

City of Salem, Massachusetts



**"Know Your Rights Under the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. c. 30A ss. 18-25 and
City Ordinance Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033."**

The City Council Committee on Public Health, Safety and Environment co-posted with the Committee of the Whole

met in the Council Chamber on August 6, 2026 at 6:00 P.M.

for the purpose of discussing the matters(s) listed below. Notice of this meeting was posted on

June 24, 2026 at 10:08 AM

(This meeting is being recorded)

ATTENDANCE

PHSE – Hapworth (chair), Davis, Flynn, Smith and Holappa. **COW** –King and Sydoriak. **From the city** – Deputy Schaeublin, Fire Department.

ABSENT WERE – **COW** - Merkl, Prosniewski, Turowski, and Varela.

#64 Ordinance Amendment relative to Gas Powered Leaf Blowers

Hapworth noted that the council has letters from Ray Jodoin, Director of DPS and Alan Dionne, Fire Chief.

Davis reviewed the reasoning for the ordinance. The ordinance was brought forward primarily as an environmental and public health issue. Gas-powered leaf blowers produce significant carbon dioxide and other pollutants, creating concerns both for the environment and for the health of the people operating the equipment. The ordinance also seeks to address the noise impacts, which have generated regular complaints from residents.

Davis noted that the council had previously held a productive discussion on the issue in the prior meeting, with useful feedback from councilors, residents, and department heads helping to shape the ordinance and the red-line changes under consideration.

Davis summarized the red-line changes to the gas-powered leaf blower ordinance.

Red-line changes

- Corrected a drafting error. Removed typo reference to "2432" that had been copied from another municipality's ordinance.
- Expanded the definition of covered equipment. The definition of gas-powered leaf blowers was clarified to include portable handheld, wheeled, and backpack-style devices, and to make clear that the list is not exclusive.
- Removed the blanket government exemption. The red line removed language excluding municipal and other government entities from the definition of commercial operators. This change was intended to ensure that the city would be subject to the ordinance rather than being automatically exempt.
- Changed the prohibition to a year-round ban. Rather than restricting gas-powered leaf blowers only during the summer, the red lines established a full-year prohibition. This was intended to avoid requiring residents, commercial operators or the city to maintain two different types of equipment and to address the environmental impacts year-round.

- Narrowed emergency exemptions. The broad citywide exemption was removed. The discussion moved toward allowing the Salem Fire Department to issue temporary exemptions when gas-powered equipment is needed for emergencies, major storms, or public safety.
- Clarified who can authorize exemptions. The original reference to the health agent or building commissioner was removed, with the discussion favoring the city through the mayor/fire department, rather than prescribing specific officials in the ordinance.
- Originally pushed the compliance dates for each entity by one year to 2027 for residents, 2029 for commercial and 2031 for the city but after discussion, the dates were consolidated. The proposed dates were consolidated for residents, commercial and the city, to give everyone the same time to transition to electric equipment. Therefore, the outreach and education can be for all at the same time. During the discussion, the council ultimately settled on 2030 as the common compliance date, rather than staggered dates. A motion to move the date to 2029 failed.
- Added retailers to the outreach requirement. The ordinance was revised to require outreach not only to commercial landscapers, large property owners, and property managers, but also to retailers selling leaf blowers.
- Made outreach more specific. The discussion further refined the outreach provision to identify the Sustainability and Building Departments as those that would inform the public and to include commercial landscaping companies within a 10-mile radius of Salem.
- Removed the redundant effective-date provision. The separate effective-date language was crossed out because the compliance dates would now be specified directly in the ordinance.

The red lines strengthened and clarified the ban, particularly by making it year-round and removing broad exemptions, while also giving affected parties more time to comply. The major compromise was to address public-safety needs through a targeted fire-department exemption rather than a blanket exemption for the city. The changes also added a stronger public education/outreach component, including retailers and nearby landscaping companies.

As far as emergency exemption, Deputy Schaeublin of the Salem Fire Department explained that gas-powered leaf blowers are an important tool for wildland firefighting, particularly for clearing dry vegetation and other ground fuel during brush fires. He said battery-powered blowers would be impractical because firefighters would need to frequently change and recharge batteries, especially when working long distances into wooded areas.

Schaeublin noted that Salem has experienced major brush fires in recent years, including fires that extended more than one to two miles into wooded areas. Although these incidents are relatively infrequent, he recalled only two major incidents during his 34 years with the department, he said increasingly dry conditions make them a greater potential risk. He emphasized that Salem Fire and mutual-aid departments, including forestry crews and other fire departments, need to be able to use gas-powered blowers to effectively remove fuel and control wildland fires.

Vote on the individual changes

Remove the erroneous “2432” reference. No separate vote was taken. It was accepted as a typo.

Remove the exemption for municipal/government entities and contractors. No separate vote was taken. The change remained in the red-line version.

Expand the definition to include wheeled blowers and clarify that the list is not exclusive. No separate vote was taken. The change was accepted during the section-by-section review.

Make the prohibition year-round. No separate vote was taken. The change remained part of the amended ordinance.

A motion by Holappa to change the compliance date from 2030 to 2029 failed by vote of 1–4. Holappa voted Yes; Davis, Smith, Flynn, and Hapworth voted No. The committee settled on 2030 as the common date for compliance.

Add retailers to the outreach requirement. No separate vote was taken. The change was incorporated into the final version.

Specify the Sustainability and Building Departments for outreach. No separate vote was taken. The change was incorporated into the final version.

Include commercial landscaping companies within a 10-mile radius. No separate vote was taken. The change was incorporated into the final version.

After the changes had been discussed, amended and incorporated, Holappa motioned to send the gas-powered leaf blower ordinance, as amended, to the full City Council with a positive recommendation and seconded by Davis.

Roll call vote: 3–2, in favor

- Yes: Councillor Holappa
- Yes: Councillor Davis
- Yes: Councillor Smith
- No: Councillor Flynn
- No: Chair Hapworth

The motion carried.

On the motion of C. Flynn the meeting adjourned at 7:20 P.M.



(Chairperson)