

Town of Falmouth  
Recycling and Energy Advisory Committee (REAC)  
Re: Final Policy Recommendation for Single-Use Disposable Shopping Bags  
August 2015

**Summary of findings:**

The core issue with plastic bags tends to be their presence in places they do not belong—especially in the ocean, making this a larger concern for coastal communities. More than 150 communities across the U.S. have adopted ordinances to encourage the use of reusable shopping bags, several which place fees on disposables, and many which ban plastic bags outright. Plastic bags have shown to have both negative effects environmentally and economically. The objective of adopting an ordinance to regulate the use of disposable shopping bags is to create a paradigm shift to more sustainable reusable shopping bags, in addition to decreasing litter in Falmouth made up of thin film.

**Some primary concerns with the global prevalence of plastic bags include:**

- Plastic bags persist for a long time and never truly degrade;
- Plastic bags become problematic in the waste stream and storm water infrastructure;
- Plastic bags are manufactured from fossil fuels;
- At our own waste-to-energy plant, ecomaine, it is reported that plastic film is very problematic. Sorting equipment at the recycling plant gets so wound with plastic film, that it must be shut down sometimes twice a day and manually cleaned, which is costly; and
- Although plastic bags can be recycled, it is at a loss for ecomaine due to the extremely low market value it has, and the problem it poses with the sorting equipment.

**Education and outreach REAC has conducted since this issue was directed to the committee includes:**

- Polling residents at the 2014 November elections;
- Distributing bags and providing additional information at June 2015 elections;
- Conducting an online survey;
- Interviewing municipalities with adopted policies to regulate the use of disposable shopping bags;
- Hosting educational events with the Falmouth Memorial Library;
- Conducting litter clean ups in town;
- Applying for a grant through NRCM to purchase reusable bags;
- Supplying reusable bags to the Food Pantry and the General Assistance Program;
- Participating in regional efforts on this issue, and interviewing Falmouth businesses on how a potential ordinance would affect their business.
- Town Council asked REAC to conduct more businesses outreach since the last meeting. After conducting 45 business interviews, the group has learned which businesses will be the most impacted from the ordinance as well as what exemptions will be necessary.

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REAC has gathered input from the residential and business communities since this issue was brought to the Town Council's attention. It was unveiled that more than half of Falmouth residents (254 polled in November 2014), use reusable shopping bags, and 80% (263 sampled) would commit to using reusable bags while shopping in Falmouth. Over 500 responses came from an online survey, where results were different; 50% do not wish to see disposable bags regulated, 48% are using reusables, and nearly 50% would commit to shopping with reusables in Falmouth. During the June elections, committee members were surprised with how few people chose to take a free reusable bags; claiming they already had plenty at home.

A business information meeting was held in November of 2014, and although the attendance was poor, the committee developed a better understanding of how an ordinance would affect small businesses versus how an ordinance would affect a larger business. REAC decided to conduct in-person and over the phone interviews with business to determine which of those are using plastic bags, and also to better understand how a fee system, as well as a ban, would affect their operations, if at all. Portland applies their compliance to those who sell 2% of their gross sales are derived from foodstuff. REAC believes a better solution for Falmouth would be to write an ordinance which bans plastic bags from all establishments, and allows the choice for a business to charge customers for paper bags. This would allow larger retailers to capture increased inventory costs with a fee system, and omit those smaller stores who have told REAC they would prefer not to charge their customers a fee.

**Potential timeline for implementation:**

- **August—**
  - Kimberly met with Ordinance Committee
  - REAC to present to Town Council
  
- **September—Town Council meeting**
  - Introduction to Ordinance Amendment
  - Public Forum
  
- **October—Town Council meeting**
  - Public Hearing
  - Schedule Order
  
- **January 2016**
  - Ordinance becomes effective