

HP Leaf Blower Task Force Report

In 2025, three Highland Park organizations came together in response to various residents' complaints about the noise and potential health and environmental impacts due to the use of gas-powered leaf blowers (GLBs). This report is the result of the Task Force's efforts. The Task Force is comprised of the following members:

1. Borough Council Representative: Matt Hersh
2. HP Environmental Commission: Jonathan Abrahams
3. Sustainable HP and HP Environmental Commission: Mark Lesko
4. Board of Health: Beth Stevens
5. Member of Community: Diane Heimlich
6. One of the founding members was Tina Weishaus, Sustainable Highland Park, who unfortunately passed away after the Task Force was formed.

Charter

The Task Force was chartered to explore the potential consequences of the use of GLBs and whether the Borough Council should discuss possible changes to Borough Ordinances.

Specifically, the Task Force:

- Researched the health and environmental issues potentially faced by residents and operators resulting from the use of GLBs;
- Discovered what other local municipalities are doing to deal with GLBs in their towns;
- Provided public information sessions to inform both HP residents and Landscaping Contractors about the potential disadvantages of using GLBs; and
- Surveyed residents and contractors to gather their opinions of GLBs and potential changes to Borough ordinances.

The Health and Environmental Impacts of GLBs

Research conducted by task force members revealed a number of potential health and environmental problems with the use of GLBs in Highland Park. Briefly, we found that GLBs can create several potential impacts. These can be summarized as:

1. Health impacts
 - Resulting from the noise generated by GLBs due to the primitive design of their engines. This noise has been shown to have physiological effects on cardiovascular systems and can contribute to hearing loss.
 - Resulting from toxic substances emitted by GLB engines (such as formaldehyde, benzene, and animal feces, among others); these substances can lead to allergic reactions and breathing problems (among others)
2. Environmental consequences

- GLBs burn fossil fuels at rates that exceed most other fossil fueled machines, including cars;
- Fossil fuels are the main driver of climate change through greenhouse gases.

A document providing such findings in greater detail is attached to this Report.

Local NJ Efforts

Several towns or cities in New Jersey have passed partial or total restrictions on GLBs.

Municipality	Action	Status	Reference
Glen Ridge	Partial ban on GLBs through an ordinance that allows them in certain seasons	Enacted	https://www.glenridgenj.org/agenda/Ordinance1816GasPowerLeafBlowerOrdinance.pdf
Mantoloking	Partial ban on GLBs through an ordinance that allows them in certain seasons	Enacted	https://www.mantoloking.org/home/news/partial-ban-gas-leaf-blowers
Maplewood	Complete ban on the use of GLB's	Enacted	https://www.maplewoodnj.gov/government/public-works/leaf-blowers-and-leaves-in-streets
Milburn	Partial ban on GLBs through ordinance that allows them in certain seasons	Enacted	https://www.tapinto.net/towns/milburn-slash-short-hills/sections/green/articles/after-much-public-debate-milburn-township-committee-passes-partial-gas-blower-ban
Montclair	Complete ban on the use of GLB's	Enacted	https://ecode360.com/42952623
Morristown	Partial ban on GLBs through ordinance that allows them in certain seasons	Enacted	https://www.townofmorristown.org/index.asp?SEC=7BC559DD-735E-4CE9-8395-CCC09669B580

NJ (state)	Prohibits sale and use of GLBs statewide	In committee since 2024	https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2024/S0500/217_11.PDF
Princeton	Partial ban on GLBs through ordinance that allows them in certain seasons	Enacted	https://www.princetonnj.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=532&ARC=1341
South Orange	Partial ban on GLBs through ordinance that allows them in certain seasons	Enacted	https://www.southorange.org/DocumentCenter/View/6860/April-18-2022-Proposed-Leafblower-Summary-PDF?bidId=
West Orange	Phased approach of Partial ban on GLBs through ordinance that allows them in certain seasons and then a complete ban to take effect in 2026	Enacted, then reversed by Mayor (see https://patch.com/new-jersey/westorange/west-orange-leaf-blower-ban-derailed-council-fails-overtorn-veto)	https://patch.com/new-jersey/westorange/west-orange-bans-gas-powered-leaf-blowers-again

Several NJ municipalities are in the process of exploring a local ordinance like Highland Park. 7 counties and over 40 municipalities (including HP) are part of a statewide effort through Advocates for Transforming Landscape for NJ to encourage GLB restrictions/bans.

Public Outreach and Education

Three public information sessions were held from April through June, 2025. 2 were held in the Library's public meeting room and 1 was a Zoom only meeting. The last two meetings were focused on reaching the commercial operators (lawn care services).

The attendance at the three meetings was measured as follows:

- Library meeting #1 - fifteen people
- Zoom meeting - seven people
- Library meeting # 2 (with Zoom option) - twenty people

The Attitudes of Residents and Lawn Care Contractors

To understand the extent of resident dislike of GLBs and the opinions of Lawn Care Contractors, the Task Force:

- circulated petitions at various HP outdoor events, like the Farmer's market and the Street Fair
- Staffed tables at the Arts in the Park and the Street Fair to answer questions
- Placed social media posts in various local Facebook groups
- Spread information by word of mouth and networking
- Most importantly, undertook surveys of residents and lawn care contractors

Challenges to Undertaking our Survey

Surveys were a challenge to undertake.

- Highland Park has only a few lawn care companies based in the borough. Most of the lawn care Companies that do work in the Borough come from other towns. Such companies have less of an incentive to respond to surveys.
- Many residents are renters and do not hire landscapers or operate the GLBs.
- Efforts were made to speak with the property managers from the residential apartment complexes and then emailing their lawncare providers. Few showed interest or responded to requests to answer our survey.
- There were no lists of independent lawn care contractors working in Highland Park. We therefore collected phone numbers from social media inquiries and the trucks of lawn care contractors. Each was texted several times to respond to the survey.

Surveys

Despite these challenges, two surveys were produced using Survey Planet to gauge residents and lawn care providers' concerns and the degree of support for a change to gas-powered leaf blowers.

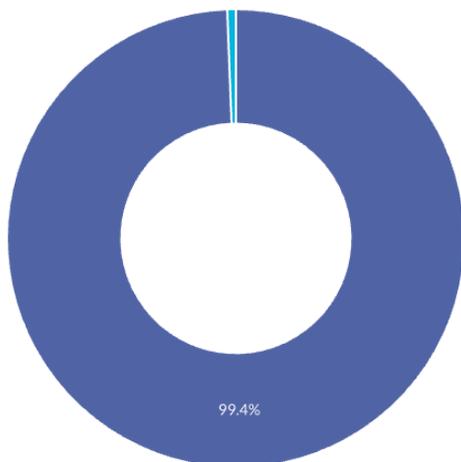
Resident Survey

Almost 500 HP residents responded to the survey, Over 65% of residents were in support of limiting the usage of gas-powered leaf blowers. In addition, the survey provided respondents

with the opportunity to expand on their opinions. This feedback section revealed many strong opinions, many in favor of completely banning the use of GLBs. In contrast there were some comments that felt it was an overreach to limit any usage.

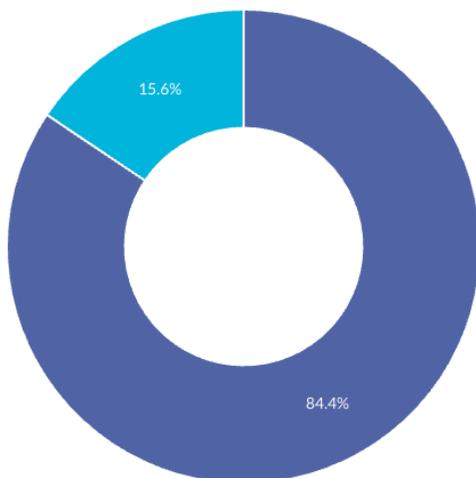
The charts on the next few pages report on resident's attitudes to GLBs and possible changes to HP's Noise Ordinance. The responses on the right of the circle graphs report on the possible answers and the number of respondents that answered each possible response. The percentage of those providing a response can be found on the different segments of the circle graph.

Q1 Are you a resident of Highland Park
Multiple Choice



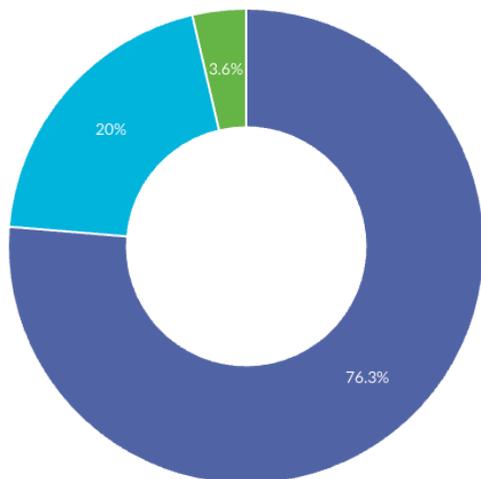
Choice	Total
Yes	489
No	3

Q2 Do you own or rent
Multiple Choice



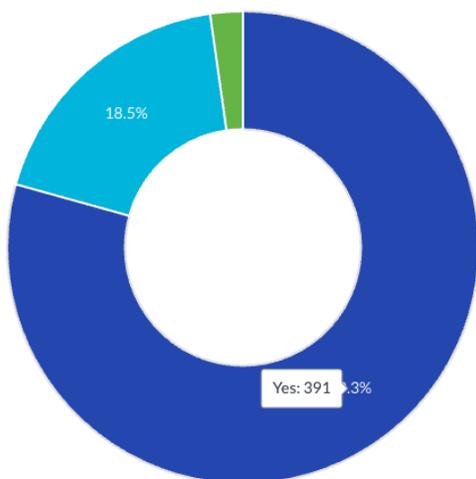
Choice	Total
Own	416
Rent	77

Q3 Do leaf blowers affect you
Multiple Choice



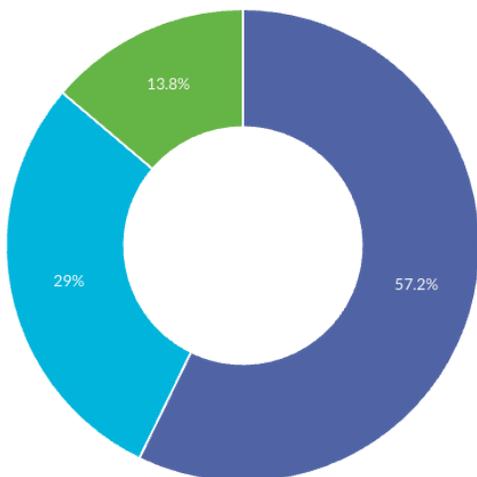
Choice	Total
Yes	377
No	99
Other	18

Q4 Do you own a single family home
Multiple Choice



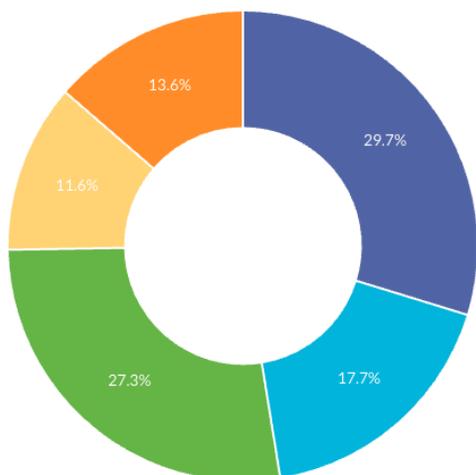
Choice	Total
Yes	391
No	91
Other	11

Q5 Who does your lawn care
Multiple Choice



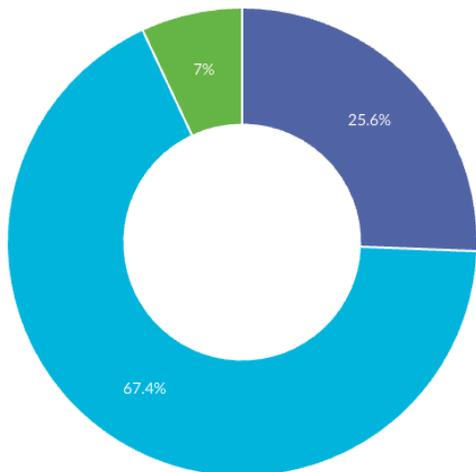
Choice	Total
I do it myself	282
I use a lawn care service	143
Other	68

Q6 Do you or your lawn care service use a leaf blower
Multiple Choice



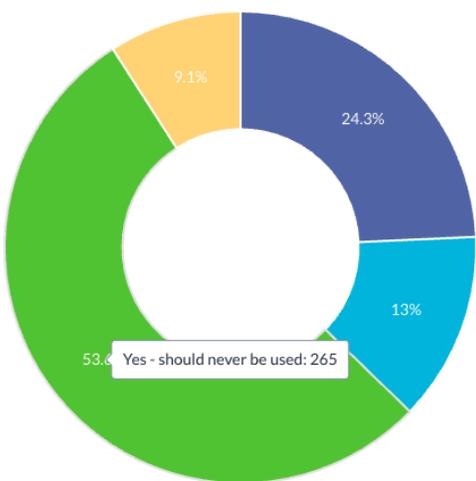
Choice	Total
Gas leaf blower	146
Electric leaf blower	87
Rake the leaves	134
Leave the leaves	57
Other	67

Q7 Do you or your lawn care service use a leaf blower to blow items besides leaves
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Yes	125
No	329
Other	34

Q8 Are you in support of limiting gas leaf blowers
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
No	120
Yes - should only be used during leaf collection seasons	64
Yes - should never be used	265
Other	45

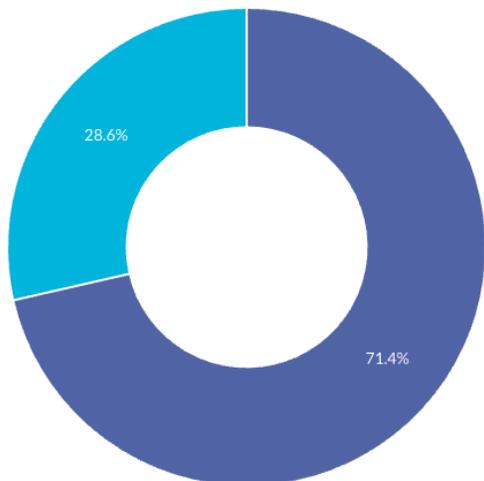
Lawn Care Provider Survey

There were only 7 responses, so that specific patterns in the results are not very easy to detect, nevertheless they supply some indications of contractor attitudes.

Q1

Do your crews use a gas leaf blower? ¿Sus equipos utilizan un soplador de hojas a gasolina?

Multiple Choice

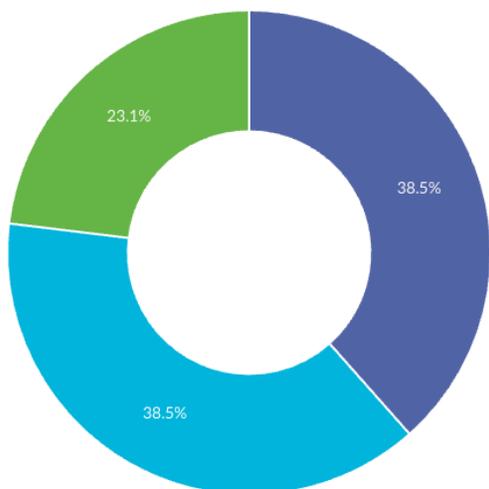


Choice	Total
Yes	5
No	2

Q2

What do you use the gas leaf blower for? ¿Para qué utilizas el soplador de hojas a gasolina?

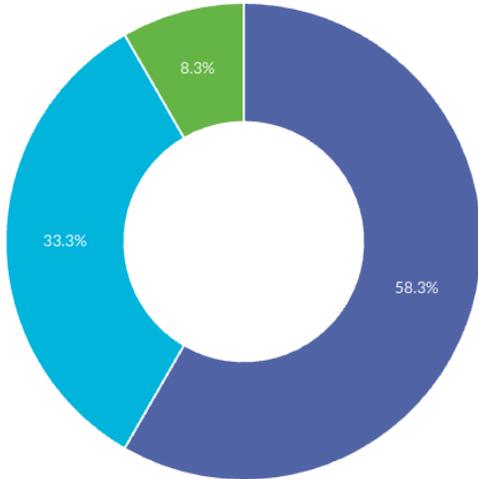
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Gather leaves/Recoger hojas	5
Cleanup sidewalk, grass and dirt/ Limpieza de aceras, césped y tierra	5
Other/Otro	3

Q3

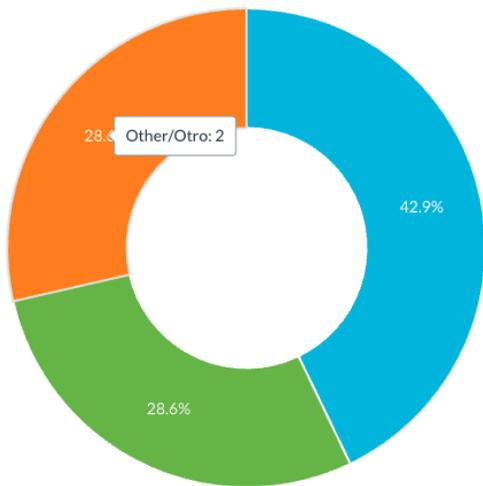
How do your workers operate the blower? ¿Cómo operan sus trabajadores el soplador?
Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Wear hearing protection/Use protección auditiva	7
Wear a mask/Usa una mascara	4
Other	1

Q4

Would you consider switching your gas equipment to electric? ¿Consideraría cambiar su equipo de gas a eléctrico?
Multiple Choice

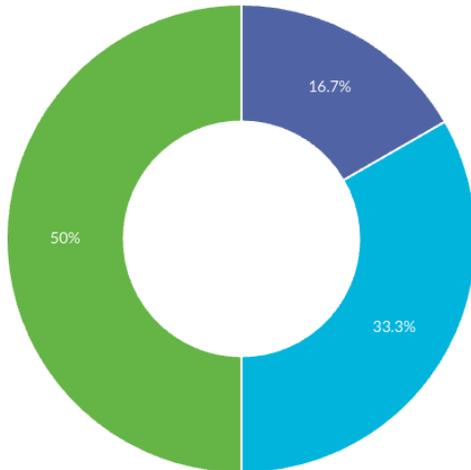


Choice	Total
Yes	0
No	3
Only if there is a financial incentive/Sólo si hay un incentivo financiero	2
Only if most customers requested electric leaf blowers/Sólo si la mayoría de los clientes solicitaron sopladores de hojas eléctricos	0
Other/Otro	2

Q5

How would you manage if the use of gas leaf blowers are restricted to certain times of year? ¿Cómo se las arreglaría si el uso de sopladores de hojas a gasolina se restringiera a ciertas épocas del...

Multiple Choice

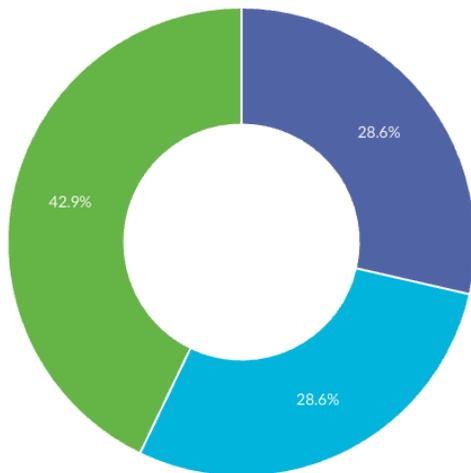


Choice	Total
Use a rake and broom/Utilice un rastrillo y una escoba	1
Leave clippings on sidewalk and grass/Deje los recortes en la acera y el césped	2
Other/Otro	3

Q6

Will restrictions to using a gas leaf blower affect your business? ¿Las restricciones en el uso de sopladores de hojas a gasolina afectarán su negocio?

Multiple Choice



Choice	Total
Will have to stop servicing Highland Park/Tendrán que dejar de prestar servicio a Highland Park	2
Will have to charge customers more/Habrà que cobrar más a los clientes	2
No change/Sin cambios	3
Other/Otro	0

Conclusions

The sum of all of the information gathered by our modes of outreach to HP residents, particularly from the survey, seems to lead to the conclusion that many Highland Park residents feel that a complete ban OR an ordinance that limits the usage of gas-powered leaf blowers is

desirable. Since a complete ban is self-explanatory, it need not be described here. Instead, we will explain the provisions of a partial ban that we saw in the ordinances of several other New Jersey towns.

Partial bans usually consist of the use of GLBs for a limited number of seasons, usually the Fall for leaf collection and the Spring to take care of debris that accumulated during the Winter. Many of the partial bans are organized in a phased approach. In such an approach, partial bans subsequently have been expanded to complete bans as residents and lawn care contractors get accustomed to doing without GLBs. Several towns have found that the use of discounted loans or grants to provide financial incentives for lawn care contractors to convert to electric equipment is useful in encouraging contractors to convert to electric leaf blowers.

The members of the Task Force will be willing to provide any additional information requested by the Council.

Recommendation

The Task Force suggests a phased in approach, seasonal ban for 2 years and then a full ban afterwards. Public education for this recommendation is important such that residents of the Boro, and landscapers, understand how this benefits everyone.