

Approved by
the Select Board on:

2/14/2022

Select Board Public Forum

Proposed Leaf Blower Control Bylaw

January 25, 2022

7:00 pm

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: February 28, 2022

TIME: 2:44 PM

CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order by Chair Adam Dash. Vice Chair Roy Epstein and Select Board member Mark Paolillo were present, along with Town Administrator Patrice Garvin.

Dash announced that said this is a special meeting to discuss the leaf blower bylaw. About a year ago a public forum was held on this issue and there was little consensus. Three draft versions of the bylaw came out of the prior forums. One version of the bylaw allowed gas leaf blowers and the others did not. The drafts are on the Town website for public viewing. Adding a new bylaw is a Town Meeting decision. The question under discussion is whether the Select Board wants to put a warrant article for a leaf blower bylaw on the Town Meeting agenda.

[Dash announced that there are over 100 people attending the meeting.]

Epstein reminded attendees that the bylaw proposals on the website are drafts. The language in those drafts are for discussion purposes only. Dash said that this forum is intended to be a brand new start on a possible bylaw.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Carleton Graham, pct. 2, said if a bylaw passes, then landscapers are going to have a hard time to find employees to rake the leaves. The cost of the extra labor, will make it more expensive to run the landscaping businesses. He hopes the Town will come to a decision that will not hurt the small businesses.

Dante Muzzioli said he has lived in Belmont his whole life, he has been on many boards, and he has a landscaping business. He said it's important to find a compromise. The Town of Belmont is known as the "town of trees" and it's a challenge to pick up leaves. We have to respect residents' choices to handle leaves the way they want. He said it's important to create a bylaw that is enforceable.

Michael Trotsky said he does his own lawn with a gas blower. He said electric is not as efficient as gas. The Town rules should apply to landowners, businesses and the DPW. Most of the time, the blower noise is over in an hour. He would like to see a hot line for complaints, rather than a ban. He feels that the noise of leaf blowers pale compared to the airplane noise. We should not be putting in a law that only affects leaf blowers. The laws should be a part of an environmental package.

Cosmo Macero, pct. 5, said that he feels the Select Board is pushing this forward. In drafting bylaw, he hopes they have researched other anecdotal information.

Simone Tropeano, pct. 2, believes it would not be a good idea to put a ban on gas blowers. She agrees that a one hour limit per residence would be a more reasonable approach to the problem. Electric blowers take much longer and are less effective. She is worried that a restrictive bylaw will affect landscapers bottom line if they have to buy new blowers.

David Kershaw, pct. 2, clears his own leaves and he tries to do it in the quickest way possible. Battery and electric are not as efficient. He doesn't feel that the Town should target what types of blowers are allowed because homeowners who do their own yard maintenance will have to buy new blowers.

Geoff Lubien, pct. 7, said he spoke about this at last year's forum and he tried an electric leaf blower and it does not have the force needed for heavy leaves. He thinks the technology is not yet available for a bylaw that bans gas leaf blowers. He also thinks that imposing a time limit would be impossible to enforce. The noise ordinance that exists should cover any issues.

Sue Bass, pct. 3, said there is no need for leaf blowers. She has half an acre and when she asked her contractor not to use a gas leaf blower they were able to take care of yard maintenance using a rake without the cost going up.

Jay Fedigan, pct. 1, said he worries about the long-term safety of our children. Leaf blowers impact our children when they are outdoors because of the pollution they cause. Belmont is a child friendly town. He suggests a compromise and he would like to see a restricted time period for leaf blowers put in place.

Dorothy Stoneman, pct. 2, is delighted the issue is being discussed. She feels that Belmont should take steps towards addressing this issue as an environmental issue. Many landscape workers do not wear protective gear to protect them from the pollution caused by leaf blowers.

David Titus, pct. 7, said he works from home. Of all the sources of noise, the leaf blowers are the most annoying in the summer. If you are on a conference call it's problematic. Noise is the biggest issue for him.

James Catona, pct. 7, owns a landscaping business. He said if someone is walking on the street, his crew stops working. Town employees should not be exempt from these bylaws. We need to listen to everyone.

Christine, is a graduate student who lives in Belmont. She said that electric may be the future of the world, but forcing contractors to get new equipment is not fair.

Roger Wrubel would like to see regulation of leaf blowers. He would like a leaf blower free day, and he would like to see gas leaf blowers be used only for leaves. He thinks the leaf blower bylaw should be phased in slowly and look to 2024 for implementation.

Jeff Levin-Sherz, pct. 2, would support a leaf blower ban. Leaf blowers are bad for the people who use them.

Thomas Nehr Korn said he is bothered by the noise and smell of gas leaf blowers. He supports seasonal restrictions.

Marina Atlas, is extremely concerned about the air pollution issues. Her migraines are exacerbated by leaf blowers. Children should be free of carcinogens. She is a former environmental protection specialist. Science supports that landscape workers can have hearing loss when they don't have access to protection. This is an OSHA issue and she supports reasonable restrictions.

Matt Taylor, pct. 1, said he studied local data on this issue. Nearly every surrounding town has some sort of leaf blower ordinance. He favors limiting use of leaf blowers by season and hours of day. He said

that Newton limits their ordinance to contractors. They fine the company, not the individual homeowner.

Karen said leaf blowers make it difficult to enjoy the warmer weather. In dense areas it gets overwhelming.

John Kolis, pct. 7, thinks that reducing noise and air pollution is based on good intentions. But he doesn't like the idea of jumping immediately to fine based enforcement. He thinks we should allow time for businesses and people to adapt to restrictions. And he also believes that the Town should not be exempt from its own bylaws.

Michael D'Andrea, pct. 3, owns a landscaping business in Belmont. He said that leaf blowers are essential tools for his industry. They save so much time. He said electric blower technology has not been developed enough to perform over long periods of time. He thinks that a restriction on the decibels of blowers make more sense. A ban would be too strict.

Judith Ananian Sarno, pct. 3, said she cannot support the bylaw at the time. It seems unfair to place restrictions on home owners or small businesses. If Belmont enacts a bylaw, the time line for compliance should be determined by when the contractors and Town can comply successfully.

Ian Todreas, pct. 1, has worked with Belmont in their emission reduction goals. He is in favor of leaf blower restrictions. People should be able to live without debris being blown around. He said the state of CA is banning gas equipment in a few years. There is legislation at the state level that can supplement equipment purchases.

Tom Lockett, said his main complaint about the leaf blowers is the noise and pollution they cause and he is in favor of restricting gas powered tools. If we are serious about our greenhouse gas limits, then this is a huge part of that. The restrictions could be phased in over a few years to help businesses.

Deb Lockett said climate change is real. Landscapers need support to get into electric. Climate change should be the number one issue.

Connor Maguire works for a landscaper. He said he cares about the environment, but it's important to look at the environmental issue from a broader perspective. People have to look at all the issues. He said if it's hard to find employees right now, adding the impact of a leaf blower by law would make it even harder to find workers. He feels that if a bylaw is instituted, that the Town should be putting in laws to help small businesses.

Jean Devine, pct. 6, is an environmental educator. She feels that we need to focus on our children's future. Gas blowers are a threat to public health and antithetical to goals to reduce global warming.

Sarah McGilvery, pct. 5, lives in a thickly settled area where there are many gas blowers. She feels Belmont needs to lead the way in environmental issues. She wonders why people need all their leaves removed from their yards.

Irene Fairley, pct. 8, favors restricting the use of gas blowers to the Fall season. We can learn to live with a slightly messy environment. Lawns don't need to be cleared of leaves and mowed constantly. She uses the Belmont kids to help rake her lawn.

Dean Hickman, pct. 1, is the Chair of Sustainable Belmont. He believes a bylaw restriction is necessary to protect the health of landscaping employees and residents. Noise is important but pollution is more important. Health and safety issues cross boundaries. He said that the Lexington DPW uses electric blowers. He would like to see a phased in bylaw be enacted that includes special quiet days.

Krista Maguire, pct. 8, feels there are not enough options currently to force small businesses to face restrictions that impose financial hardships. There are many tools and vehicles have a negative environmental impact. She wonders why are we not considering the impact of all of the pollution causing sources, rather than focusing on leaf blowers.

Marc Wolman worked in air pollution control and is retired now. He finds gas blower noise is an assault on his nerves. He would like to see either an overall ban or a restricted schedule.

Erin Lubien, said Sustainable Belmont gets grants from the state, why is there not already a plan to remove gas equipment over time? We can implement a bylaw that includes a plan that is amenable to small businesses. Instead of focusing on just leaf blowers, we should be taking into consideration the impacts of all gas-powered equipment; snow blowers, gas lawn mowers, etc.

Jerry Brown, pct. 6, said in his opinion, homeowners can pick up 80 to 90% of leaves with a rake as fast as with a leaf blower. If we are not trying make a lawn look perfect, then raking works just fine. There are landscapers who will honor requests to not use gas blowers.

Mike Atlas, pct. 7, has been gardening in a more sustainable way and he learned that leaf blowers are detrimental to the soil in plants and gardens. He shreds leaves and they break down in the winter.

Stephen Rosales is not in favor of imposing a bylaw. Imposing a bylaw against leaf blowers would create a slippery slope. We would then have to consider the impact of snow blowers, circular saws, sanders, power washers. Also he thinks enforcement will be a major issue. What is the cost to enforce the citations? What if the offender wants to take it to court? All of this will have a cost. We already have a noise bylaw. Be careful what you start.

Brian Brady is against the bylaw. The law of unintended consequences comes into play here. Ultimately we are heading towards electric tools and vehicles but we cannot force this issue at this time.

Greg Hall, pct. 2, is in support of a ban. He maintains his own lawn. He moved to Belmont five years ago from CA where they had a ban on leaf blowers. Enforcement is important. We need to phase out the blowers.

Carolyn Bishop said her property abuts six other properties and three of them use the same crew, who use gas leaf blowers without ear or face protection. One neighbor uses an electric blower and it's much quieter. We need to restrict the gas equipment and not exempt Town workers.

Bill Anderson, said he had strong opinions when started listening to this forum, but now he realizes the complexity of the issue. He thinks that the problem requires a well thought out solution. He is concerned about the health and safety of landscape workers, but you cannot ban gas blowers. He believes it would be better to put in place incentives rather than penalties.

Beth Miller, has lived here 15 years, and she believes the grit produced by gas leaf blowers creates air pollution.

Darrell King, pct. 1, thanked the Select Board for holding this forum. He uses a rake and a broom to clean his yard. He says you don't need leaf blowers. What started as a convenience is now a necessity. We need to phase gas blowers out gradually rather than using Draconian measures. Leaf blowers don't work with wet leaves. The Town needs to move towards electric or battery-operated yard equipment.

Sarah Jensen, pct. 4, said leaves can be helpful for lawns. There is a more ecological way to handle leaves that enriches the lawn. The community needs to be educated about healthy yards.

Gwen Urdang-Brown, pct. 6, is in support of a bylaw to ban gas leaf blowers. She cannot embrace the slippery slope idea. She feels leaf blowers are much noisier than snow blowers or any other type of yard equipment and they are used more often.

John works from home and he said he has gotten accustomed to the noise of the leaf blowers. He finds that the employees who work for landscapers are very courteous. He thinks the Town should set the example and pave the way for change ahead of contractors by trying out different landscaping methods and then the Town could make an informed decision about how to approach the problem. Electric blowers also blow debris into the air. Not all people can rake leaves.

Lindsay Levine, supports banning leaf blowers. Protecting human health should be the main concern.

Barry Kaye is a physician and he has listened to all the comments. He feels that restricting blowers to one day a week would help. This is more about homeowners having to get every last leaf off their lawn at the expense of their neighbors. He would support a three-year phase in policy, with state support of the purchase of electric equipment.

Don Button, pct. 1, said we know Belmont is heading towards sustainability and we need to continue on that trajectory.

Ken Stahlberg supports the leaf blower regulation. The noise from leaf blowers far surpasses snow blowers and lawnmowers. The pollution cannot be justified when there are alternatives.

Catherine Bowen, pct. 4, said she thinks that this forum is a step in the right direction.

Kathleen Ruane, pct. 8, has been here 40 years, and said it seems that Belmont always compare ourselves to other towns. Maybe Belmont should take the lead and not follow others.

Ruth Small, pct. 6, strongly supports the ban. She said she has benefited by the rebate the Town has given for residents to purchase electric leaf blowers. Sometimes we have to listen to leaf blowers all the time. We can't enjoy our yard because of the noise.

Kimberley Selness said this should not be an either/or situation. She doesn't think anyone is trying to ban leaf blowers entirely, but maybe we should restrict them for a certain time period. She favors banning them after certain hours especially the commercial ones.

Antonio Tropeano, pct. 2, is opposed to banning gas leaf blowers. He feels that there are so many regulations, we don't need another one. Small businesses do need to be considered. A plan needs to be thoughtfully put together includes feedback from businesses in a phased-in plan.

Bill Anderson asked the Select Board to look at what Arlington has done about this problem. He thinks they have come up with a practical solution.


Cosmo Macera said the DPW divisions should be involved in the conversation to provide their valuable input.

Adam Dash thanked attendees for their valuable input. If people have other things to say, please email SelectBoard@Belmont-ma.gov. Dash said we will not deliberate tonight, the subject will be taken up by Town Meeting, but he plans to put the issue on the Select Board agenda for further discussion.

This public forum will be available for viewing on Belmont Media Center.

Motion was made to adjourn and approved by a vote of 3-0.

Respectfully Submitted,



PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator