BIRMINGHAM
A WALKABLE CITY

AGENDA
BIRMINGHAM ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
MONDAY, MAY 19, 2025
BIRMINGHAM CITY HALL, 151 MARTIN ST, ROOM 202-203, BIRMINGHAM MI *
********** 5:30 PM**********

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1) **Call to Order**
2) **Roll Call**
3) **Review the Minutes**
4) **Review of the Agenda**
5) **New Business**
   A. **Leaf Blowers**
   B. **Community Engagement Plan**
6) **Miscellaneous Communications**
7) **Open to the Public for Items Not on the Agenda**
8) **Adjournment**

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*Please note that board meetings will be conducted in person once again. Members of the public can attend in person at Birmingham City Hall, 151 Martin St., or may attend virtually at:

Link to Access Virtual Meeting: https://bhamgov-org.zoom.us/j/84305107066
Telephone Meeting Access: 833 928 4608 US Toll-free
Meeting ID Code: 843 0510 7066

Notice: Individuals requiring accommodations, such as interpreter services for effective participation in this meeting should contact the City Clerk's Office at (248) 530-3405 at least on day in advance of the public meeting.

Las personas que requieren alojamiento, tales como servicios de interpretación, la participación efectiva en esta reunión deben ponerse en contacto con la Oficina del Secretario Municipal al (248) 530-3405 por lo menos el día antes de la reunión pública. (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964).

A PERSON DESIGNATED WITH THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE DECISIONS MUST BE PRESENT AT THE MEETING.

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MEMORANDUM

Planning Department

DATE: May 19, 2025

TO: Environmental Sustainability Committee Members

FROM: Nicholas Dupuis, Planning Director

SUBJECT: Regulations for Leaf Blowers

Over several years, the City Commission has discussed the issue of leaf blowers numerous times both formally and informally. In these conversations, it was suggested that leaf blowers could be considered detrimental to the public health, safety and welfare and that the City should consider banning the use of such. Ultimately, the City Commission passed a resolution in 2023 in support of a ban eliminating the use of two-stroke gas powered leaf blowers by July 1, 2026.

On October 3, 2022 (Agenda – Minutes), the City Commission held a workshop in which the topic of leaf blowers was discussed. A high level discussion regarding the goals of any future study into leaf blowers was had, and there was much discussion about the issues experienced by the use of leaf blowers and the potential challenges in considering a ban.

On August 14, 2023 (Agenda – Minutes), the Planning Department presented a more in-depth review of the problems that leaf blowers pose, specifically two-stroke gas powered leaf blowers and distilled the issues down its major components. In addition, the Planning Department provided some research into other communities nationwide that are implementing leaf blower bans. Ultimately, the City Commission moved to direct the Planning Department, through the City Manager, to study a phased approach to eliminating the use of two-stroke, gas powered leaf blowers in the City of Birmingham.

On September 11, 2023 (Agenda – Minutes), the City Commission moved to adopt a resolution to phase out the use of two-stroke gas powered leaf blowers by July 1, 2026. This phase approach included policy actions, educational actions, and regulatory actions. Since the resolution was passed, the City has provided an education campaign that involved newsletters and various press engagements.

On September 23, 2024 (Agenda – Minutes), the City Commission tabled a discussion about new ordinance language designed to support the phase-out of two-stroke gas powered leaf blowers city-wide and directed the item to the Environmental Sustainability Committee to do further research and provide a recommendation when applicable.

As for the "problem" with two-stroke gas powered leaf blowers referenced above, it may be summarized into three main categories: *emissions, noise* and *environment.*

When it comes to *emissions*, it is important to understand the basic design of a two-stroke engine and how they compare to four-stroke engines. The main difference can be discerned from the nomenclature: two-stroke engines complete the combustion and exhaust cycle in two strokes of the piston, while four-stroke engines complete the cycle in four. As we understand it, this basic design has a large impact on efficiency, which is where the principal emissions problem arises. In a two-stroke engine, not all of the fuel (which includes oil) is burned in the process, which means that the engine is emitting both burned fuel and unburned fuel into the atmosphere. These carbon dioxide and hydrocarbon-based emissions have direct impacts on climate change and public health. The two-stroke engine design is lighter weight and easy to maintain, but remains antiquated and unable to perform to the emissions standards of the more common four-stroke engine.

In terms of loud and penetrating *noise*, which is perhaps the most common refrain, consideration should be given to the public, but also the user. Research generally states that gas powered leaf blowers are the noisiest at 80-90 decibels, while electric models fall in the 65-70 decibel range. The decibel levels of leaf blowers are measured/rated from a *distance of 50 ft. away*, which means that the users of this equipment are experiencing a much higher decibel level. According to the World Health Organization, noise exposure levels should not exceed 70 decibels over a 24-hour period and 85 decibels over a 1-hour period to avoid hearing impairment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has produced Statistics about the Public Health Burden of Noise-Induced Hearing Loss that demonstrate effects to all ages and with varying economic costs. These levels can of course vary with proximity, but the low-frequency sound waves often mean that being inside a building may not even provide relief from the nuisance.

As was mentioned during the October 2022 workshop, the City of Birmingham has had noise ordinances on the books for quite some time. The City Code states that the decibel level prohibitions are to be enforced at or beyond the property line of the property on which the work or noise-emitting activity is being conducted. In a residential setting, those levels are not to exceed 75 decibels from 7 AM to 7 PM and 60 decibels overnight from 7 PM to 7 AM. With typical urban residential fabric that can be found all over Birmingham (40 ft. x 120 ft. lots, for example), it is easy to infer that these decibel levels are surely being exceeded by gas powered leaf blowers. However, as was also discussed at the 2022 workshop, these sort of standards are difficult to enforce.

Regarding the *environment*, gas powered leaf blowers have the power to completely destroy essential environments for insects, birds, and other wildlife, thus impacting biodiversity. It is worth noting here that this issue is not limited to gas powered leaf blowers – all leaf blowers can damage biodiversity. Leaf blowers can produce air at over 200 mph, which will completely blow away valuable food sources and habitats for organisms that our ecosystem relies on. It was also stated at the 2022 workshop that people experience leaf blowers in all seasons including winter snow removal and summer lawn maintenance cleanup. However, the fall leaf cleanup is inferred to be the most active season, with the most risk to biodiversity. It is also worth noting that electric leaf blowers typically utilize a lithium ion battery than can be recycled. Alternatively, there are readily available plug-in electric leaf blowers as well.

When it comes to a solution, and based on the prevalence of gas powered leaf blowers used by not only commercial and private operations, but also in Birmingham's own governmental operations, a phased approach to regulation may be the most appropriate way to address the situation. The Planning Department suggested previously a stepped approach to work towards a possible ban rather than a "cold turkey" ban, which could include educational actions, policy actions, and regulatory actions.

When it comes to the regulatory/policy actions, the City of Birmingham can take notes from several other communities that have addressed this issue. In southeast Michigan, Ann Arbor passed an ordinance that banned the use of two-cycle outdoor power equipment in their Downtown District and eventually moved to a city-wide phase out complete with ordinance language to support the shift. Ann Arbor has also launched a Pollinator-Aware Yard Care Program that emphasizes the reduction of turf grass lawns and promotes the "leaving-alone" of fallen leaves to promote habitat.

In California, the City of Sonoma (among many others) has completely banned gas-powered leaf blowers from the City, and further regulates electric leaf blowers to certain times. The State of California itself has enacted a gas-powered leaf blower ban for the state starting in 2024.

On the east coast, the Township of Maplewood, New Jersey has banned leaf blowers within the Township limits.

The City of Newton, Massachusetts has adopted a seasonal ban for gas-powered leaf blowers, and further requires registration for all leaf blower users.

Based on the availability of language from other communities to reference, as well as various scientific studies that support the transition from gas-powered to electric leaf blowers, the decision appears to be easily justifiable. With that being said, the City will very likely face some criticism from landscaping service providers, as well as their customers. Although they perform the same function, research indicates that the power difference between gas-powered and electric leaf blowers may cause jobs to take longer, which could wind up costing the consumer more. In addition to time spent performing the service, there is also the issue of cost to replace existing, functioning equipment. In one example, a backpack-style gas-powered leaf blower can cost anywhere from $200-$300 on the lower end, where an electric of the same style can cost $400-$500. These issues must also be considered in the conversation.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that four-stroke leaf blowers exist and are used by contractors and private citizens alike, but research suggests that this style of leaf blower tends to be quieter and is much more efficient – often even meeting Environmental Protection Agency emissions standards. For this reason, the Planning Department suggests targeting regulations towards two-cycle leaf blowers at this time.

At this time, the Planning Department wishes to discuss this issue broadly with the Environmental Sustainability Committee and determine next steps.

MEMORANDUM

Planning Department

DATE: May 19, 2025

TO: Environmental Sustainability Committee

FROM: Summer Aldred-Arens, City Planner

SUBJECT: Community Engagement Plan Draft

An updated draft of the Community Engagement Plan for the Birmingham Green Healthy Climate Plan will be brought to the upcoming meeting for discussion. No changes have been made to the current version at this time.

Committee members are encouraged to review the draft and come prepared to discuss additional strategies for authentic community engagement. Your input will be essential as we continue to shape an inclusive and effective outreach approach.

Please let us know if you have any preliminary thoughts or questions ahead of the meeting.

SCAP Community Engagement Plan (DRAFT)

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive framework for planning, executing, and monitoring community engagement activities for the Birmingham Green Healthy Climate Plan. The Plan aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 while fostering community ownership and actionable participation to achieve actionable items laid out by the plan by 2030.

This engagement plan emphasizes meaningful two-way communication, inclusivity, and adaptability to ensure alignment with community needs and priorities.

Goals for Engagement

1. Build trust and transparency among stakeholders and residents.
2. Engage a diverse cross-section of the Birmingham community.
3. Ensure continuous feedback and iterative improvements to the Plan.
4. Translate input into actionable projects and policies that support climate goals.

Project Overview

The Birmingham Green Healthy Climate Plan addresses climate resilience and sustainability by focusing on a variety of key areas including:

- Water & Stormwater
- Natural Resources
- Quality of Life
- Buildings & Facilities
- Waste
- Transportation
- Municipal Operations

Engagement Framework

Engagement Objectives

- **Inform**: Share clear, accessible information about the Plan.
- **Consult**: Seek input on priorities, concerns, and proposed solutions.
- **Involve**: Actively involve stakeholders in decision-making processes.
- **Empower**: Enable community members to lead climate initiatives.

Target Audiences

1. **Residents**
2. **Local Businesses**
3. **Community Organizations**: Nonprofits, schools, and advocacy groups.
4. **Youth and Seniors**: Ensuring engagement across age demographics.
5. **Underserved Communities**: Including low-income households and individuals with disabilities.

Engagement Approach

Strategies

1. **In-Person Engagement**:
    - **Public Meetings and Open Houses**: Provide updates, seek input, and share progress.
    - **Focus Groups**: Address specific topics like energy efficiency or public transit.
    - **Pop-Up Events**: Outreach at community hubs like farmers' markets or libraries.
2. **Digital Engagement**:
    - **Interactive Website**: Host resources, surveys, and feedback forms.
    - **Social Media**: Regular updates and event promotions.
    - **Online Workshops**: Virtual participation for broader accessibility.
3. **Printed Materials**:
    - Flyers, brochures, and posters distributed at key locations.
4. Local/Regional/State/National Participation
    - Groups like CLC, Healthy Climate Task Force, FOTR, CLWA etc.
    - Bringing important info back to Bham residents
    - Regional leader
    - Recaps?

Inclusive Practices

- ADA-compliant materials and venues.
- Flexible meeting times to accommodate diverse schedules.
- Language options?

Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Project Team	Plan and execute engagement activities.
City Officials	Facilitate communication and promote activities locally.
Community Ambassadors	Act as liaisons to underrepresented groups (youth/seniors).
Stakeholders	Provide feedback and advocate for community priorities.

Engagement Methods

Tools and Techniques

- **Progress Tracker**: Live look on progress of action items.
- **Surveys and Polls**: Collect quantitative and qualitative input.
- **Workshops and Panels**: Deep-dive discussions on Plan elements.

Materials

- ADA-compliant flyers and presentations.
- Social media graphics and content.
- Reports summarizing feedback and next steps.

Monitoring and Reporting

- Publish quarterly progress updates.
- Share engagement outcomes through newsletters and online portals.
- Reports to ESC & annual report to CC?

Metrics for Success

Metric	**Target**
Participation Rate	Engage 50% of Birmingham households by Year 3.
Diversity of Input	Ensure representation from all demographic groups.
Community-Led Initiatives	Launch 10 community-driven projects by 2026.
Satisfaction Rate	80% of participants feel heard and valued.

Timeline and Milestones

Phase	**Activity**	**Timeline**
Phase 1: Preparation	Stakeholder mapping, resource allocation.	0–6 months
Phase 2: Outreach	Public meetings, surveys, and focus groups.	6-12 months

Phase 3: Implementation	Launch pilot community initiatives and track engagement.	12-16 months
Phase 4: Feedback	Evaluate outcomes and refine strategies.	12+ months
Phase 5	Repeat Phases 2-3	2+ years

Conclusion

The Birmingham Green: Healthy Climate Plan's Community Engagement Plan establishes a robust framework for fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and action. By combining in-person and digital engagement strategies, ensuring equitable participation, and maintaining transparent communication, this plan creates opportunities for all community members to shape Birmingham's sustainable future. With ongoing feedback loops and adaptive approaches, the engagement process will empower residents and stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the city's goal of carbon neutrality by 2050, ensuring a healthier, greener Birmingham for generations to come.