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Dear Mayor Veron and Trustees:

This letter is in support of the longstanding proposal to have Scarsdale join other Westchester communities in discontinuing loose-leaf vacuuming during “leaf season.”

As of May 2014, only 35% of the population in Southern Westchester lived in communities that vacuumed piles of loose leaves. Unfortunately, Scarsdale was – and still remains – among the towns still providing this costly and environmentally destructive practice that also endangers the physical safety and health of pedestrians, cyclists and drivers.

Many of our neighboring towns do not provide leaf vacuuming, among them Greenburgh (Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Elmsford, Hastings-on-Hudson, Irvington and Tarrytown), Unincorporated Greenburgh (Edgemont, Fairview and Hartsdale), New Rochelle, and Yonkers. As a result, it is safe to say that virtually any landscape company working in Southern Westchester already has all of the necessary equipment and experience to do in-place mulch mowing, or if that is not feasible, leaf bagging. In other words, the excuse that it is costly for the companies to comply with such a requirement cannot be justified in the face of so many other nearby towns no longer offering leaf vacuuming.

There are many reasons to stop leaf vacuuming, among them the following:

- 1) Landscapers typically use gas-powered leaf blowers to gather the leaves at curbside. The Scarsdale Forum recently released a well documented and highly detailed report about the extensive dangers caused by gas-powered leaf blowers<sup>1</sup>; these issues will not be repeated here.
- 2) The accumulation of leaves at curbside doesn't stay at curbside. The leaves spill out into the street, where they can remain for up to 20 business days.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles are forced to steer around the leaf piles by going into the road (a typical scene is shown in the photo below<sup>3</sup>). This creates obvious safety issues for everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> Scarsdale Forum Inc. Report of the Sustainability, Municipal Services, and Climate Resilience Committees on Gas Leaf Blowers, Leaf Vacuuming, and Leaf Mulching in the Village of Scarsdale  
<https://www.scarsdaleforum.com/Reports/download/1091> (April 22, 2021) (“Forum Leaf Report”)

<sup>2</sup> Village of Scarsdale Press Release October 19, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Forum Leaf Report, p. 1.



- 3) The leaves often come from yards that are treated with pesticides, herbicides and other toxic chemicals. Sitting in wet piles, they can become breeding grounds for fungi and mold.<sup>4</sup> These substances are easily absorbed in our lungs as we pass the leaf piles, potentially causing adverse health effects.
- 4) Once at curbside, the leaf piles become dumping grounds. They look like litter and are treated as such, causing people to leave trash such as wrappers, drink containers and the like in the leaf piles. Worse yet, dogs urinate and defecate in the leaves, which then swirl around when the wind blows.
- 5) The leaf piles create an “attractive nuisance,” especially for young children who like to wade through the leaves – which, as noted above, contain toxic substances, dog feces, and trash.
- 6) The leaf piles become wet and soggy when it rains or snows. Wet leaves are slippery, creating the risk of people, bicycles or vehicles skidding, sliding or falling.
- 7) Leaves piled at curbside clog drainage areas and sewers. Standing water accumulates in some areas due to drainage backups. The clogged drains and drainage ditches then need to be manually cleared out, diverting Village DPW personnel from other tasks.
- 8) The noise is deafening. I don’t know the specific decibel level generated by the leaf vacuuming trucks. However, when we are out taking an early morning walk, we can hear the truck from blocks away, and try to avoid the neighborhood where the truck is operating. With more people working from home, the leaf vacuuming trucks create a noisy distraction that can last for some time, depending on the number of stops the trucks make in a neighborhood.

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<sup>4</sup> Forum Leaf Report, p. 36.

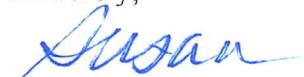
9) The practice of leaf vacuuming is expensive, costing over \$600,000 per year.<sup>5</sup> This money continues to be spent in times of austerity, while other helpful and necessary expenses are bypassed.

10) The leaves that are vacuumed need to be disposed of by carting them to a distant location in Goshen, New York, at considerable expense and environmental cost as well.

With all of these negatives, why does the Village of Scarsdale persist in this noxious, environmentally unsound, physically dangerous and expensive practice? There are two reasons that seem to be repeated – neither of which can be justified in the face of the many dangers posed by the practice. First, some residents say that this is a “service” to which they are entitled. Second, some landscapers object that eliminating the practice would pose a financial hardship. As to the first reason, this is really a question of economics. Those of us who engage in sustainable lawn care practices do not wish to promote or pay for destructive and dangerous leaf vacuuming practices for the ten reasons summarized above.<sup>6</sup> As for the second reason, as noted above, most landscapers already own the equipment and engage in other practices such as mulch mowing in nearby towns.

So let’s not delay the transition to sustainable practices in leaf collection. These include more active promotion of mulch mowing, and finding ways to incentivize homeowners to switch to this practice but with the alternative of picking up bagged leaves. Scarsdale is in the forefront of so much that we value – let’s “leave the leaves” and stop the vacuuming.

Sincerely,



Susan Douglass

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<sup>5</sup> The budgeted amount for leaf vacuuming in 2021-2022 is \$684,351 (Forum Leaf Report, p. 37).

<sup>6</sup> This is far different from the spurious argument raised by some that not wanting to pay for leaf vacuuming is comparable to saying that empty nesters don’t want to pay for schools. Unlike leaf vacuuming, providing excellent schools is a positive value that everyone espouses.