaneously, aren’t we just extending the time for a cleanup?</p>	<p>The driving force behind this ordinance is the health and quality of life impacts of the noise, and multiple blowers have significantly higher impact. Given the way the logarithmic scale of sound increase works, an increase of even 10 decibels is perceived by the human ear as <i>twice</i> as loud. And using multiple blowers of 75+ decibels simultaneously creates even higher levels of harmful noise.</p> <p>The experience in other towns that have passed restrictions is that landscapers have quickly adapted to using a mixture of tools and greener practices to get jobs done as rapidly as possible. This is a very competitive industry. There are also numerous examples of green landscapers whose services are competitively priced, indicating comparable efficiency without using gas blowers.</p>
<p>When would the ordinance take effect?</p>	<p>That depends on if and when it is passed by the full RTM. The minimum time for it to take effect would be 14 days after passage, but we have set a tentative effective date of January 1, 2022 to allow time for users to become familiar with the new rules and purchase new equipment, if necessary.</p>
<p>Isn’t it unfair to limit what people they</p>	<p>We have heard from many, many residents who can no longer enjoy <i>their</i> backyards or homes because of the noise and fumes generated by leaf blowers in a neighbor’s yard. The right of Westporters to peaceful enjoyment of their properties--and to not</p>

can do in their own yards?	have their health negatively impacted—carries equal weight to the right of Westporters to keep their properties immaculately groomed, especially given that there are reasonable alternatives. Moreover, gas blowers will continue to be allowed for spring and fall cleanups and during emergencies declared by local, state, or federal authorities.
What can I do if I still have questions?	You can email RTM members who are co-sponsoring the ordinance. Here are their names and email addresses: Kristin Schneeman: kschneeman@westportct.gov Andrew Colabella: acolabella@westportct.gov Jessica Bram: jbram@westportct.gov The Town of Westport will benefit from creating a quieter, cleaner, safer, and healthier community for all its current and prospective residents.