



# City of Sunnyvale

## Agenda Item

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**24-0117**

**Agenda Date: 2/15/2024**

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### 2024 COUNCIL STUDY ISSUE

#### **NUMBER**

DPW 23-07

**TITLE** Evaluate the Feasibility of an Ordinance to Ban the Use of Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers and Other Small Two-Stroke Motors Within the City Limits of Sunnyvale

#### **BACKGROUND**

**Lead Department:** Department of Public Works

**Support Departments:** Office of the City Manager  
Office of the City Attorney  
Environmental Services Department

**Sponsor(s):** Councilmembers: Mehlinger, Sell, Klein, Din, Srinivasan  
Cisneros

**History:** 1 year ago: Ranked, Below the Line  
2 years ago: N/A

#### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

##### **What precipitated this Study?**

At the January 24, 2023 City Council meeting, Council sponsored a Study Issue to evaluate the feasibility of an ordinance to ban the use of gas-powered leaf blowers and other two-stroke motor equipment. The state of California only bans the sale of new blowers and other two-stroke equipment, and not use of said equipment in 2024.

##### **What are the key elements of the Study?**

Leaf blowers and other two-stroke motor equipment are commonly used to maintain landscape and hardscape by property owners or maintenance professionals. While they serve as a convenient tool for the quick removal of leaves and debris, they are also a source of air and noise pollution within the City and a minor contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Many communities have taken various actions to restrict the use of leaf blowers and two-stroke motor equipment, such as banning use of such equipment citywide, banning use of such equipment in specific areas, specifying allowable operating times, or requiring training and certification of operators.

This Study Issue examines local concerns about use of leaf blower and two-stroke motor equipment in Sunnyvale, and reviews actions taken in other communities, available alternatives, and impacts of potential actions.

**Estimated years to complete study:** 18 months

#### **FISCAL IMPACT**

**Cost to Conduct Study**

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Level of staff effort required (opportunity cost):	Moderate
Funding Required for Non-Budgeted Costs:	\$100,000
Funding Source	Will seek budget supplement

Many community members have strong opinions about leaf blowers, either in support or opposition of their use. Gas-powered leaf blowers, especially older models, can be particularly noisy and highly polluting on a per-minute basis. Electric leaf blowers on the market today are quieter but have limiting factors including cost, the need to be connected to an outlet, short battery life, and less power compared to gas-powered blowers. The Study will require outreach and knowledge of City ordinances.

### **Cost to Implement Study Results**

Unknown. The Study would include assessment of potential costs, including capital and operating, as well as revenue/savings.

### **EXPECTED CITY COUNCIL, BOARD OR COMMISSION PARTICIPATION**

Council-Approved Work Plan: Yes

Council Study Session: Yes

Reviewed by Boards/Commissions: Parks and Recreation Commission and Sustainability Commission

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Defer. This policy issue is similar to a potential move in the draft Climate Action Playbook 2028. It is recommended to wait and see the outcome of the Climate Action Playbook 2028 as it relates to small two-stroke motors before taking action on this item.

Study Issue ESD 14-01 was sponsored by the Sustainability Commission. As proposed by the Sustainability Commission, the objective of the Study Issue was to “examine banning two-cycle gas-powered leaf blowers in the City because, although they are popular among landscape management businesses and professionals, these gas-powered blowers are a major source of both air and noise pollution in Sunnyvale.” ESD 14-01 was prioritized by the City Council during the February 7, 2014 Council Study and Budget Issues Workshop. At that time, Council amended Study Issue 14-01 to “clarify that, in addition to or as an alternative to banning, restrictions on use by hour or by zoning could be considered; in addition to gas-powered, electric could be considered; staff could return with alternatives that vary from no ban and restrictions on gas-powered use by certain zonings or times to, on the other extreme, actual bans and present some alternatives after we’ve looked at that and gotten some public input from the businesses affected.” At the April 7, 2015 City Council meeting, Council voted 5-2 for Alternate 1, “*Direct staff to incorporate public education to Sunnyvale residents and landscape professionals regarding the current Municipal Code restrictions related to leaf blower use and education to leaf blower operators on best practices into the City’s environmental education efforts as allowed within existing resources and priorities.*” (RTC No. 0270). ESD implemented a pilot rebate program for leaf blowers in 2015, but only 1 participant completed the program. Program promotions included flyers at key City locations including retailers, direct mail to licensed landscaping contractors, and social media. Beyond that pilot program, additional outreach has included Utility Bill Inserts, posting on social media, and an E-newsletter article on “Earth and Neighbor Friendly Leaf Blowing Tips,” to educate the community about the current municipal code and best practices for leaf

blowing. More recent outreach also includes co-promotion with Silicon Valley Clean Energy of financial incentives available from the state for the shift to electric leaf blowers.

Since the 2015 City Council meeting, in an ongoing effort to stay up-to-date with the latest technology, the Parks, Golf and Tree Programs have been purchasing electric equipment, mostly leaf blowers and chainsaws, over the last several years to use and see how they perform compared to the gas-powered equipment currently in use. Informal feedback is that the electric equipment is much quieter; however, the electric equipment is still not as productive as the gas-powered equivalent (in terms of power and not having to stop to change/charge batteries) and is more costly than gas-powered small equipment. Although the technology is certainly improving each year, the Study will determine if new technology is improving to the point to be cost effective and useful for the needed purpose.

Prepared by: Jim Stark, Superintendent of Parks and Golf

Reviewed by: Chip Taylor, Director, Department of Public Works

Reviewed by: Teri Silva, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Kent Steffens, City Manager