

## The Greening of Ashland's Landscapes

James McGinnis and David Sommer

Conservation Corner – May 2019

Did you know that there are 100-million gas lawn tools in the U.S., roughly translating to 6,100 gas lawn tools in Ashland? Just like the auto industry, battery powered yard equipment is rapidly becoming a sound investment financially, while reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and noise, air and smell pollution. About 30% of the fuel a two cycle engine uses fails to undergo complete combustion resulting in large quantities of air pollutants. As an antidote it is becoming clear that electric lawnmowers (e-mowers), leaf blowers, weed eaters and other similar tools have become reliable, cost competitive and readily available options.

For us do-it-yourselfers, you can become all electric and operate at a fraction of operating gas equipment (43% less in fuel alone). An investment of around \$450 for a battery-electric mower, plus a further minimal investment in weed eaters, blowers, etc. that you can plug the same battery into, drastically reduce GHG emissions, create zero air pollution, eliminate the smell factor, and greatly reduce noise pollution.

On a bigger scale the city of South Pasadena, CA was recently named the first American Green Zone Alliance Green Zone City in the U.S. This means all of the city's 13 properties are maintained with e-mowers, trimmers, edgers, hedgers and blowers. Here in Ashland the City, Schools and SOU have already begun replacing their smaller equipment with electric. Now add commercial e-mowers. The State of Oregon has at least 3 commercial e-mowers, two at the State Capital and one in Bend.

The immediate fuel savings from commercial e-mowers use can help finance their higher upfront purchase costs. We have calculated a 1.7 year return on investment on the purchase and charge costs of a commercial e-mower compared to the purchase price, fueling and maintenance of an equivalent gas-powered mower. After that, savings accrue from eliminating gas and oil alone. If you include maintenance costs, the savings become even greater. At the same time, going electric reduces fuel consumption and emissions, solid and toxic waste and reduces risks to worker health.

Don't forget to add a human powered approach to landscape maintenance, and converting lawns into low-water use landscapes. Many of us look at the bottom line in terms of economics and efficiency, yet we often do not take into account the long-term costs to our health. Wielding a rake is actually good cardiovascular exercise. Removing a lawn reduces water usage and the need to use a mower.

Empowering Ashland to make the change that we want to see in reducing GHG emissions, noise pollution and nasty exhaust means taking action in a multitude of fronts - like developing guidelines on e-greening our landscapes, or becoming famous with your pic of your low-carbon landscape. It might include initiating a gas-to-electric trade-in program and receiving credit for your gas powered equipment to augment buying zero-emission electric equipment at a discounted rate. Perhaps a cooperative or lend-a-tool could be established in a neighborhood or among friends. Ask your local stores about discounts for buying electric landscape maintenance equipment.

Across the city carbon footprint reductions can really add up and become great neighbor-to-neighbor and public relations opportunities. Zero-emission maintenance in a school opens up several advantages to both the students and faculty, and to the maintenance staff as well. What better way than to demonstrate that going electric is the future?

No one entity or person can do this alone. Attaining the goal of replacing all fossil fueled lawn and yard equipment with electric and human powered will take all of us to make that happen, whether you are an individual doing your own yard work, a contractor, schools, SOU or city government.

Let's join the rapidly growing number of U.S. communities that have embraced green landscaping equipment. Imagine Ashland residents and tourists alike experiencing quiet and sweet fresh smells as we walk down our sidewalks, play in our parks, and lounge in our yards. More importantly, taking action today will help us to reach our goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 8% per year through 2050. We are all in this together. Going Green is win, win, win.