



## Legislation Text

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**TO:**

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

**THROUGH:**

Bruce Moe, City Manager

**FROM:**

Carrie Tai, Community Development Director  
Stephanie Katsouleas, Public Works Director  
Dana Murray, Environmental Sustainability Manager  
Shawn Igoe, Utilities Manager & Acting Maintenance Manager

**SUBJECT:**

Receive Update on Gas-Powered Landscape Equipment and Recommendations from the Sustainability Task Force (Continued from the August 18, 2020, City Council Meeting) (Community Development Director Tai).

**DISCUSS AND PROVIDE DIRECTION**

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the City Council receive this update on gas-powered landscape equipment and provide policy direction, if desired.

**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

There are no fiscal implications with receiving this update. However, should City Council give policy direction, there may be future fiscal implications.

**BACKGROUND:**

On May 21, 2019, City Council discussed Manhattan Beach's existing ban on mechanical blowers, which has been in place since 1998. Mechanical blowers are commonly referred to as leaf blowers. City Council also considered and denied the Manhattan Village Homeowner Association's request for an exemption to allow the use of electric leaf blowers in the Village, a private, gated community. While the City currently bans the use of mechanical blowers within its jurisdiction, there is no ordinance or policy prohibiting the use of other types of landscaping equipment.

City Council also directed staff and the Sustainability Task Force to evaluate and provide recommendations on prohibiting all gas-powered landscape equipment (e.g., mowers), and replacement with electric landscaping equipment through available exchange programs.

This report provides information about landscape equipment options, current policies enacted by the City and other local governments, and a summary of discussions and recommendations by the Sustainability Task Force.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### ***Leaf Blower History in Manhattan Beach:***

In October 1998, City Council approved Municipal Code section 5.48.330, which states, “Mechanical blower shall refer to a portable device which is used, designed or operated to produce a current of air by mechanical, electrical or other means to push, propel or blow dirt, dust, leaves, grass clippings, trimmings, cuttings, refuse or debris. Use of mechanical blowers for any purpose shall be prohibited.”

Leaf blower bans address three concerns in populated areas: 1) noise impacts; 2) air pollution from emissions of gas powered devices; and 3) air quality impacts from dust particles and particulates that become airborne from the blowing action.

### ***Sustainability Task Force Discussion of Landscape Equipment Air Quality Impacts***

To consider the emissions associated with gas-powered landscape equipment, staff completed additional landscape equipment research and facilitated a discussion with the Sustainability Task Force.

There are three environmental impacts stemming from the use of mechanical landscaping equipment: noise pollution, air pollution from greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and air pollution from airborne particulates. Two of these impacts can be reduced by using electric devices instead of gas-powered devices. Electric equipment is generally quieter than gas-powered (although all mechanical devices emit noise), and electric equipment is considered zero emission. However, the impacts of airborne particulates (fine dust, etc.) are present with any blowing or vacuuming activity, regardless of how it is powered.

The small off-road engines (SOREs) within gas-powered landscaping equipment emit high levels of carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds, and nitrogen oxide, the latter two being significant contributors of smog. According to the California Air Resources Board (CARB), gas-powered landscaping equipment can contribute heavily to local and regional air pollution, as nitrous oxides can cause smog and acid rain, while hydrocarbons can be carcinogenic. According to CARB, operating the best-selling commercial gas-powered lawn mower for one hour emits as much smog-forming pollutants as driving a 2017 Toyota Camry for 300 miles. Operating a gas-powered leaf blower for one hour emits pollution comparable to driving the 2017 Camry 1,100 miles.

While emissions from gas-powered passenger cars will continue to decrease due to state level policies and the increasing use of electric vehicles in California, smog-forming emissions from gas-powered landscaping equipment are projected to continue increasing and surpass emission levels from cars. The Sustainability Task Force expressed concern about the air pollution impacts of gas-powered landscaping equipment compared to electric equipment, specifically in relation to GHG emissions and smog-forming emissions.

There are many types of electric, zero-emission landscaping equipment available as alternatives to gas-powered equipment. A few examples of manufacturers for electric landscaping equipment are Dewalt, Mean Green, Black and Decker, and Greenworks. In addition, there are several companies that serve the South Bay with zero-emission equipment.

To incentivize the transition to electric landscaping equipment, the South Coast Air Quality

Management District (SCAQMD) has two programs that help improve air quality through the replacement of gas-powered residential lawn mowers and commercial lawn and garden equipment. Consumers can receive a rebate of up to \$250 with the purchase of a cordless, battery-electric lawn mower. An operable, gasoline-powered lawn mower must be scrapped in order to be eligible for the rebate.

The Commercial Electric Lawn and Garden Equipment Incentive & Exchange Program is available for commercial landscapers and gardeners operating within the SCAQMD's region, providing up to 75% off commercial lawn and garden equipment. This program is also open to local governments, school districts, colleges and non-profit entities. Commercial lawn and garden equipment will be made available at a discounted price through pre-authorized dealerships. Equipment available through this program includes handheld trimmers, chainsaws, pruners, backpack and handheld blowers and ride-on, stand-on, walk-behind and robotic lawn mowers. An equivalent operable gasoline or diesel powered piece of lawn or garden equipment must be scrapped when the new battery-electric equipment is purchased. For example, the Manhattan Beach Unified School District has taken advantage of these SCAQMD rebate programs and have found success with the new equipment.

***What Other Jurisdictions Are Doing:***

Very few cities prohibit the use of gas-powered landscaping equipment beyond mechanical leaf blowers, with the exception of regulations for noise and/or operating times (hours or days). However, staff found several examples of restrictions on gas-powered landscaping equipment, including in municipal operations, within certain geographical areas, or in institutional settings.

- The cities of South Pasadena and Ojai have overhauled municipal landscaping operations to only use zero-emission, electric landscaping equipment and have partnered with the American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA) to become AGZA cities. A Certified AGZA Green Zone is a defined property or collection of properties on which all routine grounds maintenance is performed with low-noise zero-emission battery-electric equipment and hand tools.
- In 2019, the City of Ann Arbor, Michigan implemented a ban on two-cycle combustion engines (otherwise known as two stroke engines) within landscaping equipment (such as lawnmowers, leaf blowers, weed wackers, and chainsaws) in their downtown area in order to reduce emissions and noise pollution.
- Several academic institutions have begun to regulate gas-powered landscaping equipment. In an effort to reduce GHG emissions, the University of California, Irvine is transitioning to zero-emission landscape maintenance with UCI Student Housing partnering with the South Coast Air Quality Management District to replace aging gasoline-powered equipment with cordless, emissions-free products. Manhattan Beach Unified School District (MBUSD), Santa Monica College, and Santa Monica High School have also begun (or completed) transitioning to zero emission landscaping.

If City Council provides direction to restrict all gas-powered landscaping equipment in Manhattan Beach, the City will need to amend its contracts with its landscaping contractors, including Merchants

and West Coast Arborist. While smaller landscaping tools may be easily charged for intermittent use, larger, daily equipment would require access to an available and convenient source of power. This may prove challenging for large tree trimming or removing fallen trees with large trunks in the right-of-way. Additionally, based on feedback from the City's two landscape contractors, new, all-electric equipment would need to be procured as part of the contract amendment process.

***What Gas-Powered Landscaping Equipment does Manhattan Beach Currently Use?***

The City and its municipal maintenance contractors are significant users of gas-powered landscaping equipment due to the need to maintain parks, medians, green spaces and facility landscaping. In order to preliminarily evaluate what would be needed to shift municipal operations to zero-emission landscaping, staff compiled an inventory of gas-powered landscaping equipment currently used. This includes:

- City-owned gas-powered mechanical landscaping equipment
  - Chainsaws
  - Pressure washer
  - Small vacuum trailer
  - Tractor
  
- City maintenance contractors:
  - West Coast Arborist:*
    - Six - Chainsaws, various sizes

*Merchants Landscape:*

- Three Exmark Laser lawnmower
- One 21" Honda lawnmower
- Six Echo weed eaters
- One power trim edger
- Two stick hedgers
- Four stick head trimmers
- One Honda billy goat vacuum
- Two chainsaws
- Two Honda power wash machines
- One Smithco baseball field tractor
- One Kubota tractor
- One Walk-behind dethatch machine

For its own equipment, the City could look into SCAQMD rebates to replace gas-powered landscape equipment, as MBUSD maintenance has done over the past year.

***Policy Options in the City of Manhattan Beach***

Staff and the Sustainability Task Force discussed policy options and identified the following three options for Council consideration.

1. *Shift municipal operations to zero-emission landscaping through transitioning non-emergency City equipment and contractor equipment to electric models.* The City would join a growing

body of jurisdictions, academic institutions, and private commercial properties in reducing GHG emissions and noise through the phasing-out of some or all gas-powered landscaping equipment for routine landscaping operations. Staff would need to confirm whether the City's landscape contractors have access to adequate electric landscaping equipment and power sources to maintain the same level of service currently provided. An amendment to the existing contract would be required, and may include an increase to the overall budget. Staff would also look into SCAQMD rebates to replace its own gas-powered landscaping equipment, as well as partner with the American Green Zone Alliance in order to shift City equipment to all electric and establish AGZA Zones within City limits.

2. *Further education programs for Manhattan Beach residents.* City Council could include a Work Plan item to educate residents about the benefits of switching to electric landscaping equipment, rebate opportunities, and contracting with landscapers who use electric-only equipment.
3. *Study a ban on gas-powered landscaping equipment City-wide.* A ban on all gas-powered landscaping equipment City-wide would be a first of its kind. Manhattan Beach is poised to further quality of life improvements and demonstrate leadership in sustainability practices with a ban on gas-powered landscaping equipment. Further direction from City Council would be needed to pursue implementing a City-wide ban.

The Sustainability Task Force recommended that the City keep the existing City mechanical blower ban, as it addresses all three environmental concerns, and supported Policy Option 1 - proceeding with a city policy for municipal electrification of landscaping equipment to reduce GHG emissions and noise pollution.

**PUBLIC OUTREACH:** City Council has discussed the existing leaf blower ban in a public meeting at least two times over the past few years - in August 2017 and May 2019. The Sustainability Task Force has also discussed the leaf blower ban and gas-powered landscaping twice in the last two years. If Council were to give direction on furthering education programs for Manhattan Beach residents, City staff could propose a Work Plan item to embark on an effort to educate residents about the benefits of switching to electric landscaping equipment, rebate opportunities, and contracting with landscapers who use electric-only equipment.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:**

The City has reviewed the proposed activity for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and has determined that the activity is not a "Project" as defined under Section 15378 of the State CEQA Guidelines; therefore, pursuant to Section 15060(c)(3) of the State CEQA Guidelines the activity is not subject to CEQA. Thus, no environmental review is necessary.

**LEGAL REVIEW:**

The City Attorney has reviewed this report and determined that no additional legal analysis is necessary.

**ATTACHMENT:**

1. PowerPoint Presentation