



## Position Paper on Banning Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers

### Introduction

Hillsborough has historically been a community notable for its “quality of life” – in terms of housing stock, schools, transportation, public safety and more.

In recent years, there has been a perceived or actual decline in all of these attributes.

We have a tremendous pool of talented individuals and families as we have grown from an aristocratic summer home destination 100+ years ago to a vibrant bedroom community for San Francisco and Silicon Valley.

Along with that growth have come changes in demographics, governmental budgets, public safety and in general “quality of life” expectations and realities.

Many of our neighbors are well-minded folks simply asking for the attention to such “quality of life” issues that the recurring Hillsborough city council has not acted on for the past 10 years.

This position paper will briefly discuss a proposed gas-powered leaf blowers ban.

Other position papers in this October 2020 series discuss:

- Accelerating Wildfire Preparedness
- Legislating Aesthetic Cell Tower Placement (*not within 150 feet of residences & no taller than 40'*)
- Modernizing City Council Processes for “Good Governance”
- Fixing our emergency communication services

One of the stated goals of Aaron Zornes as city council candidate is to convene working groups of both Hillsborough residents/experts as well as the pertinent city and county departments to define the problems, the solutions available to us, and action plans to accelerate their implementation in the next two years or sooner.

Certain of the problem areas cited in this series of position papers can no longer be dangerously “kicked down the path” by our city government.

## ISSUE – Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers

Recently, the community-based NO-MO-GAS-BLO activist group polled 3,800+ Hillsborough residents via an online survey made available via email sent to town residents as well as public postings in both NextDoor Hillsborough and Hillsborough Together. As a member of that group, Zornes developed the survey based on input from discussions with neighbors, gardener services and city personnel including Hillsborough police. Suffice to state, our position is based upon several years of research, conversations and frustration with the “Hillsborough establishment” regarding a topic that most other affluent Bay Area communities have already successfully tackled.

### FINDINGS

- Electric leaf blowers can perform the same tasks as gas-powered leaf blowers \*without\* the use of fossil fuel – and without the well-documented attendant noise and air pollution.
- According to the California Air Resources Board, operating the best-selling commercial leaf blower for one hour emits smog-forming pollution comparable to driving a 2016 Toyota Camry about 1,100 miles, or approximately the distance from Los Angeles to Denver.
- Similar Bay Area communities such as Belvedere, Berkeley, Carmel, Los Altos, Los Gatos, Mill Valley, Palo Alto, Piedmont, Portola Valley, Saratoga and Tiburon have successfully banned these “infernal combustion machines”.
- Sister city Burlingame has restricted their use to certain neighborhoods on certain days ... and their gardeners have \*not\* gone out of business (one of the anti-leaf blower ban crowd’s persistent objections to such a ban).
- Per [Hillsborough ordinance 8.32.030](#), gas-powered leaf blowers are ONLY permitted [Monday-Friday 8am-5pm](#). Week-ends and holidays these are PROHIBITED.
- Current town ordinance restriction on operation of such devices outside of Monday-Friday 9am-5pm is \*not\* satisfactorily enforced. Many residents complain of the leaf blower noise that takes place on week-ends (event at 7am) and during the week before 8am and persistently \*after\* 5pm until 7pm or later. Calls to the police to ask enforcement are hit or miss in their effectiveness. Not once has a homeowner or gardener service been ticketed/cited for repeatedly violating the existing ordinance. These are facts that are experience-based and documented in the survey results.
- Our NO-MO-GAS-BLO community survey found that the many common “household activities” are greatly affected by the non-stop daily use of such gas-powered devices by gardener services: conversation; fresh air - daytime (unable to go outside peacefully to enjoy yard or back deck); hearing; meal times; outdoor activities; quality of life; reading; radio; sleep; study; television/video viewing; thinking/concentration; and work at home.
- **With work-at-home and study-at-home having become the norm due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the community as a whole has become even more concerned about the inability of our government to enforce existing regulations and to make progress on banning such public nuisances as our sister communities have.**
- Several years ago, the Hillsborough city council declined to consider the banning of gas-powered leaf blowers due to a minority of vocal homeowners. And a minority of voices persists in protesting that “it will increase the cost of our gardening services” and “we don't need more government laws”. **We think not. We will act accordingly.**

**BOTTOM LINE: Our position is that at a minimum, the Town of Hillsborough should pass** (and enforce, unlike other ordinances not enforced by the city or police) **an ordinance to either restrict or ban the use of gas-powered leaf blowers and potentially other landscaping equipment due to their high pollutant nature - air pollution \*and\* noise pollution.** The city should determine and execute a solution during the “winter lull” with such an ordinance being a “best practice” successfully implemented at similar affluent Bay Area communities.

## Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers REFERENCES *(click on links below to read other relevant articles/research)*

[Link to the NO-MO-GAS-BLO survey \(still open for input as of fall 2020\)](#)

- [Washington Post article](#) - In leaf blowers, two-stroke engines have been shown to emit carcinogenic contaminants comparable to large automobiles/trucks (~Ford F150 Raptor)
- Burlingame enforces code of gas-powered leaf blowers ONLY permitted two specific days per each of 4 Burlingame districts (large apartment buildings are given permission any day)
  - [Review of 2011 Burlingame efforts](#)
  - [Review of 2012 Burlingame final ordinance](#) re: leaf blowers (in effect since then)
  - [Full text of Burlingame leaf blower ordinance](#)
- [Portola January 2021 ban](#) - Portola Valley will ban gas-powered leaf blowers starting January 2021. They currently offer a "buy back" program that refunds 40% of cost of an electric leaf blower (up to \$120) to any resident
- [Saratoga February 2020 ordinance](#) - Saratoga instituted their new noise ordinance for leaf blowers effectively stopping all gas-powered leaf blowers
- [Review of state-wide California efforts](#)
- [Full list of California cities banning gas-powered leaf blowers](#) (select CA in pop-up box ... FYI = HD Supply is supply chain back-end to Home Depot)
- [Atherton March 2019 efforts](#)
- [Los Altos 1991 ban](#) - Los Altos was one of the first cities to prohibit gas-powered leaf blowers in 1991. Two decades later, the city reconsidered the ban, citing the adverse impact on the parks department, which needed extra battery packs to work on large properties without electric outlets. Ultimately the effort to repeal the ban fell short.
- [Los Gatos 2015 ban](#) - Los Gatos banned gas-powered leaf blowers in 2015
- [Palo Alto ordinance](#) - In 2005, Palo Alto passed an ordinance prohibiting the use of gas-powered leaf blowers in residential zones of the city.