



STAFF REPORT

City Council

Meeting Date:

5/27/2025

Staff Report Number:

25-078-CC

Informational Item:

Update on implementation of the zero emission landscaping equipment ordinance

Recommendation

The purpose of this informational item is to provide an update on the implementation of the zero emission landscaping equipment ordinance.

Policy Issues

Menlo Park regulates gasoline powered gardening equipment through Municipal Code Chapter 8.05 “Gas Powered Landscape Equipment” and Chapter 8.06 “Noise”. Under Chapter 8.05:

- A. Effective July 1, 2024, it shall be unlawful for any person to operate or authorize the operation of, permit, or direct another who engages in the operation of any gasoline powered leaf blower and string trimmer within the city limits.
- B. Effective Jan. 1, 2029, it shall be unlawful for any person to operate or authorize the operation of, permit, or direct another who engages in the operation of any gasoline powered lawnmower, hedge trimmer and chainsaws.

These local restrictions align with California state policy. Effective Jan. 1, 2024, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) banned the sale of gasoline powered small off-road engines, including gardening equipment, throughout California. These regulations support Menlo Park’s 2030 Climate Action Plan goal of carbon neutrality by eliminating fossil fuel use in landscaping equipment, which contributes to climate change and negatively impacts air quality and community health.

Background

In September 2021, the Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) advised the City Council to prohibit the use of gasoline powered leaf blowers and as a result, the City Council directed staff to develop a policy. A proposed policy was presented at a City Council study session Oct. 18, 2022, with recommended rules to prohibit the use of five types of gasoline powered gardening equipment (leaf blowers, string trimmers, lawnmowers, hedge trimmers and chain saws) due to their negative impacts on the environment and human health. The City Council directed staff to continue outreach and education with gardeners and landscapers about the proposed rules and prepare a draft ordinance for final adoption by the City Council in 2023. The EQC discussed the final proposed rules at their April 27, 2023, meeting (Attachment A). The EQC advised the City Council to adopt the proposed rules and consider a local incentive program to purchase electric landscaping equipment.

On June 13, the City Council approved introducing the proposed rules (Attachment B). On June 27, a reintroduction of the proposed rules was required to resolve potential conflicts with the City’s noise ordinance (Attachment C). As a result of the June 2023 meetings, the City Council directed staff to

implement the following activities once the rules are adopted:

1. Begin outreach with the community and professional gardeners immediately using existing outreach material and community communication platforms, providing one year to transition.
2. Consider an electric gardening equipment rebate program.
3. Provide an annual progress report to the EQC for two years starting in 2025.

On July 11, 2023, the City Council adopted the ordinance adding Chapter 8.05 to the Menlo Park Municipal Code that prohibits the use of gasoline powered leaf blowers and string trimmers in Menlo Park effective July 1, 2024, and gasoline powered lawnmowers, hedge trimmers and chain saws effective January 1, 2029 (Attachment D). The ordinance requires the use of zero emission landscaping equipment (manual, electric, or battery-powered), applies to all properties within the City (residential, commercial and City-owned) and holds property owners responsible for ensuring compliance, whether using their own equipment or contracting landscapers. Violations may result in enforcement actions, including monetary fines. At the same July 11, 2023 meeting, the City Council approved an electric gardening equipment rebate program and directed staff to conduct public outreach (Attachment E). During outreach, the proposed ordinance became known as the zero emission landscaping equipment (ZELE) ordinance for educational purposes.

Between the ZELE ordinance adoption and July 1, 2024, the public works department proactively converted its entire landscaping equipment fleet to electric power and has worked with its contractors to ensure compliance. The department now maintains an all-electric inventory consisting of 12 leaf blowers, nine hedge and string trimmers, four chainsaws, two soil cultivators and one reel mower. This transition serves as a model for ZELE ordinance compliance.

On March 19, staff presented a ZELE ordinance update to the EQC (Attachment F). During the discussion, the EQC emphasized the importance of ongoing community engagement and outreach to both residents and landscaping professionals. As one strategy, the EQC discussed that staff could identify landscapers and residents at addresses with multiple recorded violations and offer them vouchers using the limited remaining program funds.

Analysis

After 10 months of implementing the ZELE ordinance, City staff have focused on education and outreach, voucher distribution, establishing violation reporting procedures, making contact with violators and developing enforcement protocols.

Outreach and education

Since the adoption of the ZELE ordinance in July 2023, the City has implemented a broad outreach and education campaign to inform the community and encourage the transition to zero emission landscaping equipment. Efforts can be tracked in Attachment G and highlights include:

- Updated ZELE webpage (Attachment H).
- Mailed letter to all gardening businesses that hold a Menlo Park business license.
- Provided ZELE ordinance information in the quarterly Recology billing insert and customer billing statement messages starting in September 2023.
- Hosted information table and public works staff displayed zero emission landscaping equipment at the Love Our Earth Festival April 13, 2024.
- Distributed bilingual citywide postcard June 2024 (Attachment I).
- Placed electronic message boards in neighborhoods with high volume of reports December 2024.
- Displayed bilingual banners in downtown Menlo Park and the Belle Haven neighborhood January 2025.
- Distributed second citywide mailing of an updated bilingual postcard in April 2025 (Attachment J).

Voucher program

In alignment with City Council direction, the City partnered with Acterra, a local community-based organization, to implement a voucher program designed to assist eligible residents and landscaping businesses with the purchase of electric gardening equipment. The program was structured to eliminate out-of-pocket costs for participants, making the transition to zero emission equipment more accessible. Applications were submitted through an online portal, with bilingual phone assistance available to ensure access to all.

To complement the City’s outreach efforts, Acterra conducted additional promotion through community events, the Menlo Park Farmers Market, social media, email campaigns and flyer distribution. Participants in the program were able to redeem their vouchers at one of three participating retail locations, where trained store personnel offered in-person education and assistance to ensure customers selected appropriate electric equipment that met their landscaping or business needs. This hands-on support was especially valuable in guiding first-time users and small businesses unfamiliar with electric equipment. City Council allocated \$35,000 for the ZELE voucher program in fiscal year 2023-24. An additional \$35,000 was allocated in fiscal year 2024-2025. \$41,000 was provided for vouchers which were distributed in two phases. \$29,000 was used for Acterra’s staff administration, community outreach and marketing, engagement with local businesses that sell landscaping equipment and an online customer portal. Phase 1 launched in April 2024 and funds were fully expended by June 2024, creating a waitlist. A second phase of vouchers was launched in September 2024. Details on voucher audience and maximum voucher amounts for each participant category are provided in the table below.

Category	Amount
Professional gardeners working in Menlo Park	Up to \$1,000
Menlo Park non-gardening businesses	Up to \$250
Qualifying Menlo Park residents	Up to \$250

Qualifying residents were eligible for the rebate if they met at least one of the following criteria:

1. Enrolled in government or utility financial assistance program, such as but not limited to the following: CALWorks, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), PG&E Care Program, Menlo Park utility rate assistance program.
2. Located in a Menlo Park neighborhood that is disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution with a score above 60 according to California Office of the Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (CalEnviroScreen 4.0 map).
3. Residents over the age of 65.

To date, 100 vouchers have been issued and redeemed. Distribution details are outlined in the following table.

Voucher	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Professional gardeners	10	11	21
Non-gardening businesses	2	2	4
Menlo Park residents	38	37	75
TOTAL	50	48	100

The breakdown for the 75 vouchers issued to residents based on the eligibility criteria is as follows:

- Six vouchers were issued to residents enrolled in an income assistance program.
- Eighteen (18) vouchers were issued to residents based on geographic location.
- Fifty (50) vouchers were issued to residents who were age eligible.

Approximately \$5,000 remains available for vouchers in the second phase of the program. As the EQC suggested, staff are focusing outreach efforts on households with multiple violations. In early May, Police Department staff personally delivered voucher program flyers to nine frequently reported addresses and contacted four additional households via phone, email, or mail.

Education and enforcement

Enforcement of the ZELE ordinance began as an educational approach in July 2024 with a focus on informing rather than penalizing. Staff are responsive to reports made through multiple channels, including police dispatch, the ACT Menlo Park online portal, phone calls to the sustainability division and email. All reported addresses receive a violation notice letter from a Menlo Park code enforcement volunteer informing them of the ZELE ordinance and encouraging compliance. For addresses with multiple reports, a police department representative follows up with a phone call to provide additional education and request voluntary compliance.

To date, the City has received a total of 763 community ZELE ordinance violation reports. Of these, 200 were submitted through police dispatch and 535 were reported online through ACT Menlo Park. While the number of reports appeared to be gradually declining in early 2025, there was a noticeable increase in activity during April. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the 763 community reports received since enforcement of the ZELE ordinance began in July 2024.

Table 3: ZELE violation reports July 2024 to April 2025	
Month	Number of reports
July	19
August	61
September	80
October	104
November	81
December	108
January	92
February	66
March	65
April	87
TOTAL	763

Staff are preparing to transition from educational enforcement to active citation issuance beginning July 1, in accordance with Municipal Code Chapter 8.05.40, which outlines fines ranging from \$50 for a first violation up to \$500 for repeated offenses related to the use of gasoline powered landscaping equipment. Staff are also exploring additional outreach strategies to increase awareness, including the distribution of door hangers at properties with repeat violations and targeted code enforcement visits. In June 2025, a coordinated enforcement detail is planned in collaboration with sustainability staff to canvas neighborhoods and engage directly with landscapers and gardeners observed using gasoline powered equipment in real time. These efforts aim to support continued education while preparing the community for the upcoming enforcement phase.

Impact on City Resources

It is expected that \$5,000 in remaining funds will be expended by June 30 through additional voucher distributions. Department budgets will cover staff time dedicated to supporting educational enforcement efforts and upcoming citation issuance.

Environmental Review

This action is not a project within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §§15378 and 15061(b)(3) as it will not result in any direct or indirect physical change in the environment.

Public Notice

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with the agenda items being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Attachments

- A. Hyperlink – April 27, 2023, Staff Report #23-002-EQC:
menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/agendas-and-minutes/environmental-quality-commission/2023-meetings/agendas/20230427-environmental-quality-commission-special-meeting-agenda-packet.pdf#page=6
- B. Hyperlink – June 13, 2023, Staff Report #23-134-CC:
menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/7/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2023-meetings/agendas/20230613-city-council-regular-agenda-packet_w-presentations.pdf#page=163
- C. Hyperlink – June 27, 2023, Staff Report #23-153-CC:
menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/3/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2023-meetings/agendas/20230627-city-council-regular-agenda-packet.pdf#page=428
- D. Hyperlink – July 11, 2023, Staff Report #23-158-CC:
menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/6/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2023-meetings/agendas/20230711city-council-regular-agenda-packet_w-presv2.pdf#page=138
- E. Hyperlink – July 11, 2023, Staff Report #23-169-CC:
menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/6/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2023-meetings/agendas/20230711city-council-regular-agenda-packet_w-presv2.pdf#page=145
- F. Hyperlink – March 19 ZELE ordinance and voucher program update:
menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/agendas-and-minutes/environmental-quality-commission/2025-meetings/agendas/20250319-environment-quality-commission-regular-meeting-agenda.pdf#page=6
- G. ZELE ordinance outreach
- H. Hyperlink – ZELE Webpage: menlopark.gov/zele
- I. ZELE postcard
- J. ZELE postcard No. 2

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Zero Emission Landscaping Equipment (ZELE) Ordinance Outreach Activities

Table 1 is a record of the outreach activities that City sustainability and code enforcement staff completed to date to encourage community compliance of the ZELE ordinance. Sustainability staff have focused on building broad community awareness of the ZELE ordinance, while code enforcement staff and their volunteer have focused on communication with violators and direct outreach in high-violation areas.

Table 1: Outreach activities		
Date	Activity	Method
7/21/2023	Sent bilingual email and text to ZELE project and topic subscription lists to notify of ordinance adoption	Email and text
7/24/2023	Announced ordinance adoption in Weekly Digest	Published article on website
7/25/2023	Sent bilingual letters to gardeners and landscapers notifying of ordinance adoption	Mailing
9/1/2023	Advertised in Recology member agency billing message informing of new ordinance	Mailing
12/1/2024	Advertised in Recology member agency billing message informing of new ordinance	Mailing
4/8/2024	Announced voucher program launch in Weekly Digest	Published article on website
4/8/2024	Promoted voucher program launch on City social media platforms	Social media
4/8/2024	Promoted voucher program launch on Acterra social media platforms	Social media
4/9/2024	Sent bilingual email and text to ZELE project and topic subscription lists to announce voucher program launch	Email and text
4/11/2024	Promoted voucher program launch with second post on City social media platforms	Social media
4/12/2024	Promoted voucher program launch with second post on Acterra social media platforms	Social media
4/14/2024	Hosted information table at the Love Our Earth Festival	In-person tabling
4/18/2024	Promoted voucher program launch with third post on City social media platforms	Social media
4/24/2024	Promoted voucher program launch with third post on Acterra social media platforms	Social media
6/3/2024	Announced ordinance beginning July 1 in Weekly Digest	Published article on website
6/3/2024	Announced ordinance beginning July 1 on ZELE webpage	Webpage update
6/5/2024	Ordinance featured in Almanac article	Earned Media

6/10/2024	Published sustainability news item announcing ZELE ordinance beginning July 1	Published article on website
6/14/2024	Announced ZELE ordinance beginning July 1 on social media	Social media
6/15/2024	Hosted information table at City's Juneteenth event	In-person tabling
6/18/2024	Shared program materials with San Mateo County Green Business program to reach Menlo Park businesses in their network	Bilingual flyers
6/24/2024	Mailed bilingual city-wide postcard to all Menlo Park addresses	Mailing
7/1/2024	Posted bilingual flyers at the Belle Haven Community Campus (BHCC) library and reception, Menlo Park library, and City Hall reception.	Flyers
7/1/2024	Advertised in Recology member agency billing message informing of new ordinance	Mailing
8/6/2024	Hosted information table at National Night Out at BHCC	In-person tabling
9/6/2024	Shared bilingual program materials with 350 Silicon Valley's Menlo Park Climate Team for distribution at their outreach events	Flyers
9/16/2024	Sent bilingual email and text to ZELE project and topic subscription lists to announce voucher program launch for phase 2	Email and text
10/10/2024	Hosted information table at Clean Air Day event at TIDE Academy	In-person tabling
11/17/2024	Hosted information table at Wetlands and Watts event at Cooley Landing Education Center	In-person tabling
11/18/2024	Code enforcement staff placed electronic message boards in neighborhoods with multiple violation reports	Street signs
12/3/2024	Code enforcement volunteer mailed bilingual letters to all property management and landscaping companies with a Menlo Park business license	Mailing
2/10/2025	Displayed bilingual banners in downtown Menlo Park and Belle Haven neighborhood	Banner
4/25/2025	Mailed bilingual city-wide postcard to all Menlo Park addresses	Mailing
4/26/2025	Hosted information table at the Love Our Earth Festival	In-person tabling
5/18/2025	Police Department staff personally delivered voucher program flyers to nine frequently reported addresses and contacted four additional households via phone, email, or mail.	Direct contact

GAS LEAF BLOWERS AND TRIMMERS PROHIBITED JULY 1

SOPLADORES DE HOJAS Y CORTADORES DE GAS PROHIBIDOS EL 1 DE JULIO



Starting July 1, 2024, the use of gas leaf blowers and string trimmers is prohibited in the City of Menlo Park. Property owners will be responsible for violations and violators could be subject to enforcement actions up to and including monetary fines.

This ordinance was passed by City Council on July 11, 2023 as part of the City's Climate Action plan.

Eligible residents, landscaping professionals, and businesses may receive a voucher to support the purchase of zero emission landscaping equipment.

Learn more about the new rules and voucher program on our website menlopark.gov/zele, email sustainability@menlopark.gov or call 650-330-6720

A partir del 1 de julio de 2024, el uso de sopladores de hojas y cortadoras de hilo a gas están prohibido en la ciudad de Menlo Park. Los propietarios serán responsables de las infracciones y los infractores podrían estar sujetos a acciones de cumplimiento que pueden llegar hasta multas monetarias.

Esta ordenanza fue aprobada por el Concejo Municipal el 11 de julio de 2023 como parte del plan de Acción Climática de la Ciudad.

Residentes de Menlo Park, profesionales y negocios de jardinería pueden ser elegible para un reembolso para ayudar con la compra de equipos de jardinería con cero emisiones.

Obtenga más información sobre las nuevas reglas y el programa de reembolsos en nuestro sitio web menlopark.gov/zele, email sustainability@menlopark.gov o llame 650-330-6720.



City of Menlo Park
701 Laurel St.
Menlo Park CA 94025

IMPORTANTE NOTICE
AVISO IMPORTANTE



ELECTRIC GARDEN TOOLS ARE REQUIRED IN MENLO PARK

Gas leaf blowers and string trimmers are banned.
Learn more at menlopark.gov/ZELE.

SE REQUIEREN HERRAMIENTAS DE JARDÍN ELÉCTRICAS EN MENLO PARK

Sopladoras de hojas y cortadoras de hilo a gasolina están prohibidas.
Obtenga más información en menlopark.gov/ZELE.



Property owners are liable for violations and may incur monetary penalties.

Los propietarios serán responsables por infracciones y podrán incurrir en multas monetarias.



menlopark.gov/ZELE