

**Report:** 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 the current draft of the gas leaf blower ordinance from an environmental impact perspective

Kristin Schneeman gave a brief overview of the ordinance

Chair Ellen Lautenberg opened the meeting by requested that participants focus primarily on the environmental impact, which includes things like noise and environmental justice.

The members of the ENV Committee then ask questions or made comments. These included discussing why the petitioners chose to exempt town operations, concerns about environmental justice, suggestions that landscapers should've been consulted earlier on in the process, issues related to batteries and sources of lithium, time of day restrictions and ability of Conservation Dept to enforce.

Other RTM members asked questions about the difference in noise level, reporting violations and enforcement.

Colin Kelly, new Director of the Conservation Dept responded by expressing concerns about use of limited staff and ability to respond in a timely manner: for example, 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 and having approximately 9,500 properties that could suddenly come under their review with a small staff as well as budgetary concerns.

Kristin Schneeman and Liz Milwe, sponsors, responded by mentioning changes that were made to the ordinance based on conversations with landscapers: Removed restrictions on number of blowers per property, removed legal liability language, rolled back start time, expanded seasonal dates, including limiting the restriction to gas blowers to only Summer and loosened storm clean up exemption. They mentioned that effective date is still a moving target. They do not feel that cost is prohibitive for landscapers. Regarding the noise level - gas and electric blowers have the same decibels but there is a frequency component that makes the gas engine noise travel further. They mentioned there has been some education and they plan to follow Larchmont's education program which includes info on pollinators; Wakeman Town Farm (WTF) will help to come up with creative ways to educate community.

During public comment, both support and concerns were expressed.

Concerns included neighbors reporting on neighbors; that other devices make noise but ordinance only focuses on one; question about whether it is an environmental or noise ordinance; issue does not need to be legislated as landscaping will be moving towards electric equipment in the next couple years anyway; the cost to small businesses being high and could cost people jobs; not everyone in Westport can afford higher landscaping costs that would be incurred; if the town is not expected to get their work done without gas blowers, why should the landscapers; the current electric blowers are not as efficient as gas blowers so jobs take longer; difficult to keep batteries charged for multiple uses per day; issues

with electric batteries which include difficulties getting them and environmental issues with Lithium as well as potential fire hazard; should focus more on education than on regulation; the stopping time of 5:00 is too early for some home owners.

Positives included that this is a step in the right direction; Westport should be a leader on this issue; spotless yards are not sustainable; the force of gas blowers injure plants, soil and insects; leaves and clippings make yards healthier; Westport has been reported to have bad air quality and this would help improve it; passing this would begin an incremental approach for tackling additional environmental issues; it would be better for health of the workers than using gas blowers.

Some landscapers that have already converted to electric blowers support the regulation. Tony McDowell of Earthplace expressed support for the ordinance.

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.