



# HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, September 13, 2023

4:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber  
795 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Health and Environment Committee will hold a public meeting on Wednesday, September 13, 2023 from 4:00p.m. to 6:00p.m. to discuss POR 2023 #73, which asks the City Manager to work to develop a policy that would lead to a ban on the use of gas-powered lawn equipment in Cambridge by residents, businesses, and city operations and develop incentive programs to support a policy.

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Councillor Nolan, Chair
- Councillor Azeem
- Councillor Carlone
- Councillor McGovern
- Councillor Zondervan

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Health and Environment Committee was held on Wednesday, September 13, 2023. The meeting was Called to Order at 4:00 p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Nolan. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation. This 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.

#### At the request of the Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

- Councillor Azeem – Absent
- Councillor Carlone – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Zondervan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

**Present – 4, Absent – 1. Quorum established.**

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered opening remarks (Attachment A) and noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a public hearing to discuss Policy Order 2023 #73, which asks the City Manager to work to develop a policy that would lead to a ban on the use of gas-powered lawn equipment in Cambridge by residents, businesses, and city operations and develop incentive programs to support a policy. The Chair introduced Kathy Watkins, Commissioner for the

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Department of Public Works (DPW), who was joined by John Nardone, Deputy Commissioner, David Webster, Superintendent of Parks and Urban Forestry, Marc Selby, Assistant Parks Superintendent, Adam Corbeil, Division Head for Cambridge Recreation, Department of Human Services (DHSP), and Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Environmental and Transportation for the Community Development Department (CDD). It was noted that the Chair from the License Commission, Nicole Murati Ferrer, and the Assistant Licensing Investigator, Tyler Bubenik joined via Zoom, as well as Mark Gallagher, Acting Managing Director for the Water Department, and Julie Greenwood-Torelli, Director of Water Operations. Also attending the meeting via Zoom were Owen O’Riordan, Deputy City Manager, and Councillor Toner. The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized John Nardone, who along with other City staff, gave a presentation titled “Gas Powered Lawn Equipment in Cambridge” which was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation offered an overview of leaf blowers and what is controlled by Ordinance and the regulations, enforcement of leaf blowers, modifications to City operations, effectiveness of the battery-operated leaf blowers, a summary of other municipalities leaf blower bans, the challenges that are faced with an all-electric leaf blower program, specific impacts to the Fresh Pond Golf Course, concerns with the Street Sweeping program related to leaf blowers, effectiveness of the battery-operated lawn mowers, how the City is changing the maintenance approach in parks and open spaces, and how the City plans to support Cambridge residents through Electrify Cambridge, providing information and rebates, and Mass Save incentives.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan shared that she had a follow up question for Nicole Murati Ferrer regarding enforcement, violations, and the requirement for ear and lung protection. Nicole Murati Ferrer shared that the License Commissions will fine companies if there is a violation of not providing free ear protection to their employees. Nicole Murati Ferrer noted that protection for breathing is not a requirement, but there is a rule within the City that states if an employee chooses to have protection for breathing, then the employer needs to provide one free of charge. The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who shared that he had to leave the meeting early, but wanted to go on the record that he was in favor of a phased-out ban on gas powered leaf blowers for residents, noting that it could be more complicated with bigger projects and commercial companies.

**The Chair, Councillor Nolan opened Public Comment.**

Ed Abrams, 80 Wendell Street, Cambridge, MA, thanked the License Commission for their responses to leaf blower complaints and shared they support a phased-out ban on gas-powered leaf blowers for residents and commercial.

James Kelley, 100 Smith Place, Cambridge, MA, offered comments that were not in support of a gas-powered ban on leaf blowers and lawn equipment, noting that it would negatively affect their business and employees.

Peg McKenna shared they were a micro business owner and would not be in favor of a gas-powered ban on leaf blowers and lawn equipment, noting that it would affect their business negatively.

Virginia Coleman offered comments and shared their support for a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers.

**In addition to Public Comment, Councillor Nolan read for the record communications that were submitted from the public to City Councillors.**

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Zondervan who shared his excitement for moving in the direction of electric powered leaf blowers. Councillor Zondervan noted that as

time goes on, technology around electric powered equipment would get better, making electric powered equipment more efficient and user-friendly. Councillor Zondervan recognized that the cost for electric leaf blowers are higher than gas powered, but highlighted the fact that there will be less maintenance that is required for upkeep and fuel costs would be much lower and eventually nonexistent. Councillor Zondervan offered the suggestion of increasing the salary for landscapers that are hired to work for DPW, which would increase the number of applicants for the open positions and allow more employees on hand to help maintain the City. Councillor Zondervan shared that he would support proposed motions to ban gas powered leaf blowers. The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Carlone who shared that he agreed with comments made by previous Committee members and noted that even though it would cost more money for electric leaf blowers, it is better for the environment and healthier for the person using the leaf blower, making it a good investment. Councillor Carlone asked for clarification on the weight of electric leaf blowers versus gas leaf blowers, noting that electric leaf blowers are heavier. John Nardone was available to respond and shared that the weight of the battery is what makes electric leaf blowers heavier than gas powered, but as technology advances, hopefully the weight of the battery will decrease.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan offered comments and suggestions that were in support of a gas-powered ban on leaf blowers and shared she would be in favor of understanding what an Ordinance would look like moving forward. Councillor Nolan shared that she would be introducing two motions to support the ban of gas-powered leaf blowers and provided detail on how she would like to see these motions acted on within the different departments involved to create a successful transition to electric powered leaf blowers. The two motions were shared on the screen for attendees to read.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Zondervan who wanted to address the towing issue related to leaf blowers, and noted he was in favor of not towing cars. He reminded everyone of the escalating fees which should be implemented. Councillor Zondervan shared that with technology, there are many programs that can help notify residents to move their vehicles on street sweeping days. Kathy Watkins responded by sharing that the City is currently reviewing the different components within the street sweeping pilot, sharing that there are twice as many cars not moving than in previous years, noting that the \$50 fee is not sufficient.

**The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Carlone who made a motion That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to direct relevant departments to work together with the chair(s) of the Health and Environment Committee and the Ordinance Committee, and include community input from residents and landscaping companies to develop ordinance language that would lead to a phased in ban of the use of gas-powered leaf blowers in Cambridge in line with the discussion in the Health and Environment Committee meeting of September 13, 2023 and report back to the City Council no later than the end of October 2023.**

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Carlone – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Absent

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Zondervan – Yes

Yes – 3, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

**ORDERED:** That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to direct relevant departments to work together with the chair(s) of the Health and Environment Committee and the Ordinance Committee, and include community input from residents and landscaping companies to develop ordinance language that would lead to a phased in ban of the use of gas-powered leaf blowers in Cambridge in line with the discussion in the Health and Environment Committee meeting of September 13, 2023 and report back to the City Council no later than the end of October 2023.

The Chair, Councillor Nolan recognized Councillor Carlone who made a motion That the City Manager be and herby is directed to work with relevant city departments on funding sources to supplement available state and federal funds to support and incentivize the transition to electrification of lawn equipment.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Carlone – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Absent

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Zondervan – Yes

Yes – 3, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

**ORDERED:** That the City Manager be and herby is directed to work with relevant city departments on funding sources to supplement available state and federal funds to support and incentivize the transition to electrification of lawn equipment.

**On a voice vote of three members voting yes, and two members absent, the Health and Environment Committee meeting was adjourned at 5:30p.m.**

Attachment A – Opening remarks from Councillor Nolan.

The City Clerk’s Office received one written communication, Attachment B.

**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/570?view\\_id=1&redirect=true&h=fcf8c271aa057d6d236afe0006d8c55](https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/570?view_id=1&redirect=true&h=fcf8c271aa057d6d236afe0006d8c55)

**That the City Manager is requested to direct relevant departments to work together to develop a policy that would lead to a ban on the use of gas-powered lawn equipment in Cambridge in line with other municipalities and development of possible ordinance language limiting the use of gas powered lawn equipment by residents, businesses, and city operations.**

A communication was received from John Nardone, Deputy Commissioner for Department of Public Works, transmitting a presentation regarding an update to leaf blowers.

### **Health and Environment Committee Meeting - 9/13/23**

Good afternoon. I am going to call today's Health and Environment Committee meeting to order. **The call of today's meeting is to discuss [POR 2023 #73](#), which asks the City Manager to work to develop a policy that would lead to a ban on the use of gas-powered lawn equipment in Cambridge by residents, businesses, and city operations and develop incentive programs to support a policy.**

First order of business is a roll call of members present.

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation at meetings of the Cambridge City Council and its Committees. In addition to having members of the Council participate remotely, we have also set up zoom teleconference for public comment. Please be aware that zoom is primarily being used for public comment. To watch the meeting, please tune into Channel 22 or visit the open meeting portal on the city's website. If you would like to provide public comment, please visit the City Council section of the city's webpage. Instructions for how to sign up to speak are posted there. Once you have completed the sign up procedure, you will receive a link to the zoom meeting. We will allow each speaker three minutes. We will not allow any additional public comment sign up after 5:00pm. With that, all of today's votes will be by roll call.

**Agenda for meeting:** Presentation by DPW and CDD, followed by questions from councillors, then public comment and back to the council for deliberation on next steps.

#### Order of Operations

1. PNolan Intro
2. DPW Presentation / CDD Presentation
3. Public Comment
4. Council deliberation
  1. End with a motion (options below)

#### **PNolan Introduction:**

As mentioned in the call of the meeting, we are here to discuss the policy order passed this spring and to discuss with city staff a path to developing a policy that would lead to a ban on the use of gas-powered lawn equipment in Cambridge.

I want to summarize the history and review the goals of the meeting today so that we can make sure that we leave here today with a plan for going forward.

Summary: The last time leaf blower ordinance was changed was in 1998, when a ban on time and noise levels was put in place recognizing the detriment to public health. The idea of a ban has been discussed in Cambridge for a long time, with a full ban on all leaf blowers proposed and rejected several years ago. Now we are discussing not a complete ban, but a ban on gas powered leaf blowers.

The goal of the meeting is to have a plan to take this action to prioritize worker health and climate justice by limiting the use of gas-powered lawn equipment over time without unnecessarily harming companies who operate in Cambridge. We now find ourselves in a place

where the electric technology has improved and is available and we have seen regional actions by other places to serve as models. My goal for the meeting is to get an update on the city work to date - moving towards ending use of gas powered equipment, discuss the benefits and limitations of current technology, include a review of approaches by other municipalities, discuss Cambridge's current approach, and finally have a plan for Cambridge to enact , phased in over time. Goal is to charge city staff to develop specific Ordinance language following this meeting. And then, where we cannot take immediate action, decide on a framework and a timeline for future action.

We will hear from the city staff in DPW, CDD, and the Licensing Commission about gas-powered lawn equipment use in the city, challenges of having a ban, and how to move forward. In researching this topic and discussing with city staff it seems that when we're discussing gas-powered lawn equipment generally, we should be thinking about the state of specific technologies and thinking critically about actions we can take immediately vs. actions that we should be taking over time as technology improves. That means starting with a ban on leaf blowers, which many other places have done, and monitoring progress with other commercial lawn equipment electrification.

We have seen action in this space by cities and towns near us, state action in California, and regional action in the Chicago area with municipalities partnering to enact change regionally. We often hear, especially when it comes to climate action, that we, as a city, need to follow state action so we don't preempt their work or risk harming local businesses, and I'm sure state actors hear that about the federal level as well. In truth, we know that it works both ways. We follow state action, but we also spur on state action. As leaders in climate justice and worker justice, we have a responsibility to not only follow state action quickly and effectively, but also put pressure on the state to take action. We wouldn't see the state level action in California without the dozen or so cities that took early action on gas-powered lawn equipment first, and that pressured the state into taking broader action. So it works both ways – and we need to balance that, which is why I think this venue is appropriate to have this conversation. The more we can show the state that we are pushing for this, the more they will find motivation to take state level action. So that's what we're here to do today - to take our next action. And there are state legislators working on this issue - looking into statewide action, into getting more rebates for electric lawn equipment and better understanding the worker health protections needed from a public health perspective.

With that, I'd like to introduce Commissioner Watkins and her team who will lead the opening presentation.

**Erwin, Nicole**

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**From:** inmanstreet103@aol.com  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 5, 2023 2:01 PM  
**To:** City Clerk  
**Cc:** Nolan, Patricia  
**Subject:** comment for committee meeting Sept. 13, 2023

Dear City Clerk:

Could you submit the following message into the record for the Committee Meeting on gas-powered landscaping tools scheduled for Sept. 13, 2023? Thank you! I appreciate it very much, as I probably won't be able to attend.

Megan Brook 103 Inman St.

The City of Cambridge is engaged in a well-intentioned, costly, and sometimes contentious campaign to reduce gasoline-powered vehicles operating on its streets. It is undeniable that the carbon sent into Earth's atmosphere by so many vehicles is extremely serious; but at least the other pollutants produced by cars and trucks have been markedly reduced over the decades. In general the air in town is not nearly as dangerous to breathe, compared to times before the Clean Air Act and other regulation, as a result.

Meanwhile, gasoline is still permitted as fuel for hand-held landscaping equipment, which is notorious for poor combustion and resultant toxic fumes given off in use.

Yesterday was one of the loveliest days of 2023, so far, the kind of day on which the weather forecasters on TV say you don't need air conditioning. Our house, with three apartments relying on open windows rather than AC (itself a large factor in climate change) was filled with fumes from gasoline-powered hedge clippers and leaf blowers used for hours by the landscapers working at the two addresses of the duplex next door. These fumes are sickening even to someone with well-functioning lungs. No Cambridge residents should have to breathe fumes like this in their own homes.

Our shrubs are clipped by hand, our leaves are raked, and I mow our "lawn", such as it is after rabbit depredations, with an electric lawnmower. When we have the tree people here, they use electric saws. People living nearby don't have to breathe awful fumes because of our landscaping efforts; and no work crews are exposed to hours of fumes on our premises either. To my way of thinking (and I think many people would agree) the campaign to reduce our carbon footprint and our other sources of pollution could best have *started* with gasoline-powered saws, trimmers, mowers, and leaf blowers. They might not be the major source of carbon from burning gasoline, but they produce the worst fumes. Eliminating their use in Cambridge would lower our carbon emissions a little, and improve the air quality in the immediate vicinity of landscaping work A LOT, benefiting all of us but especially the landscapers themselves. Improving air quality has the add-on benefit of encouraging people to open their windows instead of relying on AC. That in turn would lower the burden on the grid from increasing demands for electricity.

There is just no good reason not to ban gas-powered tools like trimmers and saws in Cambridge. Please consider it, along with some future date for the lawful use of gas-powered lawnmowers to expire.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Megan Brook 103 Inman St.

Minutes Acceptance: Minutes of Sep 13, 2023 4:00 PM (Committee Reports)

**Motions for meeting:**

1. (Ban on gas-powered leaf blowers Ordinance)

That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to direct relevant departments to work together with the chair(s) of the Health and Environment Committee and the Ordinance Committee, and include community input from residents and landscaping companies to develop ordinance language that would lead to a phased in ban of the use of gas-powered leaf blowers in Cambridge in line with the discussion in the Health and Environment Committee meeting of September 13, 2023 and report back to the City Council no later than the **end of October 2023**.

1. That the City Manager is directed to work with relevant city departments on funding sources to supplement available state and federal funds to support and incentivize the transition to electrification of lawn equipment.