



CITY OF KIRKLAND
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MEMORANDUM

To: Kurt Triplett, City Manager

From: Diana Hart, Government Affairs Manager
Carly Joerger, Management Analyst
Noelle Johnson, Program Assistant
Erika Mascorro, DEIB Manager

Date: April 10, 2023

Subject: ELECTRIC LEAF BLOWER INITIATIVE

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council consider adoption of revised Resolution R-5585, launching the Electric Leaf Blower Initiative (Attachment 2). If the City Council adopts the Resolution, the City Manager will begin the first phase of the plan listed in the Resolution.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

At the April 4, 2023 regular meeting of the Kirkland City Council, Council considered a proposal to implement the Electric Leaf Blower Initiative, materials for which can be found on the City's website here ([April 4, 2023 Meeting Materials](#)). The Electric Leaf Blower Initiative proposal includes a multi-year phased approach to sunsetting gas powered leaf blowers by a target date of December 31, 2025. The initiative sets as a goal addressing the equity impacts of the legislation with education and financial incentives and culminates in an ordinance recommended to be adopted by the Council in 2025. City Council received the report, provided feedback on several aspects of the Initiative, and directed City staff to bring back an updated Resolution authorizing the Electric Leaf Blower Initiative that reflect their requested changes.

The revised Resolution R-5585 (Attachment 2) has three sections. First, the "whereas" statements document the history of the City's commitment to and funding of sustainability initiatives, research findings on the impacts of gas-powered leaf blowers on the environment and users, the trade-offs of gas-powered leaf blowers compared to electric leaf blowers, national examples of policy decisions related to leaf blowers, and stakeholder engagement that informed the Initiative. Section one authorizes the City Manager to implement an electric leaf blower initiative to achieve specified goals. Section two lists challenges of the initiative that were identified during initial stakeholder engagement and requires strategies to be developed to address them. The third section authorizes the City Manager to deploy a three-phased approach with key target milestones to accomplish the Initiative's goals. The strategies, goals, and three-phased approach listed in there revised Resolution have been updated to reflect Council's input and direction from the April 4, 2023 meeting.

REVISIONS TO RESOLUTION R-5585:

At the April 4, 2023 City Council meeting, Council provided feedback and direction on the draft Resolution R-5585. The following section summarizes and highlights key changes used to incorporate Council's direction into the Resolution as also seen in the track changes version of the revised Resolution (Attachment 1).

Stakeholder Engagement

The City Council expressed interest in the initiative incorporating Lake Washington Institute of Technology, Washington State Nursery and Landscaping Association, Northwest Nurseries, and the Lake Washington School District into the stakeholder engagement process. City staff will meet with representatives from these groups and they have been incorporated as stakeholders into the Resolution with the following language:

Section 3.a. "2023: City pilots, evaluates, develops, and begins implementing a transition plan for the City's equipment; ~~and~~ engages federal and state officials in support of the initiative; and initiates outreach to regional partners and key stakeholders and in the community including, but not limited to, the Lake Washington Institute for Technology Horticulture Program, Quiet Clean Kirkland, and Lake Washington School District."

City Council also expressed an interest in an educational and information campaign for the public to explain the purpose of the initiative and assist in transitioning, with an emphasis on residential households. Staff consulted with the City Manager's Office Communications team. Their recommendations were incorporated into the Resolution with the following language:

Section 3.a. "2024: City implements financial incentive programs to support private sector and resident transition to electric equipment; ~~and~~ continues City transition; ~~and~~ stakeholder engagement; and deploys an educational and information campaign for Kirkland residential households and businesses."

Financial Incentives for Kirkland Households

City Council communicated their interest in expanding the scope of the financial incentives of the program to include low- and moderate-income Kirkland households who may need help in converting to electric leaf blowers. The following language was incorporated into the Resolution to reflect this request:

Section 2.l "Providing financial incentives, especially for low- and moderate-income residents, to support the transition of household equipment."

Potential Changes to Phased Approach

City Council provided direction that the Initiative's phased approach should target certain key dates but be flexible enough to change target dates as the Initiative evolves. Staff have updated Resolution R-5585 to reflect City Council's direction that key milestones are subject to change, given new information and awareness of regional activity with the following language:

Section 1.a. "Sunset the use of gas-powered hand-held and backpack leaf blowers in Kirkland by a target date of December 31, 2025"

Section 3. "The City Manager is further authorized and directed to deploy a three-phased approach with key target milestones to accomplish the Initiative's goals. The City Manager may propose changes to these milestones based on new information, learnings, and opportunities."

Replacement Cycle Strategies

City Council directed staff to consider strategies that would not disrupt the equipment replacement process for local landscaping businesses. Staff have updated the strategies in Resolution R-5585 to consider different phase-out approaches in the Ordinance, which is targeted to take effect by December 31, 2025 with the following language:

Section 2.j. "Minimize potential disruption to equipment replacement cycles for businesses and the City."

Regional Approach & Legislative Agenda

City Council expressed interest in pursuing a regional approach to the transition, with the acknowledgement that this collaboration may further advocacy efforts at state and federal levels. City Council also communicated interest in pursuing a sponsor for state or county-wide leaf blower legislation, and potentially adding this legislation to Kirkland's Legislative Agenda next session. Staff have updated Resolution R-5585 to add strategies for exploration of potential regional partnerships and adding leaf blower legislation to Kirkland's Legislative Agenda with the following language:

Section 2.m. "Explore potential regional collaboration for the transition."

- a. Section 2.n. "Consider supporting County or State-wide action to transition to electric leaf blowers as part of the City of Kirkland Legislative Agenda."

COUNCIL ACTION:

After evaluating the changes made by staff to incorporate previous Council feedback, Council may adopt revised Resolution R-5585, amend Resolution R-5585 before adoption, request staff return with additional information or changes, or take no action on Resolution R-5585 at this time.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution R-5585 with Track Changes
2. Resolution R-5585

RESOLUTION R-5585

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF KIRKLAND AUTHORIZING THE CITY MANAGER TO IMPLEMENT AN ELECTRIC LEAF BLOWER INITIATIVE TO TRANSITION THE CITY'S GAS-POWERED HAND-HELD AND BACKPACK LEAF BLOWERS TO ELECTRIC, ADMINISTER FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO SUPPORT PRIVATE SECTOR AND RESIDENT EQUIPMENT CONVERSION, AND EXPLORE LEGISLATION TO PROHIBIT USE OF GAS-POWERED LEAF BLOWERS IN THE CITY OF KIRKLAND BY DECEMBER 31, 2025.

WHEREAS, the Kirkland City Council has prioritized preserving the environment by adopting the 2023-2024 Council Sustainable Environment goal to "Protect our natural environment through sustainable goals and practices to meet the needs of community members for a healthy environment and clean energy without compromising the needs of future generations"; and

WHEREAS, on December 8, 2020 the Council adopted Resolution R-5457 approving Kirkland's Sustainability Master Plan which establishes environmental goals for the City and 200 actions including SG-1.10, "the City will explore [the] reduction of or elimination of gas-powered landscaping equipment in City operations"; and

WHEREAS, on February 21, 2023 the Council adopted Resolution R-5578, adopting the 2023-2024 City Work Program, which includes a work plan item to "prioritize climate justice and continue to fund Sustainability Master Plan actions to further equity, energy efficiency, public health, and a clean energy economy that promotes a sustainable and resilient environment to further the Sustainable Environment goal"; and

WHEREAS, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the City has received a high volume of noise complaints about leaf blowers, and responding to these complaints was a key factor prompting exploration of this initiative; and

WHEREAS, the Council included \$500,000 in American Rescue Plan Act Funds in the adopted 2023-2024 budget to support transitioning the City's equipment to all electric leaf blowers and incentives for private sector and resident conversion; and

WHEREAS, initial research shows that current electric leaf blower models produce similar noise levels to gas powered leaf blowers, but that electric motors have more potential to reduce noise pollution and electric leaf blower technology is anticipated to improve in the coming years; and

WHEREAS, research [also](#) shows gas-powered equipment has negative health impacts on operators and negative environmental impacts from extracting natural resources and burning fossil fuels that contribute to climate change; and

WHEREAS, this initiative would impact landscaping businesses who are often small operations owned by minority members of the community and who are also disproportionately exposed to emissions at a higher rate than other community members; and

WHEREAS, providing financial incentives to support Kirkland businesses through the transition will be important to maximizing the benefit of offering an electric landscaping service to Kirkland clients and reduce any associated burdens, especially on small businesses; and

WHEREAS, similar financial incentives may be strategic to encourage adoption of electric equipment among Kirkland residents and support low-income community members in making the transition; and

WHEREAS, bearing the environmental justice components of using gas-powered equipment in mind, research also shows an environmental trade-off by converting to electric equipment, where the mining, extraction, production, and recycling processes for batteries also causes significant environmental harm; and

WHEREAS, acknowledging this complexity, policymakers around the country are still choosing to act to reduce emissions, [and potentially noise pollution](#), in their communities and protect health and safety of users by sunseting gas-powered equipment including in Washington D.C., California, Multnomah County, Seattle, and other cities in the Puget Sound region; and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Legislature has considered legislation in the past to incentivize purchase of electric equipment through financial incentives and although the bills presented did not pass out of the legislature, Kirkland's legislative delegation has expressed that future action is likely; and

WHEREAS, the Electric Leaf Blower Initiative positions Kirkland to be proactive and effective in anticipation of potential future State decisions to sunset gas-powered equipment, in addition to reducing emissions in Kirkland and protecting health of users; and

WHEREAS, the City's Parks and Community Services and Public Works Departments have already purchased and use a combined total of 18 electric leaf blowers and actively consider electric options when the nearly 70 gas-powered leaf blowers in the fleet reach the end of their useful life; and

WHEREAS, in early 2023 the City Manager met with staff from the City's Parks and Community Services and Public Works Departments and hosted a focus group with Kirkland landscaping businesses to learn

what impacts a transition to all electric equipment would have and how to work together to make this initiative a success; and

WHEREAS, City staff met with staff from the Kirkland [federal](#) Congressional delegation to discuss opportunities for funding and partnerships and there was expressed support for the initiative and interest in identifying collaboration opportunities in the future; and

WHEREAS, staff gathered key insights from the stakeholder engagement and incorporated the opportunities and key challenges into the proposed Electric Leaf Blower Initiative three-phased approach, including key milestones set forth in this Resolution.

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved by the City Council of the City of Kirkland as follows:

Section 1. The City Manager is hereby authorized and directed to implement an electric leaf blower initiative that would achieve the following goals:

- a. Sunset the use of gas-powered hand-held and backpack leaf blowers in Kirkland by [a target date of](#) December 31, 2025
- b. Reduce negative health impacts caused by gas emissions
- c. Ensure a responsive transition to electric leaf blowers that reduces the burden and maximizes the potential benefit to Kirkland landscaping businesses and residents
- d. Be proactive in anticipation of potential State decisions to sunset gas-powered equipment

Section 2. The initiative shall develop strategies to address challenges identified throughout initial stakeholder engagement, including, but not limited to, the following:

- a. Electric equipment is heavier than gas-powered equipment and with extended use, may create an ergonomics concern for users
- b. Limited availability of powerful, commercial-grade electric equipment currently available on the market.
- c. The potential impact of less powerful equipment on length of operations and service levels and the potential increase in costs to businesses and customers.
- d. Ethical disposal process for functioning gas-powered equipment.
- e. Ensuring sufficient charging infrastructure and exploration of alternative energy sources to charge equipment.
- f. Noise pollution produced by electric leaf blowers.
- g. Batter related challenges such as high acquisition cost for the quantity needed per day, concerns around the disposal/recycling process, less reliability in cold temperatures, and need for mobile recharging options that do not rely on gas-powered generators.
- h. Consideration of expanding the scope of the initiative or identify opportunities for future initiatives to address other gas-powered landscaping equipment or gas-powered equipment more broadly, [should stakeholder and regional engagement and other learnings suggest opportunity for pragmatic scope expansion.](#)
- i. Effectiveness and equity concerns with enforcement of a potential ordinance sunsetting gas-powered equipment.

including enforcement plan options for future Council consideration.

- i-j. Minimize potential disruption to equipment replacement cycles for businesses and the City.
- k. Providing financial incentives to support of the transition of landscaping operations.
- l. Providing financial incentives, especially for low- and moderate-income residents, to support the transition of household equipment.
- m. Explore potential regional collaboration for the transition.
- n. Consider supporting County or State-wide action to transition to electric leaf blowers as part of the City of Kirkland legislative agenda.
- j-o. Evaluate any potential City budget implications that may result from changing service levels by using electric equipment.

Section 3. The City Manager is further authorized and directed to deploy a three-phased approach with ~~the following~~ key target milestones to accomplish the Initiative's goals. The City Manager may propose changes to these milestones based on new information, learnings, and opportunities:

- a. 2023: City pilots, evaluates, develops, and begins implementing a transition plan for the City's equipment; ~~z~~ engages federal and state officials in support of the initiative; ~~z~~ and initiates ~~of~~ outreach to regional partners and key stakeholders in the community including, but not limited to, the Lake Washington Institute for Technology Horticulture Program, Quiet Clean Kirkland, and the Lake Washington School District.
- b. 2024: City implements financial incentive programs to support private sector and resident transition to electric equipment; ~~z~~ and continues City transition and stakeholder engagement; and deploys an educational and information campaign for Kirkland residential households and businesses.
- c. 2025: Propose an ordinance for Council consideration sunsetting hand-held and backpack gas-powered equipment city-wide while continuing City, business and resident transitions.

Passed by majority vote of the Kirkland City Council in open meeting this ____ day of _____, 20__.

Signed in authentication thereof this ____ day of _____, 20__.

Penny Sweet, Mayor

Attest:

Kathi Anderson, City Clerk