

COTI comments to City Council on gas-powered leaf blowers

Mayor Smith, Vice Mayor Johnson, Council members Crater, Henshaw and Miller

These comments are submitted in behalf Committee of the Islands (COTI) in support of Ordinance 21- 004 which is scheduled to have its second reading on August 24th.

For several years we at COTI have been concerned about the impact of gasoline-powered leaf blowers on the quality of life on Sanibel. Initially our concern focused on excessive noise generation, but it soon became clear that in addition gas-powered leaf blowers generate harmful pollutants like benzene, butadiene and formaldehyde that may affect the health of those in proximity. Given the availability of non-polluting battery powered alternatives, in 2019 we asked the Sanibel City Council to ban gas-powered leaf blowers. Instead the then Council restricted hours of use — far short of the ban we and many of our members had hoped for.

Since 2019 other cities have enacted bans with varying rationales. We believe the time is right for Sanibel take similar action to protect the quality of life in our community and public health and safety.

Some professional landscapers have expressed concerns about the expense of converting to battery-powered devices and voiced a preference for the additional power of gas-powered devices. However, with a more than two-year period in which to come into compliance we believe the expense of conversion should not be prohibitive for professionals. From the standpoint of performance, conversion involves tradeoffs. While gas-powered devices as of now may offer a power advantage (though battery technology is advancing) battery-powered devices are generally quieter, require less maintenance over time and perhaps most importantly — they do not expose operators and others in proximity to potentially harmful pollutants.

There is a nationwide trend toward conversion to battery-powered leaf blowers (and other lawn equipment) that Sanibel should join. Sanibel has always prided itself in being a leader in environmental innovation and protection. It can reinforce that leadership by taking decisive action in respect to gasoline-powered leaf blowers. For these reasons we support and urge you to pass Ordinance 21-004.

Respectfully submitted,
Committee of the Islands
Larry Schopp
President