

Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission
c/o Department of Environmental Services
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705
Arlington, VA 22201

October 25, 2021

The Honorable Matt de Ferranti
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Phase Out of Gas-powered Lawn Equipment on County Property

Dear Chair de Ferranti,

The Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2) recommends that the County Board direct the County Manager to end the purchase of gas-powered lawn equipment by County staff and phase out the use of such equipment by County contractors. The County should work with Arlington Public Schools to do the same.

We were heartened to learn from the Department of Parks and Natural Resources (PNR) that it plans to convert to 100 percent electric lawn equipment by 2030. We applaud PNR for taking this step. We believe, however, that it can and should significantly accelerate this timeline and broaden the initiative by requiring purchase of electric equipment only going forward and taking the additional steps outlined below. Both Montgomery County and the District of Columbia have instituted partial or total bans of gas-powered leaf blowers and thus have demonstrated that it can be done.

Phasing out of gas-powered lawn equipment has a multitude of health, environmental, and economic advantages:

- Gas-powered lawn equipment is inefficient and contributes up to 5 percent of the air pollution in the United States according to [the EPA](#), including CO2 emissions, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds.
- Loud, penetrating noise, particularly from gas leaf blowers, degrades the quality of life in neighborhoods and can contribute to chronic stress, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease as well as disrupt wildlife habitat.
- Landscape maintenance workers, who often come from low-income communities of color, are particularly susceptible to the health impacts of using such equipment on a daily basis.
- Electric alternatives would save on fuel and maintenance costs, offsetting any upfront price differential over the life of the equipment. PRN staff have already done much of this analysis, and some outside organizations like Clean Quiet NOVA have offered additional useful analysis. It is well established, moreover, that lithium-ion batteries can

deliver more horse-power than gas and, thus, the argument that electric leaf blowers and other lawn equipment are slow and inefficient is not supported by the evidence.

C2E2 recommends that when implementing this transition, that PNR staff:

- identify opportunities to reduce lawn equipment use by replacing turf with native plantings; leaving leaves and other plant debris to decompose in place; and opting for rakes, brooms, and other hand tools. Doing so would expand and protect wildlife habitat and contribute to Arlington's "biophilic city" goals."
- consider purchasing solar-powered battery chargers.
- extend the scope of this new initiative to lawn mowing contractors, by initiating modifications or recompeting the existing contracts, which have been recently signed, earlier than the five-year timeframe.
- consider securing bulk-purchase contracts for electric lawn equipment (e.g., leaf blowers)--potentially with neighboring jurisdictions--to lower per unit costs.
- move immediately to identify County locations where leaf removal is a matter of aesthetics only and focus instead on areas where it is an issue of safety. For example, removing leaves from bike trails, sidewalks, playing courts and fields, and playscapes where it is critical to keeping our residents and other users safe.
- design and launch a public awareness-raising campaign about the biodiversity benefits of "leaving the leaves in place," and ask residents for their understanding as they adjust expectations around the need for leaf-free turf.

Thank you for considering this recommendation as a precursor to broader action to phasing out private use of such equipment throughout the County, which currently depends on legislation from the General Assembly.

In the meantime, the County should lead by example and phase out the use of gas-powered leaf blowers and other lawn equipment by County employees and contractors, encouraging businesses and citizens to follow suit. We should join communities across America that are already taking action to make this happen

Sincerely,



Joan McIntyre
Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission

CC: County Manager
Greg Emanuel, Director of the Department of Environmental Services
Jane Rudolph, Director of Parks and Recreation