



# HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, June 7, 2022

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

**The Health and Environment Committee will conduct a public hearing to discuss the issue of the adverse impacts of gas-powered leaf blowers and recent bans on their use in other jurisdictions.**

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Dennis J. Carlone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quinton Zondervan	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council's Health and Environment Committee was held on June 7, 2022 at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Nolan. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2022 adopted by the Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, the public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

**Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.**

Councillor Nolan – Present

Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote

Councillor Carlone - Present

Councillor McGovern – Present

Councillor Zondervan – Present/Remote

**Present-5. Absent-0. Quorum established.**

Councillor Nolan stated that there are six people signed up for Public Comment and stated that each person would have a choice as to when they would give their public comment, either before or after the presentations. All of the public commenters chose to give their comments after the presentations.

Councillor Nolan gave some background information via a PowerPoint titled "Adverse Impacts of and bans on Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers." (**ATTACHMENT A**). She stated that what spurred this particular effort is that the Climate Crisis Working Group concluded its work a few months ago and they mentioned that it would be good for Cambridge to be a leader in the effort as an environmental issue. Another factor is a Cambridge student's inspiration.

Owen O'Riordan, Commissioner, Department of Public Works, introduced City staff who were present to address questions and comments from City Councillors: John Nardone, Deputy Commissioner, David Webster, Division Head for Parks, Department of Public Works (DPW); Sam Corda, Managing Director Water Department, Nicole Murati Ferrer, Chair, License Commission, and Adam Corbeil, Recreation and Aquatics Director, Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP).

Minutes Acceptance: Minutes of Jun 7, 2022 3:00 PM (Committee Reports)

John Nardone and Nicole Murati Ferrer gave a summary of a PowerPoint titled: "Leaf Blowers in Cambridge." **(ATTACHMENT B)**. Mr. Nardone stated that a lot of the slides are from a presentation that was given in 2019 when discussing a total ban. He stated that the City Ordinance states that the City Council recognized that a total ban on the use of such equipment would have a severe adverse impact on the ability of the City to effectively remove leaves, dust, dirt, grass clippings, cuttings and trimmings from trees, etc. Ms. Murati Ferrer summarized enforcement efforts by the License Commission and stated that the best practices are encompassed in the Rules and Regulations that are provided to contractors and operators that get licensed and permitted through the License Commission.

As it relates to modifications to City Operations, Mr. Nardone stated that for the past five years, the City has been exploring several pieces of electric maintenance equipment, particularly when it comes to leaf blowers. He said that he is pleased to report that all in-house City operations have switched over to battery-operated portable leaf blowers. He explained that more recently, DPW has worked with several different contractors who perform approximately 75% of landscape/park maintenance for the City who have switched over to battery-operated backpack leaf blowers. Adam Corbeil added that he is pleased to say that the Fresh Pond Golf Course has transitioned over to fully battery operated backpack leaf blowers. He said that the golf course has made a lot of effort in a replacement plan for all of the vehicles. He noted that mowers, tractor, and aerator equipment that have accessories that are battery powered have been purchased which will aid in the transition to electric equipment. Councillor Nolan asked for clarification that only battery powered leaf blowers are being used at the golf course, with the exception of large cleanups except in the massive cleanups. Mr. Corbeil answered in the affirmative.

Nicole Murati Ferrer said that although some commercial leaf blower operators are using electric leaf blowers, the majority still operate gas leaf blowers.

Councillor Nolan opened the meeting to Public Comment.

Virginia Coleman, 2 Berkeley Place, stated that she spearheaded the 2019 effort to ban all leaf blowers. She said that she is no longer asking for a total ban, just a ban on gas leaf blowers. She said that the ban, as proposed, gives large property owners 4 years to do this. She said that this is doable.

Dawn Burau, 10 Appleton Road, talked about the adverse effects of leaf blowers.

James Kelley, Cambridge Landscape Company, 100 Smith Place, stated that he was on the Committee that crafted the original ordinance. He said that there is a need for gas blowers at certain times of the year. He said that his company has electric equipment and has spent over \$100,000 this year purchasing electric mowers. He said that he would like for there to be a grant for a period of time in the fall and spring to use gas powered equipment.

Laura McMurray, 334 Harvard Street, stated that two-stroke engines pollute the air. She spoke of a study based in California regarding gas leaf blowers. She said electric leaf blowers are not perfect but they are a better way to go than the gas leaf blowers.

Susan Butler, 14 Clinton Street, stated that she has two building that are entirely electric with zero combustion. She said that she is a nurse who is concerned about health. She said that the problem with leaf blowers is particulates. She said that one should keep all plant material on the land where it came from. She said that if there was a machine the vacuumed with tight HEPA filtration keeping the particulates in may be healthy but everything else is dangerous and unhealthy.

Kerry Canavan, Deputy Director of Operations, Cambridge Housing Authority, stated that she is not in favor of a total ban of gas-powered leaf blowers. She said that it would be difficult for maintenance staff to clear the leaves out of the large developments. She said electric leaf blowers are used on a regular basis.

Councillor Zondervan said that he was part of the first effort to ban leaf blowers over ten years ago. He said that he worked in landscaping as a teen and carried a two-stroke backpack leaf blower. He is aware of the health impacts on the workers. He said that he cannot stand the noise. He said that the concerns raised by City staff are significant. He said that technology is not there yet. He asked about battery disposal. Mr. Nardone responded that as we get into more electric in general, there must be a conversation about what is happening with that waste. He noted that the City does recycle batteries as it always has.

Councillor McGovern stated that he understands the concerns around noise and health issues. He said that he is open to a plan to phase out gas powered equipment. He asked a question about enforcement issues. He asked what one would do when someone is violating the ordinance. Who do they contact? Ms. Murati Ferrer stated that since the License Commission has begun a proactive campaign, they get more information from the public when these things are happening but they proactively teach these companies what the rules and regulations are in Cambridge. She said that a lot of the companies are doing their own training of their own employees. She said that people are told to call the License Commission main line, e-mail and they can call the non-emergency police line. She said that investigators do not have the authority to issue a ticket even if they see the violation. A hearing is then conducted. She said that she is unsure where the issue of tickets has landed as it is a complicated process.

Councillor Nolan stated that she is interested in understanding what other cities are doing. She said that California is in the process of phasing in a ban across the entire state. She said that the City should consider if is other equipment to think about such as string trimmers or hedge trimmers. She said that this is emission pollution that can be controlled. She said it is an environment justice issue of the health of the workers using these machines. She asked how we can move forward to protect the City's air and the protection of the workers who use this equipment. She asked Mr. Cobiell if the vehicles at the Fresh Pond Golf Course are being replaced with electric. Mr. Corbeil responded that that is the goal. He said that currently there are 8 pieces of equipment that are being run on battery power.

Councillor Carlone said that it would be great if the DPW and the License Commission could have a position paper giving a summary with all of the information that may not be in meeting minutes that can be built upon.

Councillor Azeem said that he appreciates the conversation and looks forward to being all electric.

Councillor Nolan stated that the conversation should be continued. She stated that large institutional players and what changes can and should be made to the current ordinance.

Susanne Rasmussen noted resources available for the transition to electric equipment.

Mr. Kelley added that thought also needs to be given to infrastructure that is needed to plug in.

Councillor Carlone made a motion to adjourn at approximately 4:46 p.m.:

**Deputy City Clerk Crane called the roll.**

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Carlone - Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Zondervan – Yes

**Yes-5. Absent-0. Motion Passed.**

Attachment A: Presentation titled “Adverse impacts of and bans on Gas-powered Leaf Blowers.”

Attachment B: Presentation titled “Leaf Blowers in Cambridge.”

**Clerk’s Note:** The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. This is a permanent record.

The video for this meeting can be viewed at:

[https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/271?view\\_id=1&redirect=true&h=864f066efee7b9dcbb5ed4866a34aa20](https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/271?view_id=1&redirect=true&h=864f066efee7b9dcbb5ed4866a34aa20)

All meetings are “closed captioned”. After each meeting the “closed captioned transcripts” are available online at: <https://app.box.com/s/9qormcahynjt4pzpt1n5opixogl3q7k5>

Please note that there is no editing of these “closed captioned transcripts” and they do not constitute a verbatim transcript prepared by a certified transcriber.



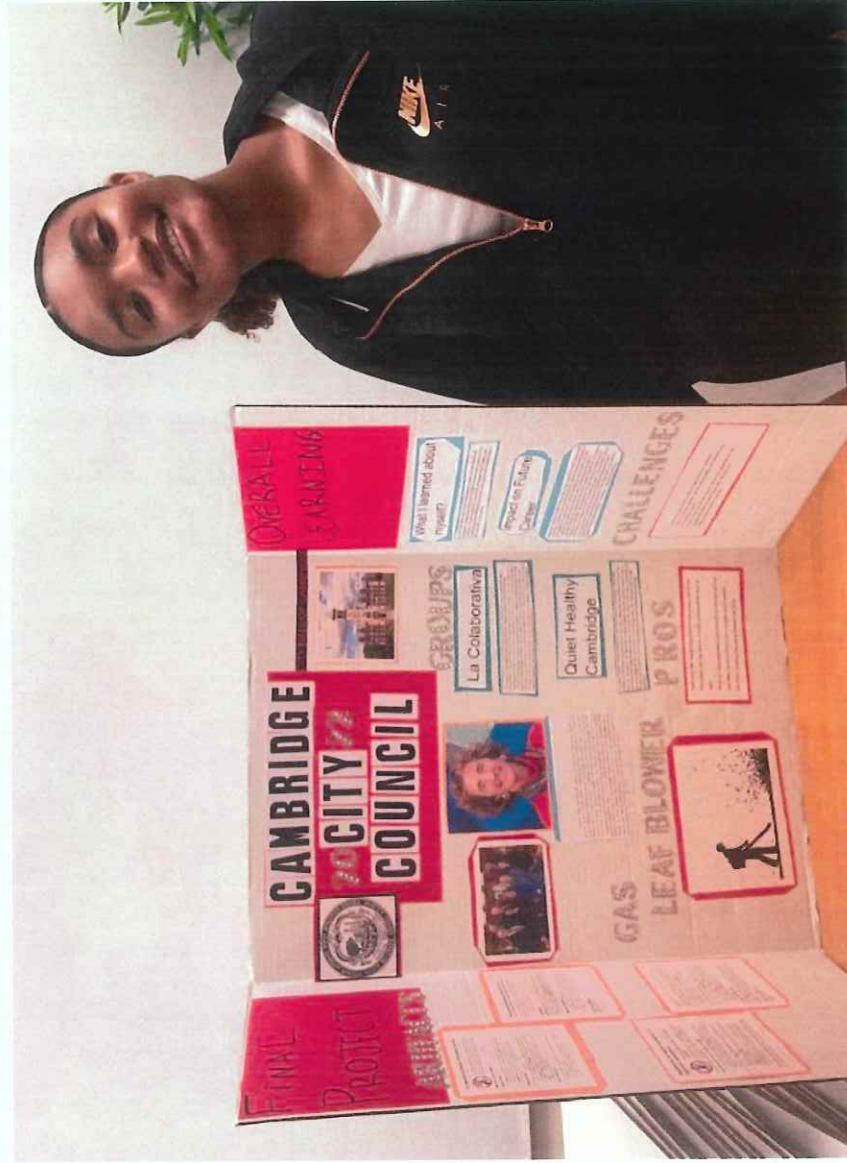
# Adverse impacts of and bans on Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers

Health & Environment Meeting | June 6th, 2022

1

## Cambridge student inspiration

Viviany Barbosa Brito, spring intern from CCSC, decided to do her project on gas-powered leaf blowers



2





## Current Cambridge regulations on Leaf Blowers

Cambridge Leaf Blower Ordinance (Section 8.16.081) regulates leaf blower noise levels and the dates and times of day they can be used.

Due to adverse impacts of leaf blowers, especially gas powered ones, today represents a time to discuss a possible update and strengthening of that Ordinance to ban the use of gas-powered leaf blowers.

## Past efforts to ban Leaf Blowers most recent 2019



Cambridge discussed a proposal to ban all leaf blowers, not only gas powered ones.

Effort failed to pass - concerns about impact

Raking is better from many perspectives

Discussion today is on ban of gas powered leaf blowers only, with electric ones allowed





## Environmental Pollution Impact

- Gas leaf blowers use 2-stroke engines, which pollute with greenhouse gasses, contributing to the climate crisis.
- Gas-powered blowers create localized emissions including many compounds and particulate matter classified as hazardous air pollutants by the EPA, meaning that they are toxic, carcinogenic, and/or ozone-forming.
- To put the pollution in perspective, hydrocarbon emissions from a half-hour of yard work with a gas-powered leaf blower are about the same as a driving a pickup truck from Texas to Alaska.



## Health Impacts and Environmental Justice

- Noise levels are so loud that users suffer from health issues and possibly lifelong hearing problems. (Often equipment protecting ears and eyes is not available or offered).
- The particulates users breathe can increase the risk of getting cancer and heart disease, especially workers who use the equipment for long time.
- The sound from gas blowers travels farther and passes more easily through walls than does sound from electric blowers.

## Recent jurisdictions gas Leaf blower bans

- **Washington DC.** A ban on gas-powered leaf blowers as of January 2022.
- **State of California.** Ban on the sale of new gas-powered leaf blowers (and lawn mowers) will start in 2024, and on portable generators by 2028.
- **Lexington MA** voted March 2022 to ban gas-powered leaf blowers starting in 2025. **Arlington MA** phasing in a ban over several years with some exception & **Marblehead MA** voted for a limited ban during the summer months .
- **Boston, Belmont, Brookline, and Winchester** (and possibly others) are exploring bans on gas-powered leaf blowers.
- **37 other USA cities and towns** already have bans.

# Objections and Responses

## What are the main objections? Possible solutions:

- Cost - Electric leaf blowers can cost more than gas-powered leaf blowers
- Longevity - If used all day, electric blowers need to be recharged
- Power: takes longer to complete job if electric not strong enough
- Cost - While electric blowers are more expensive up front, they cost less to operate over time
  - The City of Cambridge can explore financial help to small landscape companies
- Longevity - Extra batteries can be brought to the landscape site to replace when the original gets low
- Current electric models are getting better
  - Need to ask: what price for environmental justice



# Leaf Blowers in Cambridge

## 8.16.081 - Leaf Blowers

Statement of purpose. The City Council hereby finds that the reduction of noise and emissions of particulate matter resulting from the use of leaf blowers is a public purpose that protects the public health, welfare and environment of the City of Cambridge and its citizens. The City Council recognizes that a total ban on the use of such equipment would have a severe adverse impact on the ability of the City to effectively remove leaves, dust, dirt, grass clippings, cuttings and trimmings from trees, shrubs and other types of litter and debris from streets, sidewalks, cemeteries and large recreational facilities and other open spaces and to clean and maintain such facilities without relaxing restrictions on the use of such equipment for maintenance operations of such facilities.

# Ordinance Summary

- ▶ Restricted use protects public health, welfare, and the environment
- ▶ Defined as portable, handheld, or backpack style equipment
- ▶ Must meet current EPA emissions standards and cannot emit noise greater than 65 decibels as rated by the manufacturer at a distance of 50 feet.
- ▶ Only allowed between March 15<sup>th</sup> and June 15<sup>th</sup> and September 15<sup>th</sup> and December 31<sup>st</sup>
- ▶ Provisions do not apply to the following City parcels: Danehy Park, Freshpond Reservation, Municipal Golf Course, Cambridge Cemetery, the Old Burial Ground, and during emergency operations
- ▶ There is a limit of leaf blowers than can be used per parcel.
- ▶ Commercial operators must be permitted:
  - ▶ Train all operators on Cambridge ordinance and regulations
  - ▶ Provide Personal Protective equipment
  - ▶ The regulations also provide additional restrictions as to the manner of use





# On-going Education

On a yearly basis, commercial leaf blower operators, municipal contractors, and City staff who operate leaf blowers are educated on the requirements of the City Ordinance, Leaf Blower Regulations, and best practices.

## ► What is controlled by Ordinance:

Season Restrictions - Spring & Autumn.

Time Restrictions - Time of Day, Sundays and Holidays.

Noise Restrictions - types of blowers and when multiple ones can be used.

## ► What is controlled by the Rules (offered in English, Spanish and Portuguese):

Cannot operate simultaneously on adjacent parcels.

Commercial leaf blower operators must train their employees on the Ordinance and Rules.

Cannot be pointed at animals or persons and operator must be 50 ft. away.

Prohibited to blow towards open windows or doors.

Cannot blow debris into basins, adjacent property, street, vehicles, etc. (some exceptions for municipal contractors).

Employees must wear ear protection when operating and that protection is to be provided by the employer free of charge.

Cannot be used for construction dust, plaster dust or dry garden topsoil.



# On-going Education

## ► Best Practices

Operator should use respiratory and eye protection (if employee requests, employer must provide free of charge).

Use rakes when possible.

Use longest nozzle and orient nozzle to reduce noise.

Stop using leaf blowers while playgrounds are in use.

Wet dusty areas prior to use when possible.

Avoid large dust plumes.

Service equipment regularly.

Use at lowest setting.





# ENFORCEMENT

## SeeClickFix

In 2016 The City established a Leaf Blower complaint category within Commonwealth Connect. This category continues to be an important tool in monitoring and enforcing compliance.

### LICENSE COMMISSION'S GENERAL PROACTIVE APPROACH:

1. Investigators patrol the City for improper use of leaf blowers. Any information received from a CAD as to the improper use of a leaf blower is enforced.
2. Non-permitted commercial leaf blowers which are operating in Cambridge are sent "warning" cease and desist letters with a link to the application and copy of the Ordinance. This has been very effective in educating companies and getting them permitted.
3. Any violation at a property where there is no information as to who is performing the work, a "warning" cease and desist letter is sent. The letter includes the Ordinance and information for the resident to provide the commercial operator, if any. When necessary residents are brought in for a meeting with the Chief Licensing Investigator and the Chair for the License Commission. The Ordinance and its limitations are explained to the resident.
4. Permitted and non-permitted commercial leaf blowers who violate the Ordinance have been brought before the Board of License Commissioners and fines of \$300.00 per violation have been issued. This has been effective in having the companies take accountability for their employees and spend time educating their employees.
5. If a violation is issued to a company, the owner of the parcel where the violation occurred is also noticed.





# FURTHER STEPS TAKEN BY THE LICENSE COMMISSION

1. Created and published Rules and Regulations which include limitations more stringent than the Ordinance. These Rules and Regulations have been published in English, Spanish and Portuguese and are provided yearly to all permitted companies. They are also available on the License Commission's website.
2. Periodically publish in the Cambridge Chronicle an advisory with information as to the Ordinance and the commercial leaf blowers currently permitted in the City of Cambridge. This information is available on the License Commission's website.
3. Send reminders to all permitted companies as to time, day and season restrictions, and the Rules and Regulations. Send emails to all companies when there is a "trend" of violations.
4. Publish the advisory on the limitations of the Ordinance on City Manager's newsletter which is sent to all residents.
5. Send renewal applications to previously permitted companies. With renewals, re-publish the Rules and Regulations.
6. Have Investigators patrol the City to ensure compliance with the Ordinance.

# MODIFICATIONS TO CITY OPERATIONS.

- ▶ All City operations have switched to battery operated portable blowers.
- ▶ At this time DPWs primary landscape contractor has committed to only using battery powered backpack leaf blowers on city parks and open spaces.
- ▶ Times of operation have been adjusted during both Spring and Fall. March 15th to May 31st and September 15th to Dec 31st. (If possible we will restrict Public Works crews to December 1st)
- ▶ The Department will restrict the use of leaf blowers on flower beds and ground cover areas to the extent possible in an effort to reduce the loss of soil and reduce dust volumes from these areas
- ▶ Continue to purchase battery powered leaf blower equipment. (battery time continues to be an issue).
- ▶ Toomey Park is maintained exclusively by electric landscaping equipment. This equipment is stored and powered in the maintenance facility constructed under the mound in the park.



## Effectiveness of the battery operated leaf blowers

Since the Fall of 2016 City staff have been utilizing a variety of battery operated leaf blowers. This equipment has noise levels at or below 65 decibels.

### Pros:

No fuel to carry

Noise level is slightly less

Good for working with light dry debris

Eliminate emissions

### Cons:

Power is limited

Battery life is limited

Not effective with heavy debris

Less comfortable for the operator

Battery disposal





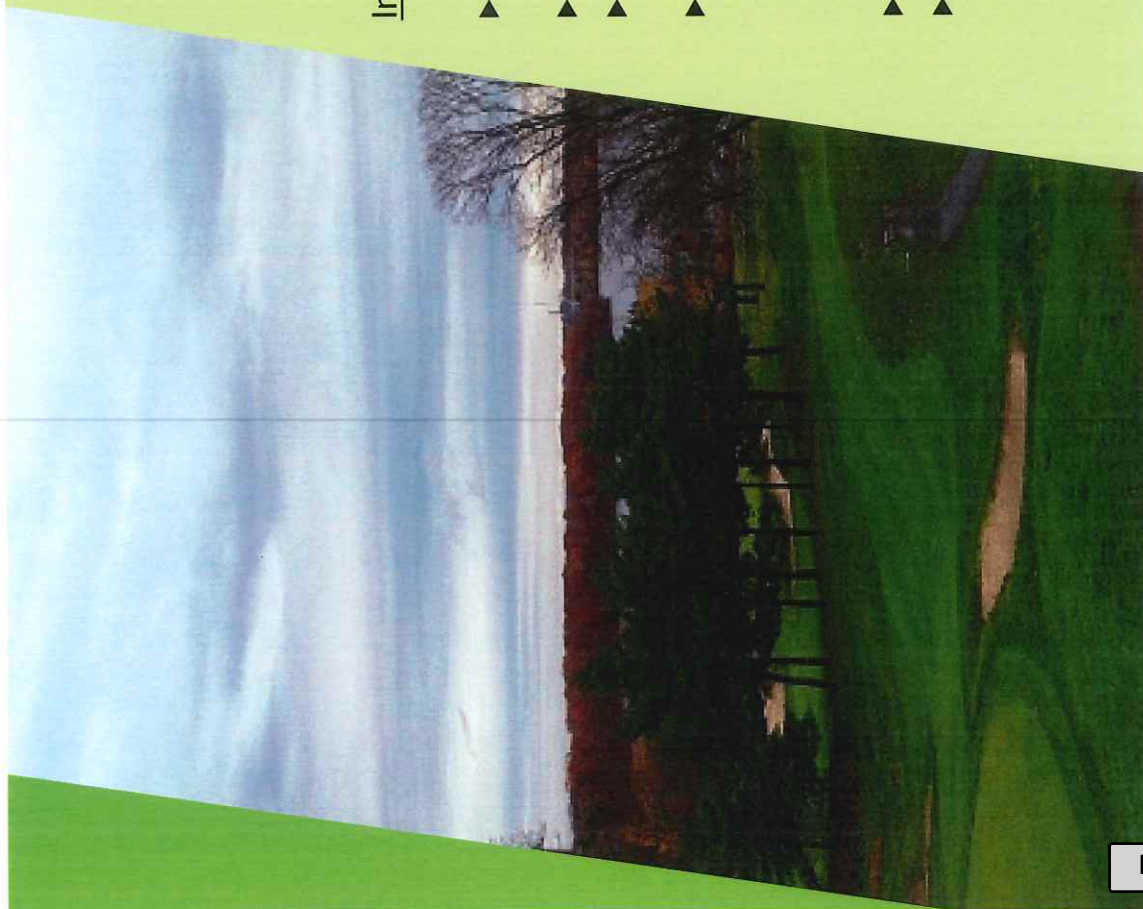
# Additional Challenges to a full Ban Operational

## CITY WIDE TOTALS 2018



Field by Field Permitted Usage Data

- ▶ A complete leaf blower ban could effect the amount of play time and quality of play.
- ▶ Will not allow city, contractors, colleges and companies to clean debris efficiently and effectively.
- ▶ Significant increase in cost associated with leaf cleanup and insufficient seasonal manpower available.
- ▶ Increased probability of root and stem damage in planted areas due to increased use of harsh raking.
- ▶ Increased leaf debris may cause build up of organic matter on fields, pathways, and fence lines, affecting drainage and ultimately playability.
- ▶ Aesthetic qualities of parks, fields, planting beds, walking paths, sidewalks, plazas and businesses throughout the city will decrease.



## Specific Impacts of outright ban

### Impact on Golf Course

- ▶ Impossible to maintain tee boxes, bunkers, and greens.
- ▶ Impossible to hand rake 35 acre course.
- ▶ Labor market shortage for seasonal workers adds to challenge.
- ▶ Longer time frame to clear course meaning
  - 1) shorter playing times
  - or 2) maintaining while playing. (unsafe).
- ▶ Like playing fields - issues with dead turf.
- ▶ Greens need leaf blowers.





## Specific Impacts of outright ban

### Impact on stormwater

- ▶ Excessive leaves lead to blocked catch basins.
- ▶ Phosphorus TMDL on Charles River.
- ▶ Phosphorus - Pollutant of Concern on Alewife/Mystic.
- ▶ Leaf “debris” in separated drainage systems increases phosphorus loading.
- ▶ Important that leaf “debris” is managed to reduce algae blooms.

Note: Primary concern is impervious surfaces.





## Specific Impacts of outright ban

### Impact on Parks and Cemetery.

- ▶ Significant increase in staff/contractors required.
- ▶ Not possible to maintain 130 parks and Open spaces 66 acre Cemetery and 55 acre Danehy park to community standards with rakes.
- ▶ Labor market shortage for seasonal workers adds to challenge.
- ▶ Poorly raked/blown grass leads to poor grass.

