

Feb 16, 2022

Dear Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and Scarsdale Board of Trustees,

The Village capitulating on a loose leaf pile pick up and gas blower ban, based on anecdotal input from homeowners who may not yet have tried mulching themselves, and may not understand that it takes only a simple and inexpensive blade change on the lawnmower, is ill-conceived.

I respect that the Village of course wants to "involve and listen to the community," and I understand there are some community members who are not in favor of converting to more sustainable landscape practices. Some local residents may not understand the "why" and "how" of sustainable lawn care, others may simply not want it out of concern for a negative personal financial impact of maintaining a manicured lawn "status quo" aesthetic on their properties. Ironically we all know, as is well documented *even on our own Village website*, per official professional testimony and in existing archived demonstrations that include our own *local landscapers, mulching is not only feasible but saves landscapers time and money* - in comparison to blowing - *and produces a beautiful and healthy lawn and garden* (see <https://www.scarsdale.com/427/Leaf-Mulching-Video>).

I understand and respect the Village decision last spring to speak with the community, because, as a physician, I *also* listen to people. I listen to sick hospitalized patients and their family members who have not been COVID vaccinated. They ask to be "treated" with ivermectin while the patient remains on a ventilator as their lungs are turning into a tissue that has more of the compliance of cement than a normal lung. Similarly, these patients initially refuse scientifically based best practices and treatments for COVID and its complications, like remdesivir. They have even refused standard treatments like blood transfusions when anemia complicates the COVID aftermath. They believe remdesivir will cause kidney failure or that blood administered from persons who have previously received the COVID vaccine will harm them. They have grown these beliefs from local echo chambers of misinformation and disinformation, all flying in the face of scientific fact.

I hadn't realized how deeply penetrated and pervasive the parallel local echo chamber of misinformation was in Scarsdale regarding sustainable lawn care practices! I imagine there are some vocal residents who don't understand the significant quality and quantity of life and health, public safety, and social and environmental justice issues which are all deeply attached to the Village policies and practices regarding landscape management. I imagine our local residents, like many of my unvaccinated COVID patients, are not aware of, or perhaps just don't believe, the science? This is the science that demonstrates in the state of California, as per the California Air Resources Board (CARB) for example, that lawn equipment emissions currently create more ozone-contributing pollutants than do cars.

Perhaps, not understanding the benefits, community members fear for the safety and health of their own lawns and gardens, and therefore push for the Scarsdale status quo which is gas

powered leaf blowing and then vacuuming loose leaves? The science on the benefits of mulching is robust and comprehensive, demonstrating how rich a resource the leaves are in promoting a healthy topsoil with a complete microbiome and even a local habitat for much needed species that we need to keep ourselves and our planet healthy. I for one greatly appreciate skepticism, but given the robustness of the science, and the magnitude of what is at stake, I would argue that this is an ethical issue that only the Village can adequately address through a change in practice and policy.

While the principle of autonomy is integral in ethics, justice, and beneficence, above all avoidance of maleficence - otherwise known as preventing the commission of harm - is just as critical. Therefore, I CANNOT give ivermectin to patients with COVID nor CAN I ethically arrange for and have the public support - through their insurance premiums and tax dollars - treatments that are not scientifically shown to be helpful, or even potentially harmful. It's unethical, even when the individual patient is asking for it. Similarly, **it is unsound and unethical to continue to ask Village residents to fund the highly detrimental Village practice and policy of leaf vacuuming and promotion of gas blowing over mulching which negatively affects us all, especially the disadvantaged members of our community, simply because some residents and local landscapers are asking for continuation of these harmful practices.**

And to salt the wounds, all Scarsdale residents are paying for this with their tax dollars. I feel strongly that our Village officials need to base our landscape policies and code *on actual science and ethical principles that support environmental and social justice within our community*. PLEASE, let's start with the low hanging fruit - eliminate 2 stroke engine gas blowers and loose leaf pile collection.

Luckily our Village has already made some progress in the gas blower ban, and of course we have the benefit of the models from our many surrounding municipalities' transition to banning gas blowers and eliminating loose leaf pile collections. Scarsdale already provides organic yard waste containerized pick up all 12 months of the year, and with an expansion of our compacting truck fleet with two new garbage trucks it's a mathematical financial win. It's irrational to be collecting noncompacted leaves and then carting them to Goshen NY, paying the county in the process. The costs and the waste involved are mind boggling. **New Rochelle**, which converted to containerized pickup many years ago and encourages residents to mulch in place through the "Love 'em and Leave 'em" campaign is **now converting to an all-electric battery-powered landscaping program**. The City will transition all municipal operations to electric equipment, as well as provide outreach, training, equipment demos and financial incentives to residents and local landscapers, enabling them to work collaboratively with the industry and position small local landscapers' transition away from gas-powered equipment. Once their own composting/recycling facility on Beechwood Avenue is complete, leaves will be composted there.

Let's follow suit. It's been a long campaign here in Scarsdale, starting with the 2011 Village resolution on mulching, which we have continually promoted each fall, but which has not gotten the complete traction we need. We have existing "can do" panels and an actual video

demonstration of mulching in Chase park (as above) on our village website and other compelling materials (e.g. see <https://www.leaveleavesalone.org/home-for-professionals/>). The CAC and the Scarsdale Forum have produced multiple reports outlining not only the feasibility, but also the financial and environmental, quality of life, and direct health impacts and improvements inherent in eliminating gas blowers and leaf vacuuming. It's notable that, at one of the last Village Board Working Sessions he attended in May 2021 before retiring, then Village Manager Steve Pappalardo endorsed the realized truth seen in other communities that discontinuation of "curbside" loose leaf collection translates into less blowing and more mulching, compounding the win-win into a win-win-win. It's time for Scarsdale to act on the promise of this long running campaign, and "just do it."

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