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## Advocates Want to Expand Seasonal Ban on Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers

By Anne Levin

Since Princeton passed a seasonal ban on gas-powered leaf-blowers in October 2021, prohibiting their use from May 16 to September 30 and from December 16 to March 14, most residents and landscaping companies have followed the rules and made the switch to less toxic electrical equipment.

But three landscapers and one property owner were recently cited for not complying with the regulations. According to the organization Quiet Princeton, which advocated the development of the ordinance, each were fined \$250 and warned that a future violation could result in a \$2,000 fine.

“These people are not the majority,” said Anthony Lunn, who with Phyllis Teitelbaum founded Quiet Princeton in 2016. “On the whole, observance of the law has been very good, and we are very fortunate in having the Community Compliance Officer Sandra Garrity, who has been going around and talking to landscapers.”

Advocates of electrical rather than gas-powered blowers are pleased at the low incidence of local landscapers who have violated the seasonal ordinance. But they want to take the idea further and ban gas-powered leaf blowers altogether. Noise and toxic air pollution are the primary objections.

“Other municipalities in New Jersey have already put in year-round bans,” said Teitelbaum. “The time has come for us to have them here in Princeton. We’ve had two-and-a-half years of the seasonal bans, and it has been very successful. Quiet Princeton gets a lot of feedback from people who are spearheading this. The most important thing, we think, is protecting the landscaping company employees who suffer from the noise, hearing loss, and pollution. The bans would eliminate those problems for them.”

Councilwoman Eve Niedergang was closely involved, along with Sustainable Princeton, in creating the leaf-blower ordinance. Because of the way the ordinance is structured, violators have to be observed in action before they are cited and fined.

“It’s a vast improvement over what it was, and I think the community has noticed that,” she said. “But there are scofflaws out there.”

Because many of the landscaping companies are small and family-owned, “we don’t want to be too punitive,” Niedergang said. “So there has been a pretty forgiving attitude. But once you have people who observed the same landscaper or property owner being in violation three times, they have to act.”

Work has been underway at the state level to ban the sale and use of gas-powered leaf-blowers in New Jersey.

“State Senator Bob Smith has introduced a bill that would do this,” said Teitelbaum. “Finally, this year, it came before the Environmental [and Energy] Committee, which heard two-and-a-half hours of testimony from both sides — people who favor the ban, and those who want amendments to weaken it. They passed it as is, and it will go to the Appropriations Committee next. It will proceed, but the process takes several years to go through that committee, the Assembly, the Senate, and so forth. So, something is happening in the state legislature, but it will take several years.”

Governments across the country have been targeting gas-powered blowers. Measures have been passed in Washington, D.C.; Portland, Ore.; Burlington, Vt.; and Evanston, Ill. among other places. A ban in the state of California is to begin next month.

While advocates favor the use of electrical rather than gas-powered equipment, the ultimate goal of some is to eliminate equipment altogether. “Sustainable Princeton are leaders in this country in advancing the ideas of going beyond, of thinking differently about landscaping,” said Lunn. “Whether you need a lawn at all is one question. But it takes decades to make that kind of change. We are focused on a much narrower thing to get change more quickly.”

In December 2022, Quiet Princeton provided matching funds of \$2,500 for donations to Sustainable Princeton’s Landscaping Transition Fund, which ultimately gave \$21,000 to aid the transition to electric leaf blowers. The funds went to 24 companies, who serve 708 properties in Princeton, according to Quiet Princeton’s website.

Expanding the ban to a full year, if passed, would possibly go into effect in 2026. “We’d need to give people time to replace all of their equipment,” said Niedergang. “Time would be needed for the transition.”

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