

Minutes: RTM Environment (ENV) Committee Meeting – Tuesday, 9/27/22, 7:30 p.m.

Committee Members Present: Ellen Lautenberg - Chair, Wendy Batteau, Lori Church, Andrew Colabella, Matt Mandel, Liz Milwe, Lisa Newman

Absent: Cathy Talmadge

Agenda: To Discuss Gas Leaf Blower Ordinance from an Environmental Perspective

Kristin Schneeman gave a brief overview of the ordinance

Ellen Lautenberg opened the meeting by first acknowledging the passing of Arline Gertzoff. She then requested that participants focus primarily on the environmental impact, which includes things like noise and environmental justice. The order of speakers was laid out as follows: Members of the ENV Committee, other members of the RTM, members of the public.

The members of the ENV Committee were then allowed to ask questions or make comments.

Lisa Newman: Why/How did we choose to exempt town operations? Kristin and Liz responded that there was too much intense pushback from Town and that the Town has less total property than individual homeowners.

Lori Church: I'm disappointed Town isn't leading on this.

Wendy Batteau: With her background and "environmental victories", expressed concern that petitioners don't know what environmental justice is and read parts of her email to the RTM into the record. Suggested landscapers should've been consulted and engaged and expressed concerns about issues related to batteries and sources of lithium.

Liz Milwe: The Sponsors of the ordinance did have an open meeting with landscapers and changed the ordinance limiting it to summer; they have listened to the landscapers - we're way behind on this issue.

Liz read a statement from Cathy Talmadge.

Matt: Hate the GLBs but looking at this piece of legislation and would like to find how to do it well. Does not feel we've gotten to a true compromise with landscapers and has questions about timing. Need to change the perception among the community - missing the educational component; we can't tell private citizens they can't blow their lawns after 5:00 pm – should be more like 7:00.

Wendy: This ordinance is not ready for primetime; she's talked with ~50 landscapers who don't feel they've had input; Also concerned with Conservation enforcement capabilities; no phase in period is a problem.

Other RTM members weighed in:

Jessica Bram: Wants us to stick to environmental issues rather than quote other department heads who aren't here; She said she was misquoted without her permission as the Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee.

Candace Banks: What's worse for the pollinators? Is there truly a difference in noise level?

Kristin mentioned changes that were made in the ordinance from conversations with landscapers: Removed restrictions on number of blowers per property, removed legal liability language, rolled back start time, expanded seasonal dates and loosened storm clean up exemption to honor system. Effective date is still a moving target, currently it's March 15th for the time of day changes and Summer ban doesn't start until May. Does not feel that cost is prohibitive for landscapers – Loew's has a good model for around \$300. Re: noise - gas and electric blowers have the same decibels but there is some frequency component that makes the gas engine noise travel further.

Kristin Purcell: Concerned about enforcement and wants to hear more from Conservation.

Colin Kelly, new Director of Conservation Director: Concerned operationally about how the enforcement will be fulfilled by his department; he's only got 5 people in the office and 2 members on field staff in addition to limited; if weekend complaints come in and the landscapers are finished with the work, conservation won't be able to address in real time; worried that people will reach out to the police. We're talking about 9,500 properties that could suddenly come under their review with a small staff.

Liz: There has been some education and they plan to follow Larchmont's education program which includes info on pollinators; Wakeman Town Farm (WTF) will come up with creative ways to educate community.

Harris Falk: This ordinance has more of a lead-in than the two prior versions.

Wendy: concerned about neighbors taking photos of neighbors' yards

Public Comment:

Mark Mathias: Concerned with neighbors reporting on neighbors; Mentioned all devices that make noise - ordinance only focused on one; is it an environmental or noise ordinance? Called the ordinance fundamentally flawed. Just said sometimes the best legislation is no legislation at all and maybe we could achieve more by doing nothing. Proposed a gas blower buyback program.

Toni Simonetti: Toni is a master gardener, said blowers are smallest noise polluters; naming all the noisier things including motorcycles and snowblowers; wants to know why we narrowed this to blowers - this is a simplistic approach to a much larger problem; thinks idling is a larger problem and blowers aren't going to move the needle; landscapers are small businesses, this will cost more and could cost people jobs; it is not true everyone in Westport can afford higher prices.

Alice Ely: A master gardener, pollinator pathway organizer, garden coach, educator at Wakeman Town Farm - This isn't everything but this is a step; spotless yards are not sustainable, we need to embrace a new aesthetic; She said force and noise is greater with gas and injures plants and soil and insects; leaves and clippings make for healthier yards.

Tiffany Weitzer: She is pregnant, a mom and a newcomer from NYC. She started researching leaf blowers when she moved here and said Westport has the worst air quality in the northeast. Confused why people are more concerned with small business than her right to breathe clean air.

Jonathan Steinberg: He's encouraging us to vote it out of committee and take an incremental approach as this can be a model for tackling other things.

Wendy Batteau responded to Tiffany to correct the record on blowers and the ozone; responded to Jonathan saying we have to vote on this as this is and not on its principle.

Kristin Schneeman responded to some comments.

Peter Boyd: He's for doing what we can do now; feels this is a good start.

Dan Delventhal: plugging his electric landscaping business - supports the regulation.

Valerie Seiling Jacobs: addressed enviro concerns, starting with ozone; said landscapers are fear mongering; concerned with health of workers

John Horan: landscaper in Westport; said it is shortsighted to blame ozone on GLBs, machines are more efficient now. Said the Lowe's electric blower is half as efficient as a GLB; asked if the town, which would be exempt from the ordinance, can't get their work done in time, how can landscapers?

Tanvi Gorre: Staples student - the next step doesn't have to be a perfect step.

Diane Lauricella: agreeing with Alice Ely on changing people's habits; spoke about the air pollutants.

Tony McDowell (Earthplace): He supports the ordinance.

Anna Rycenga: Mentioned both pollution and noise - said we don't need to blow leaves. Voiced full support of outreach and education for transition but feels we need more time on education; conservation may not be able to handle the enforcement – asked about exemptions and fines.

Colin Kelly, the new head of Conservation Dept: expressed concern about the Conservation department's ability to enforce the regulation both from a personnel and budget perspective, how violations would be verified, ability to have timely response to complaints

There were various other concerns raise, some of which were not specific to the environmental issues so discussion was limited:

- Small businesses and individual homeowners being required to follow regulations while town properties were exempt;
- The stop time of 5:00 p.m. being too early;
- The amount of time it would take for electric blowers to do the same amount of property as the gas blowers

Vote:

Lori Church proposed the following resolution: The Environment Committee recommends that the full RTM votes to pass the proposed leaf blower ordinance.

Liz Milwe Seconded it.

The committee discussed this but did not support this resolution. After some discussion about what the majority of the committee members would support, Liz Milwe proposed another resolution: The Environment Committee supports the principles behind the proposed ordinance but believes further modification of the language is needed. Andrew Colabella Seconded it.

Vote occurred at 11:59 p.m. with Andrew, Matt, Liz, Ellen, Lisa and Lori voting yes and Wendy voting to abstain.