

Response to the letter from residents last week requesting that I schedule a worksession discussion to consider banning gas powered leaf blowers.

The short answer to the question is “Yes”, I will schedule a discussion in January. There is no space on the agendas in the next few weeks before we break for the holidays.

I’d like it to be a broader discussion and to encompass at least the following points (this is by no means a comprehensive list) :

1. We haven’t “banned” things—is that an effective course of action? Remember that our Nuclear Free Zone and our water bottle resolution, and past efforts regarding Burma and others, are really purchasing restrictions for the City government, and recent efforts on foie gras and cage-free chickens are advisory, and envisioned as educational.
2. We would need to explore the legal issues surrounding the authority for any action, and the enforcement of any potential ordinance.
3. We might need to consider the flexibility to address a number of issues including the ability of seniors and disabled residents to get work done on their properties, the impact on landscaping businesses and their customers, and the needs of large institutions—for example the hospital, private and public colleges and schools, and City and County parks and facilities.
4. Our draft Strategic Plan, which the Council discussed at length last week, and which will soon be out for comment, has a prominent goal of “making environmental improvements focused on reducing climate change and improving stormwater management”. It includes a priority project to create, and *enact* a 5 year environmental plan with a budget that incorporates a greenhouse gas emission reduction plan for the entire City, and it also calls for expanding sustainable practices in coordination with the new regional Council of Governments’ Plan, and with the Montgomery County plan.
5. This may be the opportunity to focus on the need for expanding the membership of the Committee on the Environment, and/or expanding the mission of the Committee, or replacing the Committee with a group with an expanded focus, or adding a new Committee. This will be an opportunity for the signers of the letter, and others, to step up to the task of helping to design and implement an action plan to address this and other concerns about the sustainability and livability of our City, and our environment.