



# Gas-powered Lawn care

Presentation to the Village of Oak Park Board, June 13, 2022

Laura Derks, Chair, Energy and Environment Commission

Response to VOP Board **6/28/21** to recommend policy on leaf-blowers, and other gas powered devices

# Current Ordinance : Noise 5-17-2004

- ▶ Any gasoline powered leaf blower emanating more than sixty five (65) decibels shall be prohibited **between June 1 and October 1** of each year ...
- ▶ **Permitted** equipment, which emanates no more than sixty five (65) decibels and meets EPA emission standards is **required to be registered** with the Village on an annual basis as follows:
  - ▶ 1. **Each piece of equipment to be registered** must be demonstrated to the Village Manager or the Village Manager's designee allowing the Village to measure the decibel level emanating from the machine.
  - ▶ 2. Owners must provide proof of purchase for each piece of equipment to be registered.
  - ▶ 3. Owners must provide manufacturers' specifications for each piece of equipment to be registered.
- ▶ During the restricted period from June 1 to October 1, **each piece of registered equipment must display the approved sticker** provided by the Village at the time of registration



# Community Calls for Change

- ▶ **Health and Safety of residents and workers:** “I’m writing just to add my voice to the many calling for a local ban on gas-powered leaf blowers in Oak Park..the noise, dust, and emissions their operation entails endanger the workers...their health and safety.”
- ▶ **Cost to Environment and possible Ecosystem services** “a public information campaign to tell them that leaves left undisturbed in beds and under shrubs provide valuable wintering-over habitat for many species..we need to be reminded of the measurable costs of using gas-powered leafblowers--on our ears, our air, the ecosystem, the biosphere's temperature, and more.
- ▶ **Noise levels** “Acoustic assault” “We were unable to walk around our block or any of the blocks adjacent to ours, because there were crews using these infernal devices in all directions. The din is incredible. It can be heard over Zoom from two or three yards away.



# Community Concerns Continued

- ▶ **Long-time concern** “As a longtime resident of Oak Park, this issue is of great interest to me and others. There is simply no reason to still allow this constant intergenerational assault on health, quality of life and the environment.
- ▶ **Highest Volume of Calls, Emails, and Passing Comments:** People are so ready for change they have emailed and verbally communicated (at least 20 individuals) over the past three years and suggest the policies we should adopt.



# Human Health and Ecosystem – Often Invisible -- Costs

- ▶ **Toxic pollution** – Two-stroke engines, unlike increasingly cleaner car engines, burn an oil-gas mixture that generates high levels of ozone-forming chemicals and disperses fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>). which emit more air pollutants than a car; emissions from 30 minutes of gas-powered leaf blower use are about the same as driving a Ford F-150 pickup truck 3,900 miles.
- ▶ **Harmful health impacts** – Ozone and PM<sub>2.5</sub>s are well known contributors to early death, cardiovascular disease, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cancer, premature births and other serious health conditions. Even short-term exposure can be harmful.



# Costs Continued

- ▶ **Air-borne contaminants** – The high-velocity air jets from gas-powered leaf blowers (150-280 mph, comparable to the strongest hurricanes) disturb topsoil and disperse spores, fungi, pollen, chemical residues from insecticide, rodenticide, herbicides
- ▶ **Damaging noise** – According to reports from federal agencies, noise from leaf blowers ranges from 102-115 decibels (dBs) at the ear of the operator. These same federal agencies have declared noise levels above 85 dBs to be harmful. This difference means there is a huge amount of potential damage to a person's hearing. VOP current ordinance is 65 decibals and is not enforced.

# Join other Local Municipalities

- More than 100 cities in the U.S have banned gas-powered leaf blowers, and many others have restricted times when they can be used.

Town	Ordinance	Timeline	Enforcement
Evanston	All gas leaf blowers banned	4/ 1/ 23	Budget for personnel and new equipment
Wilmette	Gas leaf blowers banned for lawncare and residents	5/15-9/30 (Electric allowed all year)	Village informs landscapers and uses public education for residents. Lawncare company will be cited for multiple violations



# Cleaner, Quieter Lawncare Readily Available and Long-term Costs: less \$

- ▶ Oak Park Park District, experience in using battery-powered lawncare devices:
  - ▶ Leaf blowers, chain saws, pruning saws and string trimmers for two years in the parks.
  - ▶ Currently trying out a battery-powered lawnmower.
  - ▶ Have added solar to the landscaping trailer last month to charge all of our equipment and back up batteries
  - ▶ Staff appreciative for decrease in equipment rate, lower noise level and complete decrease in fume smell
  - ▶ Less maintenance and less time with equipment malfunctions





# EEC Unanimous Recommendation

- Phase-out all gas-powered lawn devices (except lawn movers) over the next year for all home-owners, single family homes, condominium and Village of Oak Park
- Educational program for residents and contractors on the health impacts of gas-powered equipment and the conversion plan to battery-powered blowers, along with their benefits
- Enforcement : dedicated VOP email for complaints. Enforcement personnel would be either housing inspectors or health inspectors
- Look to other municipalities for examples about supporting the transition for small businesses such as grants for buy backs of gas-powered devices