

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

2. Towards a Quieter and Emission-Free Landscape Maintenance Equipment Future in Vancouver

Submitted by: Councillor Kirby-Yung

WHEREAS

1. The City of Vancouver is committed to helping citizens enjoy a good quality of life by regulating and enforcing property use, noise, and graffiti issues. The City works to manage noise through land-use planning, bylaws and traffic management;
2. Noise is part of urban life, but too much noise is disruptive and harmful to well-being. The City's Noise Control Bylaw defines how much noise is acceptable, based on:
 - Where you are
 - Where the noise is coming from
 - What is making the noise
 - What time and day the noise is occurring
3. The City's Noise Control Bylaw aims to balance noise from most activities in a way that respects everyone's right to relative comfort, within reason. The bylaw specifically regulates noise from:
 - Carpet-cleaning equipment within vehicles
 - Lawn mowers and weed eaters
 - TVs, radios, stereos, amplifiers, and musical instruments
 - Parties and gatherings
 - People shouting
 - Pressure washers
4. Historically, in 1997, growing concerns about noise and its effects on everyday life in Vancouver led to the creation of the Urban Noise Task Force. This citizens group, with the assistance of City staff and Councillors, made a series of recommendations for improving Vancouver's "soundscape" many of which have been, or are being implemented;
5. The Report of the Urban Noise Task Force from April 1997 noted that "Lawn mowers, leaf blowers, trimmers, edgers, mulchers, and other lawn and garden equipment are a significant source of noise for many people" and that "Twenty-five percent of the letters received by the Task Force commented about the noise produced by these machines." The report also noted that "Noise from motorized lawn/garden equipment was the most frequently mentioned noise problem" and thus the Task Force strongly suggested that the City move toward the use of non-motorized gardening services and methods in its own operations;

6. Recommendation 40.1 from the 1997 Urban Noise Task Force report states that “The City should, based on technological advances within the industry, require that all leaf blowers maintain a maximum decibel level of 70 at 50 feet until January 1998, when 65 decibels will be the maximum allowable; that they be run at the lowest effective throttle setting and that between October 1 and April 30 of each year the City establish hours of use....”;
7. The City’s website currently states that “Leaf blowers can be operated in Vancouver, but not in the West End” (i.e., an area bounded by Stanley Park, Burrard Street, West Georgia Street, and Beach Avenue. The City of Vancouver defines a leaf blower as a “backpack-mounted or handheld machine used for blowing or sucking up leaves, grass, or debris.” Leaf blowers may have vacuum attachments. Vehicle-mounted leaf blowers are not included in the City’s definition;
8. The City’s website states that “A manufacturer’s decal must be attached to the leaf blower” to certify that it meets the "Category 1 – dB (A) ≤ 65" equipment standard set out in ANSI B175.2 – 200, published by the Portable Power Equipment Manufacturer’s Association. The decal includes the following text: [*The manufacturer’s model number*] and *Maximum sound level 65 dB(A) and Measured at 50 ft (15 m) Per ANSI B175.2 – 200*;
9. Vancouver has declared a Climate Emergency and developed a plan that aims to reduce carbon pollution by 50% by 2030;
10. In January 2019, the Vancouver Park Board unanimously carried a motion (“Renewal Strategy for Landscape Equipment – Towards an Emission-Free Reality”) which directed Park Board staff to work with unions and WorkSafeBC “to develop a transition plan to replace and retrofit gas-powered landscape maintenance equipment used for park maintenance with emission-free equivalents or quasi-equivalents where possible.” The motion also directed that “the transition plan include financial considerations, including purchase, usage, maintenance and end-of-life replacement costs, as well as ways to quantify/qualify non-financial benefits such as: carbon emission reduction; disposal of refuse oil and other parts;
11. A recent December 7, 2020 Memo from the Park Board General Manager served to report back on the work being undertaken by Park Board staff in response to motion approved by the Board in January 2019. It states that staff anticipate transitioning all small landscaping equipment to zero emission alternatives over the next four years. The Memo also notes several key findings from the 2019 pilot, as well as the fact the Park Board has been transitioning its gas-powered equipment to low or no-emission equipment for many years as equipment reaches end of life, and that electric options meeting performance and function specifications are preferred for all equipment procurement in accordance with Vancouver’s commitment to reducing its environmental emissions and fossil fuel consumption;
12. Feedback received from the public by members of Council frequently cites the issue of noise and emissions from gasoline-powered landscape maintenance equipment, such as lawn mowers, trimmers, chain saws, and especially leaf blowers. Members of the public often suggest that the use of gasoline-powered

equipment be prohibited in favour of non-emitting electric alternatives which are also considered to be far quieter;

13. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the negative noise impacts from gasoline-powered landscape maintenance equipment have been significantly heightened for residents with so many people working from home and spending considerably more time at home. Increasingly, Council and the City are receiving noise complaints that point to the need to revisit noise reduction strategies with respect to gas-powered landscape maintenance equipment and transition towards replacement and/or retrofitting gas-powered landscape maintenance equipment with quieter, emission-free equivalents or quasi-equivalents.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Vancouver City Council direct staff to report back with recommendations to meet the goal to phase out and transition personal and commercial use of gasoline-powered landscape maintenance equipment in the City of Vancouver by 2025, giving consideration to a timeframe that is workable for residents and landscape maintenance service providers alike, and respecting the Development, Buildings & Licensing (DBL) moratorium on new work, this work not begin before January 2022.
- B. THAT recommendations are informed by consultation with relevant stakeholders such as but not limited to representative strata councils and the BC Landscape and Nursery Association.
- C. THAT phase out recommendations be sensitive to any increased costs that transitioning would create for residents and the landscape maintenance industry, and that a reasonable transition timeframe be considered before any potential by-law changes would be implemented.
- D. THAT the report back identify (but not be limited to):
 - any issues with respect to implementing a ban on gasoline-powered landscape maintenance equipment;
 - all relevant City by-laws and policies that currently impact upon noise and emissions from gasoline-powered landscape maintenance equipment that would require amendment;
 - information related to the impact that gasoline-powered landscape maintenance equipment can have on noise and local/regional air pollution as well as implications for mental well-being, quality of life and human health;
 - information regarding harmful environmental effects of gasoline-powered landscape maintenance equipment;
 - information on availability and trends that would allow non-emitting electric landscaping equipment to equal and/or exceed the performance of gasoline-powered equipment.

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