

Town of Canton
2/25/19 Finance Committee Meeting
Plastic Bag Reduction By-Law



Article 27: Eliminates Thin-Film Plastic Bags at Retail Establishments in Canton 6 Months After Passage

Plastic Check-Out Bags

- Create litter and harm animals
- Made of nonrenewable fossil fuels
- In landfills, release CO2 which promotes the leaking of other gases including methane
- Clog storm drains and lead to flooding
- Jam recycling machinery
- Enter waterways and impact seafood

Reusable Shopping Bags

- Inexpensive; as little as \$1
- Used repeatedly
- Safe to animals
- Organic or recycled fibers

MA Cities & Towns With Bag Reduction By-Laws

As of January 2019, **91 Massachusetts cities and towns**, representing over 40% of the state's population, regulate single-use plastic shopping bags ([Sierra Club of MA](#)):

Adams, Amherst, Andover, Aquinnah, Arlington, Ashland, Athol, Attleboro, Barnstable, Bedford, Belmont, Beverly, Boston, Bourne, Bridgewater, Brookline, Burlington, Cambridge, Chatham, Chilmark, Cohasset, Concord, Dalton, Danvers, Dartmouth, Dennis, Duxbury, Edgartown, Falmouth, Framingham, Gloucester, Grafton, Great Barrington, Greenfield, Hamilton, Harwich, Haverhill, Hopkinton, Ipswich, Lee, Lenox, Lexington, Lincoln, Longmeadow, Lowell, Manchester-by-the-Sea, Mansfield, Marblehead, Marshfield, Mashpee, Melrose, Milton, Nantucket, Natick, Newburyport, Newton, Northampton, Oak Bluffs, Pembroke, Plymouth, Provincetown, Reading, Rockport, Salem, Sandwich, Scituate, Shrewsbury, Somerville, South Hadley, Stockbridge, Sudbury, Swampscott, Tewksbury, Tisbury, Topsfield, Truro, Tyngsborough, Wakefield, Watertown, Wayland, Wellesley, Wellfleet, West Tisbury, Westborough, Westford, Weston, Williamstown, Wilmington, Winchester, Yarmouth.

Bags Not Affected By Article 27



Recycling is Not a Solution

- Low rates of voluntary recycling and only 5-10 % of bags are properly recycled
- Costs more to recycle a plastic bag than make a new one
- Not appropriate for municipal curbside recycling
- Jam and damage the mechanisms of recycling machinery
- Cheaper to make new bags than to recycle used ones



Impact on Canton's Recycling Services & Costs

“Our recycling process is comprised of a series of rods with spinning discs which move the material along. Flexible plastics of all kinds are thin and stretchy, and get wrapped around these spinning discs. Our facilities run 24/7, except for the time that is lost each day shutting down the entire line when we are required to manually cut and remove the tangled items from our screens. This process is exceptionally dangerous, and decreases the efficiency of the recycling process....

When customers put their recycling in plastic bags, we are unable to see the contents and are unwilling to risk the safety of our employees by ripping into a bag we can't see through. Ultimately, bagged materials must be diverted *as trash*. **Plastic bags and other flexible plastics are a contaminant in the recycling stream, and therefore have the potential to fail large loads of recycling based on the volume of these materials. Failed loads incur a price penalty based on the level of contamination. In many cases, the municipality will be charged contamination fees reflecting the level of non-recyclables, which includes bags and other flexible plastics....**

After the challenge of [China's National Sword](#) — which bans 24 types of solid waste, including various plastics and unsorted mixed papers, and sets a much tougher standard for contamination levels — reducing contamination rates in recycling has been of the utmost importance. Incorrect items, such as plastic bags, have negative consequences for everyone involved.”

---**Gretchen Carey, Recycling and Organics Coordinator, Republic Services**

Microplastics and Human Health

- Plastic bags need **500 to 1000 years** to break down and they never fully biodegrade
- Tiny pieces (microplastics) enter waterways and flow into the ocean
- Absorb and concentrate pollutants present in the water
- Pollutants bioaccumulate in small marine life when they mistake microplastics for food, and move up the aquatic food chain
- Extent of possible harm to human health is being researched by EPA



Low Cost - Huge Environmental Payoff

Reusable Bags:

- Cost as little as a dollar
- Save retailers money
- Are promotional material
- **FREE** at bag drives
- No impact to local economy*
- Do not create litter
- Do not pollute waterways
- Do not end up in landfills
- Do not impact municipal recycling

[*Economic Impact Analysis: Proposed Ban on Plastic Carryout Bags in Los Angeles County \(AECOM, 2010\)](#)



Implementation Considerations

Town of Mansfield, with a comparable population & land area, has *not* needed to hire additional staff to manage their Bag Reduction By-law

- **Notification**

- *Canton Residents Toward an Equitable, Sustainable Future* will prepare fact sheets & deliver notification to retail establishments
- Newspaper articles (business and consumer education)
- Educational presentation to the public
- Town Website, Signage and Social Media

- **Implementation**

- Effective date six months from Town Meeting (Nov 2019) for large establishments; up to 12 months for small merchants

- **Enforcement**

- BOH to respond to violation complaints submitted via phone or email, issuing warning, subsequent fines

YES



ARTICLE 27