



More Leaf Mowing – Less Leaf Blowing

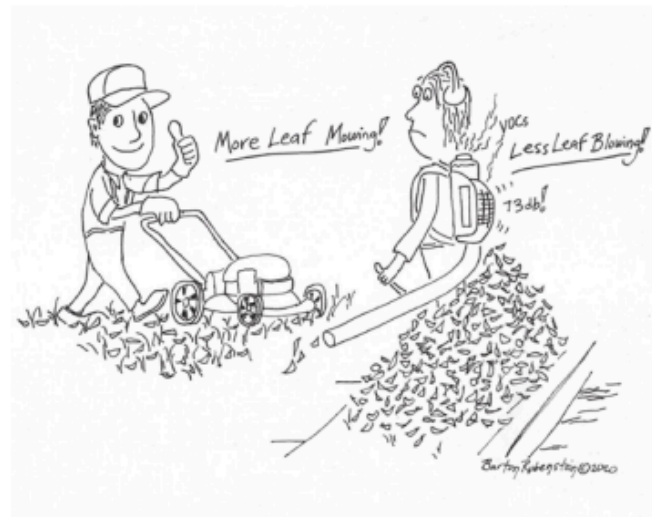
Less Leaf Blowing

On October 14th, Somerset's Environment Committee sponsored a Zoom discussion on leaf blowing, which featured DC Advisory Neighborhood Commission Commissioner Chuck Elkins, who spearheaded banning gas-powered leaf blowers in Washington, DC. This ban will start on January 1, 2022. We also heard from Marea Hatzios, Co-Chair of the Environment and Energy Committee in Chevy Chase Village, who described how their town recently piggybacked the same legislation, starting on the same date. Since the pandemic has kept us all at home, the Environment Committee and Town Council Members have heard from dozens and dozens of residents through verbal and written correspondences about how leaf blowers are extremely loud and thus disruptive to one's work at home and ability to relax outside. We have also recently discovered that around 85% of gas-powered leaf blowers used by our landscapers are actually rated above 70 db and are thus illegal to use according to Montgomery County Law. In other words, these gas-powered leaf blowers, owned by landscapers, need to be retired immediately. Finally, we learned from Jamie Banks of QuietCommunities.org during the Zoom call that battery-powered leaf blowers are significantly less noisy than gas-powered leaf blowers, whose low frequency sounds unfortunately penetrate the neighborhood at large distances.

For those interested, a recording of this meeting can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLlc-RmxQL4>

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS

BANNING GAS-POWERED LEAF BLOWERS: All of these factors and feedback from neighbors have led the Environment Committee to unanimously recommend to the Town Council that our Town follow in the footsteps of Chevy Chase Village and DC and also ban gas-powered leaf blowers on January 1, 2022. We believe this legislation will dramatically reduce the amount of noise in our town and reduce the dangerous fumes and dust that these leaf blowers produce. The EC also recommends that the Town and EC continue an education campaign to assist neighbors and landscapers with this proposed transition.



In the coming months, the EC will continue to disseminate information about the hazards of gas-powered leaf blowers and hold meetings to recommend more sustainable landscape practices. We thank everyone for their focus on this issue and collectively hope to be enjoying a quieter neighborhood in the years ahead.

WHAT TO DO: While the Town Council considers this legislation, we encourage everyone to visit Chevy Chase Village's website for quiet landscapers, <https://bit.ly/3dKYNrS>. As most gas-powered leaf blowers typically last two years, we encourage everyone to show their landscaper how their leaf blowers are potentially illegal (i.e., anything above 70 db, name plate and decibel level is on each machine in bold print) and discuss the possibility of new legislation in Somerset and elsewhere, in the hope that they will consider buying battery-powered leaf blowers within the next two years. For those doing their own landscaping, stores such as Strosniders offer some excellent choices of battery-powered and electric leaf blowers. The Environment Committee is also recommending that the Town Council create a "Swap Fund," which will be used to incentivize neighbors to transition to electric or battery-powered leaf blowers and retire their gas-powered leaf blowers. We recommend that \$50 - \$100 be offered to neighbors willing to make this change.

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Sustainability Corner: More Leaf Mowing — Less Leaf Blowing

More Leaf Mowing

Also on the Zoom call was Kelly Okleson of GroundSmithCollective.com, who was recently hired by our town as a garden consultant. Last week, she met with Enrique Cabrera and his crew to discuss more sustainable gardening practices. The most significant recommendation made was to no longer remove leaves from the grass on Town properties, but instead mow the leaves into pieces so that they become mulch. This simple recommendation will significantly reduce the amount of work by more than half, eliminate the difficult leaf blowing on grass, and produce a much smaller quantity of leaves that will need to be removed or moved to the grass for mowing. The leaf blowers will now only be needed to clear leaves on hard surfaces such as the tennis courts and the pool facility.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND: Kelly also plans to have a Town-wide outdoor meeting with neighbors to discuss similar gardening practices and will be available for more in-depth questions. We will let you know the date of this meeting once it is confirmed. In the meantime, we highly

recommend that everyone consider not blowing leaves off their grass but mowing them with the grass. Personally, as our property has a few enormous white oaks, I used to have a 4' high pile of leaves along the entire curb line every December, but now my landscaper moves all of the leaves to the grass and mows them two or three times. The Environment Committee encourages you to do the same, as this will reduce the amount of leaf blowing necessary and make the job easier for you or your landscaper.

I wish everyone a wonderful fall and look forward to seeing our beautiful tree Town covered with a colorful abundance of leaves and acorns!

Montgomery County Petition to Ban Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers

For those interested in banning Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers in Urban Parts of Montgomery County, Maryland, please consider signing this county-wide petition: <https://bit.ly/35jYekT> and let us know that you did: TOS.EnvironmentCommittee@gmail.com.



Fall is here and plenty of pumpkins have popped up on Somerset's front porches and doorways. Next month's Journal will feature photos of the winners of the Town Halloween house-decorating contest.

