

MODERATOR'S COMMITTEE ON LEAF BLOWERS
June 21, 2016 DRAFT Minutes

The Moderator's Committee on Leaf Blowers held a meeting on June 21, 2016, 5pm – 7pm, in Room 408 of Town Hall. Present were Committee members John Doggett, Dennis Doughty, Neil Gordon, Benedicte Hallowell, Maura Toomey, and Faith Michaels (at 5:15); and members of the public Jerry Lazar, Ed Blumstein, and Regina Frawley.

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the June 8, 2016 meeting and, by a vote of 4-0, approved an amended version.

The bulk of the meeting was comprised of a discussion that incorporated two major themes: code enforcement issues and options as well as the implications of requiring various forms of registration for leaf blowers or their operators.

With respect to enforcement, the Committee noted that 25% of the recorded complaints are about Town activities, which means that any proposed solution must carefully consider applicability to the Town.

John described the current practice in Cambridge: landscapers sign an affidavit indicating that they understand best practices, have compliant equipment, etc. Complaints are taken seriously and can impact license renewal, which can adversely affect the landscaper's ability to do business in the city.

The Committee brainstormed different mechanisms for adopting a similar strategy in Brookline, including a review board; registration of either landscapers, property owners, or both; delineating boundaries within the town which would have different days or overall restrictions; and the question of whether enforcement by the Town might require additional staffing. The Committee identified many questions and concerns for discussion with various Town departments at future meetings.

Comments were then solicited from the public.

Ed Blumstein (Rawson Road): I don't think the current system works at all. Everyone on the street uses a different contractor; they all come at different times. I frequently walk past 5 or 6 trucks in a single walk; several with no company names on them. All using gasoline powered leaf blowers out of season. Many use several leaf blowers simultaneously on small yards. The operators often do not (or pretend to not) speak English and so are difficult to communicate with. Those that I can communicate with say things like "hey, if I can't use leaf blowers I can't get my work done." The funeral home on Beacon Street uses leaf blowers to clean the driveway.

Neil: Do you find that your chief complaints are leaf blower uses that are prohibited under the current By-Laws?

Ed: Throughout the year there are compliance issues. During the "legal" period I still see leaf blowers being operated at 7:30am.

Jerry Lazar (Craftsland Road): If there were a requirement that landscapers had to be registered, this would help. But it would also be helpful for homeowners to have “skin in the game.” E.g., consider a fine for using an unlicensed/unregistered landscaper. This would provide an incentive to use suppliers who are accountable, and there can be no opportunity to claim ignorance of the rules because they have to tick that off during registration. With that said, I see more problems from non-complying lawn mowers (85 dBA vs 75 allowed) than from leaf blowers. Registration and enforcement AND “homeowner skin” would all help with compliance.

Neil: Just to note, 350 registrations is probably manageable under our current system; 350 new licenses is probably not.

The Committee decided to hold its next meeting on July 14 and to invite representatives from the Police Department and Town Counsel to discuss enforcement and licensing in more depth.