CITY OF BOULDER, COLORADO
BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS
MEETING SUMMARY

NAME OF BOARD/COMMISSION: Environmental Advisory Board

DATE OF MEETING: March 1, 2023

NAME/TELEPHONE OF PERSON PREPARING SUMMARY:
Heather Sandine, 303-441-4390

NAMES OF MEMBERS, STAFF AND INVITED GUESTS:
Environmental Advisory Board Members Present: Michael SanClements, Brook Brockett, Amanda Groziak, Hernan Villanueva
Environmental Advisory Board Members Absent: None
City Staff Members Present: Carolyn Elam, Heather Sandine

1. **CALL TO ORDER**
   M. SanClements declared a quorum and called the meeting to order at **6:00 PM.**
   H. Sandine reviewed the meeting protocols.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
   On a motion by **M. SanClements**, seconded by **B. Brockett**, the Environmental Advisory Board (EAB) approved the February 1, 2023 meeting minutes.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
   - **Paul Culnan** shared his support for the board.
   - **Lynn Segal** spoke about her experience with a cold house. She would like to see LEAP participants have the option to participate in district energy ground source heat pumps. **C. Elam** provided information about programs in development.

4. **DISCUSSION ITEMS**
   A. **Environmental, Health & Equity Impacts of Landscaping Equipment**
      i. **Overview**
         - **C. Elam** provided an update on landscaping equipment and related impacts on the environment and health equity. She would like to hear from the board about what types of community engagement they would like to see.
         - Summary: project was launched in 2022 after hearing concerns from the community. There is a nexus with many of our city goals. American Green Zone Alliance has been hired to lead the study. Our landscaping service providers are diverse and outreach can be complex.
         - Steps taken with AGZA: City staff walked AGZA through the city's Racial Equity Instrument; AGZA interviewed service providers at Western Disposal's drop off location for yard and wood waste; shadowed providers to understand the needs of the customer, the environment and the landscapers; shadowed a provider who uses all electric equipment.

- One of the biggest concerns we hear from the community is about leaf blowers because they are two-stroke engines, create noise, dust and debris and have an environmental impact. Electric leaf blowers are equally invasive in terms of noise and dust. Additionally, by clearing fallen leaves from the landscape we are impacting pollinators and other invertebrates.

ii. Clarifying Questions and Discussion

- **B. Brockett** asked what the equity concerns are and what would the cost be to transition to electric landscaping equipment.
- **C. Elam** replied that there is not an electric version of the type of blowers used available. Providers would need multiple electric leaf blowers to provide the services at the same level as gas. The cost would be about $7,500 as opposed to $1,000 for gas equipment. Employees would have to take home batteries to charge and would be bearing the cost of recharging.
- **A. Groziak** referenced the packet section discussing noise complaints. She was concerned about the potential of police responding to noise complaints. She asked if there is discernable difference in the noise levels produced by gas vs electric to help enforcers determine the type of equipment used. She wanted to know how city staff would know if a piece of equipment is gas or electric if someone calls in a complaint.
- **C. Elam** said that the city has a noise ordinance that allows for certain decibel amounts with an exception for landscaping equipment. Council could remove that exception or allow the exception for electric only. The way the ordinance is written requires observation of the noise source.
- **H. Villanueva** asked what problem we are trying to solve and what are the proposed next steps given the cost of replacement.
- **C. Elam** responded that we need to educate the public on the negative impacts on the environment caused by traditional landscaping and how we can wholistically landscape. We would want to do that before considering a full ban on leaf blowers. We would possibly look for a seasonal allowance. Leaf blowers could be banned for all but two months of the year when the highest debris is present. It is best to leave the leaves and debris on the lawn and let them decompose or rake instead. We also don't want to cause any negative impacts on employees or employers within the landscaping industry.
- **H. Villanueva** was concerned about the impact neighboring yards left with leaf litter would have on his yard if leaves blew over to his. He said the issue of landscaping equipment seems to be a noise concern disguised as a health and environmental concern. He wanted to know if landscaping equipment poses a real problem or if people are making a noise concern into a bigger problem than it is.
- **C. Elam** responded that these are the kinds of concerns staff wants to hear. Commercial leaf blowers contribute about 10% of our front range ozone. They have a larger impact on the environment as discussed previously.
- **A. Groziak** asked if first raking then blowing would be an option.
- **C. Elam** responded that staff can investigate that option and asked how compliance would be quantified, reported and enforced.
- **H. Villanueva** was concerned that providers will find loopholes or run gas

generators to recharge their batteries.

- **B. Brockett** asked how much less effective a leaf blower is than the rake. It doesn't seem reasonable to maintain the use of leaf blowers on lawns. She worries that the outreach would not reach the people who would complain about the debris.
- **C. Elam** said you should expect some debris left on a lawn if using a rake. Leaf blowers wouldn't be practical to use on brick, rock or large areas. Homeowners associations carry large contracts and may hear complaints from homeowners if contractors aren't meeting their expectations. This could result in businesses losing customers if there is a perception that they aren't doing a thorough job. We need a slower, seasonal approach to counter this. For example, an approach could be by 2024 the city only allows leaf blower use in certain months and will engage in soft enforcement (warnings). Then by 2025 there could be limits to allow only electric equipment and have stronger enforcement for repeat offenders.
- **A. Groziak** asked if the city could invest in the development of a quieter leaf blower that is comparable to a gas one.
- **C. Elam** responded that this is an interesting idea that we haven't thought of. The city secured a grant from Boulder County to pilot a new incentive program to drive more electric adoption by paying a portion of the cost at the point of sale. Small businesses may not have the option to wait for rebates. We want to ensure we are providing good charging infrastructure by purchasing charging stations outright and providing them to small businesses. All of this would be paired with information for folks to voluntarily transition and would be backed with a robust education program.
- **M. SanClements** said he believes customers should bear the burden of some of the costs of providers switching to electric.
- **C. Elam** replied that we have few or no providers that only work in the city. If we, as a community, drive this incentive model there will be a larger impact throughout the area. She added that we are also thinking about who we are enforcing against. One option would be to enforce against the provider and the other would be against the person purchasing those services. Staff recommends enforcing against the person purchasing the services. Another consideration is who enforces it. We will look at case studies where noise enforcement has shifted from police enforcement to code enforcement.
- **C. Elam** provided a recap. She said she hears loud and clear the board shares the concerns for equity. She asked what else the board would like her to take to council. She will ensure this work is centered in the right outcomes and not only the noise concern.
- **B. Brockett** said she doesn't want to see noise issues blown out of proportion.
- **A. Groziak** would like to see the city fund development of a better leaf blower.
- **H. Villanueva** said this seems to be a situation where we need to wait for the market to adapt, which may be 5 – 10 years away. We don't currently have the right battery capacity. He is against banning gas lawn equipment until there are better equipment options available. He is very concerned about police enforcing bans. Many landscaping workers aren't documented and that's unfair to them to

put them in a situation where they are required to interact with the police.

- **M. SanClements** would like to see programs to encourage voluntarily transition to electric equipment rather than a forced change or ban. He added that the National Science Foundation has a program to help fund private sector innovation.

B. University Hill Trash Ordinance

- **A. Groziak** requested to add an agenda item about the University Hill trash ordinance. The board approved this addition. She shared an article about the ordinance.
- **C. Elam** said she was not an expert on the ordinance and would defer to other staff for information.
- **H. Sandine** offered to invite other staff involved to a future EAB meeting. She will reach out to Utilities, Code Enforcement, Encampment Cleanup and any others suggested. She will also share the council memo related to the ordinance with the board.
- **A. Groziak** said she is concerned that decisions with an environmental impact are being made without EAB input.

5. OLD BUSINESS/UPDATES

None

6. MATTERS FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY BOARD, CITY MANAGER AND CITY ATTORNEY DEBRIEF MEETING/CALENDAR CHECK

A. Recruitment update

7. DEBRIEF MEETING/CALENDAR CHECK

A. The next EAB meeting is scheduled for April 5 at 6 PM. Does EAB wish to reschedule to April 12 in light of April 5 being the first night of the Jewish holiday of Passover? The board agreed to the change.

B. The next EAB meeting is scheduled for **April 12 at 6 PM.**

8. ADJOURNMENT

The Environmental Advisory Board adjourned at **7:27 PM.**

Approved:

Chair 4/12/23 Date