

Scarsdale Leaf Education Task Force
Review of 2015 Education Campaign and Proposal for 2016
March 6th, 2016

The Leaf Education Task Force was established by the Village Board in the fall of 2014 and has recently completed its second year of community education. Its educational focus has been on giving residents strategies for handling leaves on their properties. The following report provides a review of Task Force activities completed throughout 2015 and a proposal for the continuation of community leaf education in 2016.

Review of the 2015 Education Campaign

The Task Force, under the leadership of Anne Jaffe-Holmes of the Greenburgh Nature Center and community volunteers, developed a diverse and in-depth education campaign to provide Scarsdale residents with information about leaf mulch mowing. We held informational events, live demonstrations, distributed mailings to residents, worked with Village Staff in the Parks, Recreation and Conservation and Public Works departments and coordinated with outside organizations such as the Cornell Cooperative Extension. The following is a detailed listing of work completed throughout 2015:

Events

- **Mulch Mowing Demonstrations:** Two mulch mowing demonstrations were held at the Weinberg Nature Center and Temple Shaarei Tikvah. Each demonstration included an overview of leaf mulch mowing by Ms. Jaffe-Holmes, a demonstration by a professional landscaper with a commercial mower and a demonstration with a residential homeowner mower.
- **Education Panel with Cornell Cooperative Extension and Local Landscapers:** An education panel event was held to help residents learn about mulch mowing and how it works from representations of the Cornell Cooperative Extension as well as two local landscapers. Questions posed to panelists represented common questions residents had been asking as well as an open Q&A at the event.
- **Benefits of Mulch Mowing Presentation by Chip Osborne:** Mr. Osborne, a national organic turf management consultant and consultant to Scarsdale's PRC department, gave a comprehensive lecture at the Scarsdale Library. His presentation covered the environmental benefits of mulch mowing and the science behind organic turf and soil management. The presentation also included a report on the positive empirical results measured in the soil at Chase Park as a result of mulch mowing.

Information and Outreach

- **Mulch Mowing Tutorial Video:** An educational how-to video was produced providing an overview of mulch mowing, the proper technique and what a lawn looks like once leaves have been mulch mowed. The video covers techniques using both commercial and residential mowers. The video was produced in conjunction with Scarsdale Public TV and can be found on scarsdalepublictv.com.

- **Sanitation truck magnets:** Large magnets promoting mulch mowing were created and placed on Village sanitation trucks.
- **Homeowner lawn signs:** Small lawn signs were created for homeowners to place on their properties to identify that they or their landscapers employ mulch mowing.
- **Grasscycling Educational Mailer:** A one-page letter providing an overview of grasscycling and its environmental benefits was sent in the November water bill. The Task Force addressed grasscycling because it provides similar benefits throughout the growing season, is also accomplished easily by mowing and can be an opportunity for a homeowner to try this practice as a companion technique to fall leaf mulch mowing.
- **House of Worship Outreach:** The Task Force contacted local houses of worship about the mulch mowing initiative, local events and how to learn more.
- **Village Hall Entrance Display:** A display was put up in the Village Hall display case to build awareness of mulch mowing and grasscycling.

Metrics

- **Mulch Mowing Map:** A map to track properties that are being mulch mowed was created and will be ready for launch in spring 2016. The map will provide practical information and allow residents to locate and view similar properties where mulch mowing is being practiced.
- **Leaf Volume Tracking (DPW):** In order to better track important metrics such as leaf collection volumes and yearly changes, the DPW has begun tracking leaf volumes separate from other yard waste. In past years all yard waste during the fall months was measured in the aggregate, limiting the ability to track changes in leaf collection volume from year to year. The tracking will help the Village determine the results, if any, of onsite leaf management.
- **Cornell Waste Management Institute, Soil Health Assessment Study:** Launched in 2014, Cornell is conducting a two-year study to measure the impact of leaf mulch mowing. Working in conjunction with the Task Force and the PRC, two Scarsdale properties are included in the study (Chase Park and a private residence in the Village Center).

Despite these numerous education campaign initiatives, the use of mulch mowing in all Village public properties (including recreation fields and parks), anecdotal accounts of homeowners switching to mulch mowing and the use of mulch mowing equipment by some landscapers, to date there does not appear to be a significant increase in the adoption of mulch mowing techniques and activity on residential properties. This assertion is based on preliminary metrics of fall yard waste from the DPW, which indicates that leaf volume handled by the Village in 2015 was in line with volume collected in 2014. Although leaf collection volumes are unchanged, we feel awareness of leaf mulch mowing has increased in our community as a result of the education initiatives undertaken to date.

Task Force Proposals for 2016

The Task Force proposes continuing community education and outreach in 2016 to continue building awareness of this initiative and to provide information to those interested in adopting

mulch mowing. Although the impact of education alone has been limited, continuing education and outreach might eventually increase residential mulch mowing and lower the volume of leaves collected. The areas of focus for this year's educational campaign will be (1) updating the Village website¹ with easy to use resources (2) outreach to Houses of Worship as well as local organizations and (3) other awareness building and educational actions that can be easily repeated from previous years such as the Village Hall display. We believe this is the most effective way to reach the largest number of residents and leverage the existing work completed over the previous two leaf collection seasons.

In addition to this educational campaign, the Task Force has considered drafting mulch mowing materials for use by the landscaper community for use in their own marketing. These materials would outline benefits of the mulch mowing approach, potentially including reduced costs, and would be provided in a format available for any landscaper to use. In this way, we are hoping to catalyze market forces, letting landscapers publicize mulch mowing as part of their business.

The Task Force does not recommend a continuation of live events such as demonstrations and panels since video replays are available for events held in 2014 and 2015. If the need arises during the fall 2016 season, appropriate live events can be developed at that time.

To support the continuing educational campaign, the Task Force also recommends that the Village Board should adopt a policy change to encourage grasscycling. The Village should discontinue the curbside pickup of grass clippings. Residents and landscapers could continue to bring grass clippings to the Secor facility as needed. This policy change would be an incremental step in promoting the onsite management of grass and leaves.

The Task Force believes the most significant, positive outcome for residential leaf handling and the environment would occur as the result of a policy change discontinuing curbside loose leaf pickup. However, in the absence of such a change in policy and procedure, education on alternatives to leaf collection should continue. Residents are becoming more aware of onsite leaf management options, landscapers are continuing to purchase mulch mowing equipment and other communities and municipalities continue to address this issue.

The Task Force would also like to thank Ms. Jaffe-Holmes of the Greenburgh Nature Center for her expertise, guidance and leadership throughout the 2014 and 2015 education campaign.

Scarsdale Leaf Education Task Force – Resident Volunteers
March 6th, 2016

¹ To be completed after the new Village website format is live.