

# Landscaper Engagement Summary Report

## INTRODUCTION

There is a negative impact on the health of landscaping workers and the environment from traditional landscaping practices. While recognition of this is not new in Princeton, the issue has received heightened attention, driven primarily by residents working and attending school from home affected by the noise from gas-powered lawn maintenance equipment. This provides Princeton with an opportunity to reduce the negative impact of landscaping practices on human health and the environment, including noise pollution from gas-powered equipment **following a process where those most directly impacted, the landscapers, are co-creators, leaders, and partners in designing solutions to the problem.**

The Changing the Landscape/Cambiando el Paisaje Project brought together a group of diverse stakeholders to have a dialog about policies and practices that affect the residents of the community, the landscapers that service their homes, and the environment. The process was grounded in inclusive approaches to meet procedural, distributional, and structural equity objectives.

**PROCEDURAL:** Create processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive in developing and implementing any program, plan, or policy. Ensure that all people are treated openly and fairly. Increase the civic engagement opportunities of communities that are disproportionately impacted by climate change.

**DISTRIBUTIONAL:** Fairly distribute resources, benefits, and burdens. Prioritize resources for communities that experience the greatest inequities, disproportionate impacts, and have the greatest unmet needs.

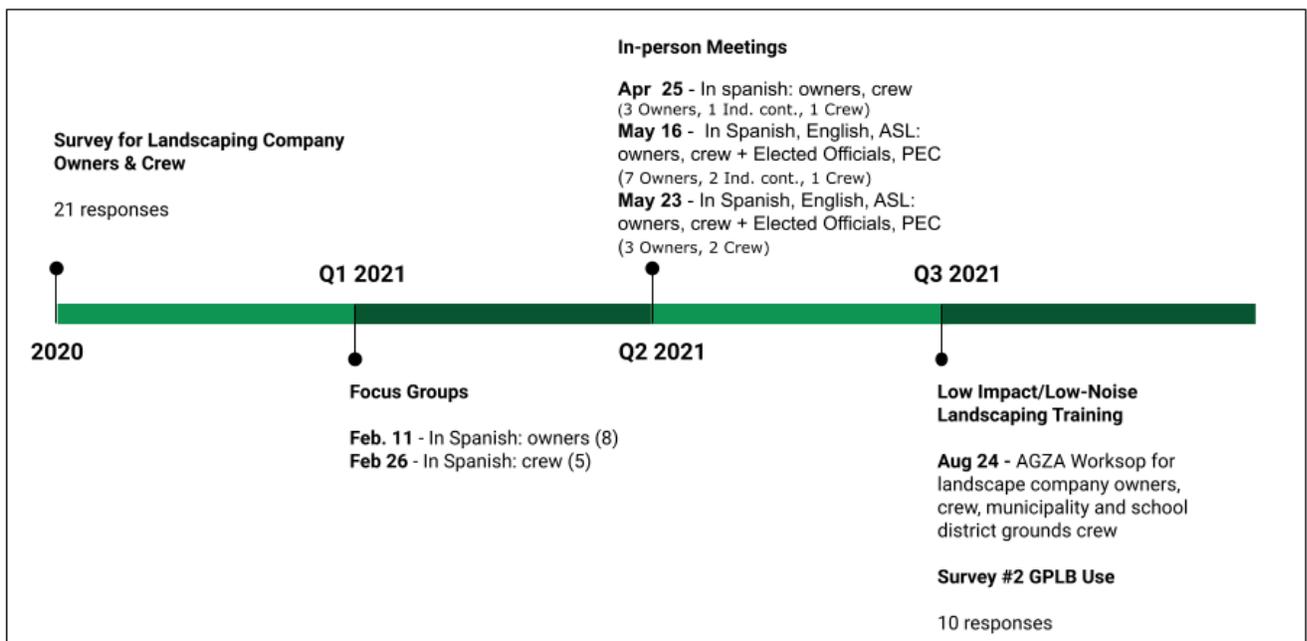
**STRUCTURAL:** Commit to correct past harms and prevent future unintended consequences. Address the underlying structural and institutional systems that are the root causes of social and racial inequities.

(From the Guide to Equitable, Community-Driven Climate Preparedness Planning)

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## ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Several activities occurred to learn more about the commercial landscaping companies, their owners, and crew working in the Princeton area. The feedback obtained from these engagement activities were used to inform the educational outreach to property owners and the proposed changes to the landscaper registration requirements and noise ordinances and their implementations.



## SURVEY FOR LANDSCAPING COMPANY OWNERS & CREW

The purpose of the survey was to understand:

- How many landscaping companies are operating in Princeton
- Company size
- Type of clients
- Type and amount of equipment used (gas-powered and battery-powered)
- Fuel costs
- How they manage leaves for clients
- Employee safety measures
- Attitude about battery-powered equipment

Survey distribution details:

- Printed copies of the survey in English and Spanish were sent via U.S. Mail to 70 companies.
- Telephone calls were made to companies to take survey answers over the phone

- If email addresses were available, a link to the English and Spanish survey was sent
- Responses
- 21 responses were received - 15 in English, 6 in Spanish
  - See [2020 Landscape Survey Report](#)

## FOCUS GROUPS

The purpose of the Focus Groups was to get input from owners and workers of landscaping businesses on their understanding of the latest news regarding landscaping practices and proposals to reduce noise, environmental pollution, and the negative impact on the health of landscapers in Princeton. To facilitate an open dialogue, owners and workers had a separate focus group meeting.

**Focus Group #1: February 11th, 2021**, involving eight owners of small Hispanic-owned landscaping businesses. Facilitated via Zoom by Maria Juega, a member of the Steering Committee. Molly Jones provided consecutive translations from Spanish to English.

- Participants expressed a desire to establish a Mercer County Landscapers Association
- To advocate for the rights of the small business owners and address classism.
- To educate other business owners and their customers on how to incorporate sustainable landscaping practices.
- Participants are willing to meet regularly in a formal setting, and to bring crew members with them for subsequent meetings.

### **Areas of Concern (Owners)**

- Expectations from Princeton homeowners, and a system that demands accountability on the part of the landscapers but not from homeowners.
- Fear of losing workers and having to increase the minimum wage (\$12-\$16).
- Cost of equipment - Increase in prices based on homeowners' preference and/or purchase of new equipment.
- Being heard, being taken into account, and included in the decision-making process.

**Focus Group #2: February 26th, 2021**, specifically targeted crew members working for small Hispanic-owned landscaping businesses providing services in and around Princeton. A total of five workers/crew members participated in the discussion via Zoom. Facilitated in Spanish by Ana Paola Pazmino, Unidad Latina en Acción NJ and member of the Steering Committee. Samuel Garcia provided consecutive translation from Spanish to English.

- Participants identified health and safety as their primary concerns.
- Participants will need and welcome additional training to increase knowledge-base and advocacy needs.

### **Areas of Concern (Crew/workers)**

- Lack of support and unfair treatment from some landscaping business owners.
- Cost and efficient use of new battery-powered equipment.
- Increase in prices based on homeowners' preference and/or the need by business owners to purchase new equipment resulting in the possibility of losing their jobs.

### **THREE-PART CONVERSATION WITH LANDSCAPERS**

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The project team held three in-person conversations at 400 Witherspoon St. with landscaping business owners and crew members who work in Princeton, members of the "Changing the Landscape" Steering Committee, including members of Council and the Environmental Commission, and the Mayor.

The April 25th meeting was conducted in Spanish with English translation available to non-Spanish speaking attendees. MAPA Collaborative acted as a meeting facilitator and notetaker.

The May 16th and 23rd meetings were conducted in English with simultaneous Spanish translation and American Sign Language interpretation available to attendees. MAPA Collaborative acted as a meeting facilitator and notetaker.

#### **April 25th:**

Primary Goal: Present to landscape owners and crew members information about the "Changing Landscape" project.

Intended Outcome: Increase knowledge and understanding of the "Changing Landscape" project to participate in the decision-making process.

*Objetivo principal: Presentar a los propietarios de jardines y a los miembros del equipo información sobre el proyecto "Cambiando el paisaje".*

*Resultado previsto: Aumentar el conocimiento y la comprensión del proyecto "Panorama cambiante" para participar en el proceso de toma de decisiones.*

- Five landscapers attended (three owners, one independent landscaper and one crew member). Range of experience among the 5 participants ranged from 2 years to 30 years working in this field.
- All participants had experience or had worked with battery operated equipment. The biggest concern was the cost of switching equipment and the time lost with new equipment, which affects business profit.
  - There was a general sense from one of the owners that the electric or battery operated equipment would slow down their work, and they couldn't take care of as many houses per day.
  - Will the government help with the replacement of equipment?
  - One of the participants asked if the municipality was also intending to change their landscaping equipment to battery-powered. (*Answer: yes*)
- Timing of the ordinance was also a concern - January rollout was mentioned as the best time. Owners explained that they begin to engage with contract negotiations with their clients around November to have contracts signed in December for services to be offered during the calendar year. Any changes should take place after January to allow for amendments to be made to the contracts.
- Participants agreed that they are doing what their customers want.
- One participant mentioned that the owners need to know about the new ordinance, if passed. Conversation around what to do if an owner doesn't know about the ordinance, and how to relay that information. Is it their responsibility to do so? Who will communicate with them? What happens if even after being told about the ordinance the worker is still asked to use gas-operated equipment?
- Participants appeared open to some restrictions, for example Sunday restrictions.
- Participants appeared open to penalties provided these were also enforced for the homeowners/residents. They understood/expressed this to be a "fair" approach.
- Participants appeared relieved that gas equipment would not be banned this calendar year.
- Participants understood that any implementation would be phased in and not an immediate change to their current practices, which alleviates some of their concerns - specifically related to cost of transitioning.
- Without financial support, some landscapers may be impacted greatly. Landscapers may not fully understand the current cost associated with their business practices and may have difficulty figuring out the cost of new business using sustainable practices. Grants and other forms of financial assistance should be considered. In addition, if concrete tools can be created for the landscapers to have a uniform way to assess their current and projected financial costs and/or implications, that may allow for a way to share information that is specific to independent workers, small, medium or large businesses.

**May 16th:**

Primary Goal: Review the multiple ideas from the different stakeholders regarding the possible solutions around the “Changing Landscape” project.

Intended Outcome: Clarify the top two to three options or considerations for an intended ordinance.

*Objetivo principal: Revisar las múltiples ideas de las diferentes partes interesadas con respecto a las posibles soluciones en torno al proyecto "Panorama cambiante".*

*Resultado previsto: Aclare las dos o tres opciones o consideraciones principales para una ordenanza prevista.*

- Ten landscapers attended (7 owners, one independent landscaper, and two crew members)
- General concerns shared by the landscaper owners and crew members:
  - Homeowners make all the decisions, and there are questions regarding their willingness to “compromise.” Landscapers feel they have “to do as they ask,” “accept what they want,” or else “they will go to someone else” and “lose their business.”
  - They are concerned about the cost and the environment, but they feel there needs to be “equity” between the homeowners and the business owners.
  - Homeowners must be educated about the expectations of the ordinance.
  - Landscaping owners fear that owners will seek lower prices and go with someone else.
  - Not having adequate funding or the proper technology to transition and not being able to keep up with a fast-moving process.
  - Competition from unregistered businesses.
- Discussion about transitioning from gas to electric or battery-operated equipment:
  - Owners who have already fully transitioned to electric/battery-operated equipment shared that many of their clients are aware of the additional cost and are willing and able to pay the added fee associated with the transition.
  - One of the owners stated that it was difficult for other owners to see the benefits of the transition because the workers “were so used to the fumes that they don’t know the difference it makes to their health.”
  - Transitioned owners shared that by making the switch, landscapers would need to plan to attract different customer types.
  - One of the owners encouraged the project to conduct the homeowner’s survey as a way to also “teach them about the long-term care of maintaining their lawns.”
  - Having to pay for the cost of transitioning from gas to electric/battery-operated equipment and needing an alternative to subsidize the cost.

- Electric/battery-operated equipment cannot do the job in the fall, and landscapers will need to increase their prices, which will then need to be absorbed by the residents/homeowners.

**May 23rd:**

Primary Goal: Build consensus to recommend an ordinance that is shaped by multiple voices from diverse stakeholders.

Intended outcome: Draft an ordinance recommendation that includes a timeline that is agreed upon.

*Objetivo principal: generar consenso para recomendar una ordenanza que esté conformada por múltiples voces de diversas partes interesadas.*

*Resultado previsto: redactar una recomendación de ordenanza que incluya un cronograma acordado.*

- 5 landscapers attended (3 owners and 2 crew members).
- Participants were in favor of the no-noise ordinance on Sundays, provided that homeowners are held to the same standard.
  - Owners stated they could minimize the noise by limiting the hours; however, transitioning to new equipment would take longer
- There was a discussion about limiting hours of gas-powered equipment on Saturdays to fewer hours than the 8am - 8pm Monday through Friday weekday.
  - Landscapers agreed to changes to weekend hours, noting that businesses operating Sundays may not be paying workers fairly.
- Owners who have already switched their equipment want to be fair and mindful of people who, for business reasons, still use gas-operated equipment. "Don't want people who are using gas to be unnecessarily stripped from what they need to do their business."
- Owners who were not ready to fully be operational with battery-powered equipment were willing to adjust their hours of operation as part of the transition this year.
- Landscapers do not want to be fined at the first infraction. Penalties should start with a warning. Increase fines with repeated violations.
  - Participants questioned if their industry was being singled out, and if tree services, gutter cleaning services, etc. would also be impacted.
- Owners and crew members favor a ban on holidays provided it's written as part of the ordinance and effectively enforced to prevent unfair competition.

## AGZA WORKSHOP

At the Community Park Elementary School, an American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA) and Quiet Communities workshop was held on August 24th, 2021. The workshop included presentations about the health impacts of gas-powered lawn maintenance equipment and how to incorporate battery-powered equipment into commercial landscaping business operations. There were demonstrations from battery-powered lawn equipment manufacturers Stihl, EGO, and Greenworks.

## ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

ATTENDEES	FOCUS GROUPS		THREE-PART CONVERSATION WITH LANDSCAPERS			AGZA Workshop
	2/11/21 Owners	2/26/21 Workers	4/25/21 Spanish	5/16/21 - Spanish/English/ ASL	5/23/21 - Spanish/English/ ASL	8/24/21 Spanish/English/ ASL
Landscape Company Owner	8	N/A	3 Owners 1 Ind. Cont.	7 Owners 2 Ind. Cont	3	8
Landscape Company Crew	N/A	5	1	1	2	4
Elected Officials	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2	2
Environmental Commission	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2	N/A
Project Team & Facilitators	5	6	7	12	10	13
Municipal staff & grounds crew, Princeton Public Schools grounds crew	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	14