



Legislation Text

File #: Res 32064, Version: 2

CITY OF SEATTLE

RESOLUTION _____

A RESOLUTION declaring the City Council’s intent to phase out gas-powered leaf blowers; establishing goals and identifying actions to meet these goals.

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle (“City”) has the authority to adopt policies to protect and promote public health, safety, and welfare; and

WHEREAS, in 2021, the City Council (“Council”) adopted Statement of Legislative Intent OSE-003-B-001 requesting that City departments develop a plan to phase out the use of gas-powered leaf blowers in Seattle within two years and submit this plan to the Council by September 2, 2022; and

WHEREAS, the Council is seeking to reinforce and elevate this request through this resolution by establishing goals and articulating specific actions the City should take to gradually phase out the use of gas-powered leaf blowers; and

WHEREAS, in 2014, the City’s Department of Planning and Development (now the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections) considered strategies to reduce or eliminate the use of gas-powered leaf blowers in their response to Statement of Legislative Intent SLI 70-1-A-1 and recommended no new regulations or changes to City practices due to the lack of equivalent electric alternatives and other considerations at that time; and

WHEREAS, since then, new data have revealed more of the environmental and public health impacts of gas-powered leaf blowers; electric leaf blowers technology has improved; and other jurisdictions have moved to eliminate the use of gas-powered leaf blowers; and

WHEREAS, gas-powered leaf blowers most commonly have two-stroke internal combustion engines that

incompletely combust their fuel, resulting in the emission of toxic and carcinogenic substances, such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds, which contribute to the formation of ozone, smog, and acid rain; and

WHEREAS, best available data indicate that the use of gas-powered leaf blowers can cause direct harm to people within the vicinity by contributing to localized air pollution, creating excessive noise, and causing other negative health impacts to their operators, who disproportionately identify as Latinx or Hispanic (46 percent) relative to overall workplace demographics (18 percent); and

WHEREAS, operating a leaf blower results in particulate matter lifting into the air, which has been shown to degrade localized air quality by increasing coarse and fine particles by more than 60 percent relative to ambient air, and the smallest particles can remain in the air for up to a week; and

WHEREAS, studies from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) indicate that fugitive dust (i.e., particulate matter) and exhaust emissions from gas-powered leaf blowers can pose significant health risks to operators and the public, including “cardiovascular disease, stroke, respiratory disease, cancer, neurological conditions, premature death, and effects on prenatal development”; and

WHEREAS, gas-powered leaf blowers with two-stroke engines emit particularly low-frequency sound waves, including ultra-low frequency, which cause the sounds to travel longer distances and more easily penetrate walls and other barriers, magnifying the impacts of nuisance noise; and

WHEREAS, the California Air Resources Board determined that operators of gas-powered leaf blowers may be exposed to an average sound of 88-101.3 decibels (dBs), which exceeds acceptable thresholds set by the World Health Organization, the United States Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and Washington State; and

WHEREAS, regular exposure to sound levels higher than 70 dBs can cause hearing damage and loss to operators, and studies have shown that high environmental noise pollution can contribute to the incidence of arterial hypertension, myocardial infarction, tinnitus, and stroke; and

WHEREAS, the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) established a Racial Equity Toolkit (2012) analysis process, wherein the City committed to racial equity and justice principles, including prioritizing stakeholder engagement throughout policy development, especially stakeholders who are directly affected by a policy's implementation; and

WHEREAS, in response to the considerable negative impacts from gas-powered leaf blowers, over 100 cities across the nation have instituted policies limiting or banning them from use, and California has passed Assembly Bill 1346, which requires the California Air Resources Board to create a plan to phase out the sale of gas-powered leaf blowers in California by 2024; and

WHEREAS, electric leaf blowers are quieter than gas-powered versions and do not emit low-frequency sound waves or toxic emissions, reducing harm to operators and other people nearby; and

WHEREAS, several City departments continue to use gas-powered leaf blowers, including Seattle Parks and Recreation, the Seattle Department of Transportation, and Seattle City Light; and

WHEREAS, transitioning away from fossil fuel-powered leaf blowers is consistent with the City's electrification plans to phase out the use of fossil fuels for transportation and buildings; and

WHEREAS, while Seattle Parks and Recreation has already committed to transition ten percent of its gas-powered leaf blowers to electric models each year to reach 50 percent leaf blower electrification by 2026, the harms to workers, residents, and the environment and the wider availability of equivalent electric alternatives warrant a faster and more thorough implementation; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE THAT:

Section 1. The City Council recognizes that the use of gas-powered leaf blowers causes significant adverse environmental and health impacts, including noise and air pollution, and establishes the following goals to support an expeditious transition away from their use:

A. By January 2025, or later if necessary, the City and its contractors will phase out the use of gas-powered leaf blowers; and

B. By January 2027, or later if necessary, institutions located in Seattle, businesses operating in Seattle, and Seattle residents will phase out the use of gas-powered leaf blowers.

Section 2. To accomplish the goals in Section 1 of this resolution, the Council requests that City departments (as suggested below) pursue the following actions:

A. Seattle Parks and Recreation, the Department of Finance and Administrative Services (FAS), Seattle City Light, the Seattle Department of Transportation, and other departments as appropriate, are requested to:

1. Evaluate their current practices related to the use of leaf blowers and explore options to reduce reliance on leaf blowers, both gas-powered and electric, either by allowing leaves to naturally decompose or clearing them using non-motorized methods; and

2. Develop and implement plans to ensure that City facilities and employees are adequately equipped with infrastructure and equipment to use electric-powered leaf blowers rather than gas-powered leaf blowers.

B. Seattle Public Utilities, the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI), the Office of Labor Standards, and the Department of Neighborhoods are requested to design a culturally- and linguistically-appropriate education and outreach strategy that informs City employees, businesses, and the general public of the negative health and environmental impacts of gas-powered leaf blowers, and encourages residents to adopt alternatives that are safer, quieter, and more environmentally friendly.

C. FAS, SDCI, and other departments, as appropriate, are requested to develop a proposal that would phase out and ban the use of gas-powered leaf blowers within Seattle. The proposal should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. A Racial Equity Toolkit analysis to identify benefits or burdens of the proposal and gather feedback from key stakeholders, such as landscaping businesses that operate in Seattle;

2. Whether the City should offer incentives, such as a buyback program or rebates, to landscaping businesses that operate in Seattle and low-income Seattle residents;

3. What regulatory mechanism (e.g., amendment to the Noise Code) is most appropriate to support enforcement of the ban; and

4. The potential benefits and reasonably quantifiable net costs (if any) to the City of implementation and enforcement of the actions requested by this resolution.

Section 3. The Council requests that the Executive provide to the City Council’s Sustainability & Renters’ Rights Committee or other committee as appropriate by December 2, 2022, a proposed work program, timeline, and budget to achieve the goals of this resolution.

Section 4. Nothing in this resolution should be construed to preclude or impede the City’s ability to more quickly phase out gas-powered leaf blowers.

Adopted by the City Council the _____ day of _____, 2022, and signed by me in open session in authentication of its adoption this _____ day of _____, 2022.

President _____ of the City Council

Filed by me this _____ day of _____, 2022.

_____, City Clerk

(Seal)