



DATE: November 5, 2019

AGENDA ITEM #2

TO: Environmental Commission
FROM: Callie Niday, Staff Liaison
SUBJECT: Herbicide Use in Los Altos City Parks

RECOMMENDATION:

Review and take action, as appropriate, on the current use of herbicides in Los Altos City parks

BACKGROUND

At the regular meeting of August 14, 2019, the Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) approved a motion to recommend to City Council the banning of the use of synthetic herbicides and synthetic pesticides in Los Altos parks. The PARC forwarded the August 14, 2019 commission's agenda report on "Herbicide Use in Los Altos City Parks" along with the other documents to the Environmental Commission to explore the banning of synthetic herbicides and synthetic pesticides in the City of Los Altos. At the regular meeting of September 9, 2019, Manny Hernandez, Municipal Services Director, gave a presentation to the Environmental Commission on the herbicide use in the Los Altos City parks. The Commission agreed to continue to evaluate and investigate the effects of synthetic pesticides and herbicides before continuing discussion and considering a recommendation to the PARC.

Like many Bay Area agencies, herbicides are used to control or eliminate unwanted vegetation in public parks, open spaces and other city-owned outdoor spaces. The City of Los Altos does not use Roundup; however, the current herbicide being used to control weeds is Ranger Pro. Ranger Pro contains 41% Glyphosate (same active ingredient as Roundup). This product is a complete broad spectrum non-selective post-emergent professional herbicide, approved and in compliance. Ranger Pro is generic for Roundup and is equivalent and just as effective as the name brand. This generic roundup will kill most weeds and grasses. Ranger Pro moves through the plant from the point of foliage contact to and into the root system. It is then absorbed into the soil and breaks down naturally, and therefore will not spread through the ground and kill neighboring plants.

Within the Municipal Services Department, the Park Maintenance Division makes efforts to avoid usage of herbicide around the public or common areas. Pathway spraying is done as early as 5am to allow drying prior to the arrival of park users. There are no public pathways through median landscapes. In addition, staff uses a diluted mix of Ranger Pro, a dilution of 2% with water. Application happens once a year, to target the weed explosion in the spring. Ranger Pro is applied along park pathways, City owned medians, and hardscape as needed. On direction from the County, Glyphosate herbicide is not used on the Foothill medians as it is owned by the County. Weeds in those areas are knocked down throughout the year. Several other "organic" herbicides and time-consuming

techniques, such as torching and use of vinegar, have not proven successful. Neighboring agencies have experienced the same.

Over the last few years, the City of Los Altos has severely cut back on the usage of Glyphosate herbicides in parks and medians by limiting where they are used and when the public is least present. A move completely away from the use of Glyphosate products will have aesthetic implications in the parks and medians.

The City is currently mandated by the Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention Program through a Municipal Regional Permit to maintain an Integrated Pest Management Program that mandates minimal herbicide use. The City is currently in compliance. The current Integrated Pest Management Policy prohibits the use of pesticides for pest control.

Staff reached out to surrounding agencies and below is a summary of the information received from six neighboring agencies on their weed control practices.

Redwood City:

Redwood City uses pre-emergent treatment twice per year (Cool/Warm). The herbicides they have used since stopping the use of Glyphosates include:

- Scythe- not found to be effective in recycled water or high salinity soils areas, stopped use.
- Avenger Organic- not found to be effective at all.
- Fiestas Organic- used for a long time, not super effective but some staff like it for very specific uses so we keep it.
- Finale- Was effective, new main product, then they didn't re-register it for use in California. (Tons of So Cal cities switched to it also)

Atherton:

Atherton currently uses Roundup on non-turf areas. However, in the coming weeks Council will discuss discontinued use of it. If they approve and it is discontinued, Atherton proposes to use Mirimichi or Reward. When using Roundup, Atherton applied it 5 times a year (3 applications over 3 days) in the early morning and close off sections until dry. The City has not used herbicides on turf areas for a few years now. The City only has one 22-acre park so it may be easier for the City to control weeds. The focus is to keep the turf healthy. The City dethatches once a year, aerates twice a year and fertilizes every 3 months with a seasonal fertilizer. When the City gets Clover, it uses nitrogen. The City has well water and keeps the turf areas well irrigated.

Sunnyvale:

Sunnyvale has not banned the use of Roundup or Glyphosate derivatives. It is still legal use in California. CA DPR, CA EPA, and the US EPA still has listed it as a legal product to use. Sunnyvale has been looking into alternatives because Baylands Park is a 177-acre Santa Clara County park and the county banned the use of Glyphosate on all county owned facilities last fall.

The City is trying an alternative which is Glufosinate-ammonium, trade name of the product we use is Lifeline Herbicide. Its mode of action is like Glyphosate in the it is an enzyme blocker of an amino acid synthesis pathway. The amino acid synthesis blocked by Glyphosate is more effective than Glufosinate-ammonium enzyme action. Because of the stigma of the most recent litigation many

agencies are banning its use just to avoid any potential litigation that could arise. So far Glufosinate-ammonium has not been linked to any cancers.

Currently the City does not have any hard data on its use. The first use of Lifeline Herbicide has been at Baylands Park. The City has just started using it. Some City staff are experimenting with Lifeline Herbicide at other parks and open space facilities but for the most part most the staff still uses tried and true Roundup.

Foster City:

Foster City stopped using Roundup last year, but continued to use Ranger Pro. The City has since stopped using both products and has just started using Lifeline mixed with Magnify (surfactant). As a result, the City started applying this last week. Foster City has limited to spraying windows due to what seems to be never-ending winds. The City also uses Reward when necessary as well as some broadleaf chemicals such as Speedzone and Turflon. The City has also increased the usage of Surflan for pre-emergent control. It has had mixed results with this, especially in areas where the City has done a lot of mulching.

San Mateo County Parks:

San Mateo County currently uses a Glyphosate herbicide but are stopping use once the product on hand is used up, which will be by December 2019 when the staff recommendation expires. The County has been using Finalsan with Oroboost as a surfactant. We also have recommendations for Gallery and Dimension, the results are somewhat comparable to Roundup but decreases staff time by mechanically removing weeds as well as Workers Comp claims for repetitive motion injuries. Glyphosate is really the optimum treatment choice since it is selective in what it treats. The others mentioned are not selective and have a warning label compared to a danger label on Roundup.

Santa Clara:

The County of Santa Clara stopped using Glyphosate last year in public areas. They were spraying Reward and tested a propane burner until something caught on fire. Currently, there are not using any organics.

DISCUSSION

Under the Community Development Department, the City of Los Altos Environmental Commission “shall have those powers and duties entrusted to it by the council from time to time and shall submit an annual report to the council. The Environmental Commission studies and makes recommendations to Council on issues that affect the natural and built environment in the city and the region. Additional duties include special projects as directed by the Council.”

During the regular meeting of October 14, 2019, the Environmental Commission received public comments and discussed the Parks and Recreation Commission request to explore the banning of synthetic herbicides and pesticides in the City of Los Altos. The Environmental Commission voted unanimously (5 – 0) to recommend eliminating the use of synthetic herbicides and pesticides in City Parks and to request Council and staff guidance on further Environmental Commission work on this topic.

Attachments:

- A. Herbicides Memo to City Council

November 5, 2019

To: Los Altos City Council
From: Los Altos Environmental Commission
Subject: Herbicides

During its October 14, 2019 meeting, the Environmental Commission received public comments and discussed the Parks and Recreation Commission request to explore the banning of synthetic herbicides and pesticides in the City of Los Altos. The Environmental Commission voted unanimously (5 – 0) to recommend eliminating the use of synthetic herbicides and pesticides in City Parks and to request Council and staff guidance on further Environmental Commission work on this topic.

The Environmental Commission reviewed several publicly available research articles on synthetic herbicides and pesticides and found reasonable support that such products can be toxic to applicators as well as people, plants and animals that may come in contact with such products unintentionally. As a precautionary measure, the Environmental Commission believes limiting the use of synthetic herbicides and pesticides in the City and eliminating their use in our parks is appropriate.

The Environmental Commission also expressed interest in further investigations of the use of these chemicals in the City of Los Altos, including consideration of limiting or eliminating their use in all public areas, residents and by businesses in the City.

The Commission is seeking Council and Staff guidance on whether to pursue this area of research for the following reasons:

- An investigation of the use of synthetic herbicides and pesticides in the City of Los Altos is not part of the Environmental Commission's 2019-2020 Work Plan reviewed with the Council.
- Consideration of limiting product use is a policy issue that is best directed by Council.
- Use of herbicides and pesticides is, in part, controlled under the required City Integrated Pest Management Program.
- The Commission would need to conduct substantial research in order to recommend additional limitations of synthetic herbicides and pesticides, particularly one that would limit the use by residents or businesses. Therefore, the Commission is seeking direction from Council as to whether this is an action the Council would potentially support given appropriate information and recommendations.