TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Milton Dohoney Jr., City Administrator

CC: Derek Delacourt, Community Services Area Administrator
John Fournier, Deputy City Administrator
Nick Hutchinson, City Engineer
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Sue McCormick, Interim Public Services Area Administrator
Marti Praschan, CFO
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SUBJECT: September 3, 2024 Council Agenda Response Memo

DATE: August 29, 2024

C-1 - An Ordinance to Amend Chapter 75 (Leaf Blowers) of Title VI of the Code of the City of Ann Arbor

Question: Can staff provide detail on why an exception to our gas-powered leaf blower regulations is needed for controlled burns? I'd also appreciate information on anticipated technology advances to make this work possible with electric blowers. (Councilmember Akmon)

Response: To safely and efficiently conduct controlled burns within the park system's natural areas and within our community, Parks & Recreation Services and private contractors rely on leaf blowers. Controlled burns remain one of the most effective means to manage natural areas and combat invasive species. Leaf blowers are an integral tool for preparing a prescribed fire burn unit sized to match the site objectives to the capacity of the staff available. They are also an integral tool for responding to prescribed fire emergencies.

Parks & Recreation Services staff have thoroughly tested two electric leaf blower models that purport to be comparable in function to the gas-powered leaf blowers currently used in the City's controlled burns. Below are details on those field tests.

Field Test Summary

• The electric models would be incapable of achieving emergency response measures if a controlled burn were to "jump" and spread unexpectedly.
• The electric models were less powerful than the gas model. Due to this, staff estimated it took 2-3x longer to blow comparable breaks around the burn unit and interior hazards using the e-blower.
• The electric models were noticeably heavier than the gas model, which made performing the tasks more physically strenuous and would limit staff's ability to respond to emergencies with agility and speed.
• The electric model has three power settings. Staff found that they needed to use the higher settings for burn operations, resulting in only 90 minutes of battery life. This falls short of typical and efficient operational needs during controlled burns.

Staff Notes

• Until there is an electric model that matches the performance of gas-powered leaf blowers, using electric leaf blowers for controlled burn operations decreases the safety and efficiency of prescribed fire objectives by the following:
(1) increasing the time and effort it takes to effectively prepare a burn unit
(2) negatively impacting the quality of burn preparation
(3) taking a greater physical toll on field crew's that need to sustain energy for the demands of an entire day's burn operations, due to the need to use heavier equipment over a longer burn day.
• Due to these reasons and staff experience managing a burn program, staff anticipate an estimated 40-60% reduction in the City's burn program outputs if unable to utilize gas blowers. In general, staff would need to reduce each burn site size to meet safety and efficiency standards, thus reducing the efficacy of stewardship efforts within the city. Ideally, staff believe that 200 acres of parks natural areas would benefit from prescribed burns annually. Currently staff attempt to conduct prescribed burns on 100 acres annually. By removing gas powered leaf blowers from staff's toolkit for burn operations, staff anticipate added decreases to an already challenging ecological management shortfall.

Parks and Recreation staff will continue to pilot and test models as technology advances but are not equipped to provide information on when, or if, that technology will advance to make this work possible with electric blowers.

CA-18 - Resolution to Approve Change Order No. 4 with C.A. Hull Co., for the East Medical Center Bridge Rehabilitation and Widening Project, RFP 23-59; ($1,017,851.86 Increase, Total Contract Amount $11,607,881.33)

Question: This change order for 1,017,851.86 is split between UM and the City. UM will contribute a little over 522k. The total amount that Council is asked to approve will also include around 522k for the cost of the beam replacement plus an additional 600k in case of further contingencies, for a final total of 1,017,851.86. (Councilmember Disch)

Response: The additional cost of the beam replacement is $1,017,851.86 ($522,265.17 U of M share + $495,586.70 City share). The additional $600,000 contingency brings to total requested additional authorization to $1,617,851.86.