

Interview With Chris Sawyer - His experience changing to an electric lawn service

Chris Sawyer, an Ansley Park resident since 1982, is a semi-retired attorney who has been very involved nationally in environmental and conservation issues. He recently switched to an electric lawn maintenance company. Here are some of his comments, edited for length and clarity.

What caused you to switch your lawn maintenance from gas-powered to electric?

Well, it was a number of factors. We were very happy with the fellow we had before. But his imagination for the yard and ours just kind of started dividing. So we ultimately decided to make a change. At the time, I wasn't aware that there were many people out there doing clean energy lawn care. But then I found out about Bret (Clean Air Lawn Care), and my antenna went up. Because it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that leaf blowers make one heck of a lot of noise. And gas fumes are not good for your health.

So it was a combination of the noise and the air pollution that you were mostly concerned about?

You don't have to do but about three minutes of Googling and you realize that those noises and fumes that the leaf blowers also blow out are harmful. The landscaper is there wearing ear protection, but the neighbor that's 50 or so feet or less from him gets essentially the same harmful impact that he would but for the protection. So reducing the noise was a big deal. Once I met Bret and talked to him for a little while, it was a no brainer to switch. So we were excited.

Have you been personally bothered by the noise from gas-powered leaf blowers at home?

I can filter out a lot of noise. We have lived 200ft off of Piedmont for almost 42 years, one row of houses. So you get a lot of gray noise. And part of it is urban living, but the noise from leaf blowers is an entirely self-inflicted problem. Nobody needs to use a gas leaf blower. And it's particularly irritating because when we go out in the yard in the summer, it's usually in the evening or early morning, and these guys are out there blowing. They are aggravating, and especially so when you learn that there is no good reason for the landscaper to create that much noise to do what he is doing.

Does your new electric lawn maintenance company provide the same level of service as your former gas-based company?

When you're getting a landscape team to come help you, your first thing you want is a good landscaper. I have discovered that Bret is really good. If you just sit down and say, tell me about Bret, first thing I would say, in short order, is that he is a very good landscaper. He's very confident, he knows his material and all of that. So that's great, but he is also creative and easy to work with. And then the second thing is that he is also very creative and thoughtful on the clean energy piece of it. I think he's very fairly priced. And so all of those are pluses, right? And clean energy works, really well.

Have you noticed less noise with the electric lawn service?

It's great because it's quiet and there are no gas fumes! I don't even know when he shows up a lot of times other than I walk outside or come home and the yard is done, and it looks great. When he cuts the grass, there's hardly any sound and likewise with the blower. It's wonderful. Talking about impact on neighbors you know, we live on Walker Terrace. Walker Terrace has small lots. So whatever happens in my yard happens directly to at least five immediate neighbors. Well, with Bret, that impact is terrifically lessened which is terrific. And we feel good about that.

Have you talked with your neighbors about switching to electric lawn care?

We've chatted with them and they're a very environmentally conscious group. They've asked me about it and we keep a sign up advertising it. I think Bret does a great job, but the impact on neighbors is terrifically less. Now, it's not just clean energy. He's very environmentally proactive and so he doesn't use bad insecticides or pesticides. My number one plant priority is I want something that really is great for the four B's, which is, of course, birds, butterflies, bees and bugs. And it doesn't work if your neighbors are using insecticides and they're only 15 feet from you. Our whole road is 15 feet away from our neighbor.

What are obstacles that keep people from switching to low noise, low pollution lawn care?

When you have a landscape company you like, you tend to overlook some flaws if you really like them. And so if you're pleased with the job they're doing, it's not easy just to pick up the phone and say, I'm sorry, I'm switching because I don't like your gas blower. But on the other hand, what we all should be doing is telling our lawn services that, you know, I like you, but I would love you if you had this new equipment.

But I think just opening people's eyes to the possibility and I think conceding maybe on the front end, that, hey, we understand that if you've got a happy relationship with your landscaper, then what you need to do is talk to your landscaper. Encouraging and helping them make the decision to move to clean energy it seems is simply a winner to all of us: the landowner has a quieter and cleaner experience, one's neighbors also clearly and similarly benefit from this, and ultimately the switch in my view will help the landscaper expand its business. Clean energy landscaping in my view is only going to grow.

How does the cost of your new electric lawn service compare with what you were paying for gas-based maintenance?

It's hard to compare, but he is less. I think he's very reasonably priced. He's just very efficient and pleasantly business like. And he also loves working in the yards and he's very devoted to the environment which is terrific.

Anything else that you want to say?

Something I've suggested when the issue comes up is how the Ansley Beautification Foundation hires landscape people for our islands. We ought to take the lead by shifting that to clean energy.

It would also be fun to put together a short presentation for the neighborhood association at the annual meeting on all of this that talks about how well it works and the health benefits in a very positive way and with the idea that you encourage your own lawn folks to go to electric in every way possible. We could also have some equipment there that everyone could use and test. Focus on finding clean energy because there's no reason not to do that, and ultimately it is the right thing to do.