



Middletown's *Bring Your Own Bag* Ordinance

The City of Middletown is considering a new ordinance to eliminate single use plastic check-out bags and encourage consumers to use reusable bags. The Middletown Garden Club is moving this forward because it is such a critical environmental issue. Plastic bags are convenient and cheap, but their environmental costs far exceed what retailers pay to provide them. Simple alternatives such as reusable shopping bags are available and already used in many stores.



The Hartford Courant estimates that CT uses 1 billion plastic bags a year.



Single use plastic bags are used for an average of 12 minutes.



Only 1% of plastic bags are returned for recycling.

Why is this important?



Plastic bags kill wildlife. Plastic bags are lightweight and aerodynamic, making them a good candidate for litter. Sadly, littered bags can be mistaken as food by wild animals. Plastic bags choke, strangle and entangle turtles, whales, sea lions, seals, birds and fish, among other species.

Plastic bags are made of non-renewable sources. Thin plastic carryout bags are made from fossil fuels. 100 billion plastic bags a year are used in the US, which requires 12 million barrels of oil to manufacture.

Plastic bags do not biodegrade. Although they fragment through mechanical action and photo degradation in the presence of light, these processes are slow, taking an estimated 200+ years to complete. When plastic bags finally do break down, they do not dissolve into benign substances, instead they fracture into smaller and smaller bits called "micro plastics." These small particles present the greatest long-term danger, as these particles displace food supplies in the world's oceans.



Biodegradable & compostable bags are not a good option. Some plastic bags are made of biodegradable and/or compostable materials. Although these have some environmental benefits, they still create problems. Some of these bags still contain petroleum and other toxic components, and the time it takes to breakdown depends on many factors such as light, oxygen, temperature, etc.. Compostable bags can only be composted in an industrial composting facility (the closest one to Middletown is in Ellington, CT); although they look the same, they cannot be recycled with the regular plastic bags because they actually contaminate the loads.

Plastic bags cause flooding. Because plastic bags never fully break down, they often clog storm drains and damage infrastructure on their way to the ocean.

Plastic bags cause problems when mixed with other curbside recyclables. If plastic bags are put in with the regular curbside recycling, they clog up the processing machinery, causing costly equipment shutdowns and delays.

Plastic is ending up on our plates. Researchers have found plastic and fibrous debris in 25% of individual fish and in 67% of all species of fish sold in California.

How effective are plastic bag bans?

Studies have shown that plastic bag bans are most effective in changing consumers' behavior when there is also a fee attached to the ban, meaning that plastic bags are eliminated and a fee is charged for the alternative paper bag.



- The City of San Jose's plastic bag ban and 10 cent fee on paper bags resulted in an increase from 4% to 62% of customers bringing their own reusable bags to the store; an 89% reduction of plastic bag pollution in storm drains; and a 50% reduction in downtime of recycling operations related to plastic bags. These positive outcomes came about within one year of implementation.
- In Alameda County CA, a ban and fee law led to an 80% decline in the use of single use paper and plastic bags; a 200% increase in the number of shoppers bringing reusable bags or not using a bag at all; and a 44% decrease in plastic bags found in storm drains.
- In 2018 Suffolk County in New York decreased its single use bag distribution by 80% due to a ban and fee according to the Food Industry Alliance of New York.



Not long ago, there were no plastic bags, and we survived just fine!

What will Middletown's Ordinance do?

PURPOSE: To encourage the use of reusable bags and ban single use plastic bags.

ACCEPTABLE BAGS: Recyclable paper bags, reusable bags, gift bags, laundry and dry cleaner bags, newspaper bags, produce bags, product bags or bags sold in packages containing multiple bags.

BAN: Single use check-out plastic bags.

TYPES OF STORES AFFECTED: All retail establishments, such as retail stores, restaurants, pharmacies, convenience and grocery stores, liquor stores, seasonal and temporary businesses, food trucks and household goods stores. **Exempt:** Charities and non-profits that distribute free food, clothing, or other household items.

STORE RESPONSIBILITY: Stores must provide an acceptable bag, and must charge 10 cents per bag; charges must be itemized; and signs must be posted.

EXEMPTION: SNAP and WIC customers exempt from 10 cent fee.

ENFORCEMENT: By Recycling Coordinator

OPERATIVE DATE: Six months from date of adoption

What path does the Ordinance have to take?

- March 13, 2019, 6:30 PM, Public Works, Room 208 of City Hall
- March 14, 2019, 6:30 PM, General Counsel, Room 208 of City Hall
- April 1, 2019, 7:00 PM, Common Council Chamber



Why charge 10 cents for paper bags?

The goal of this ordinance is to remove problematic plastic bags, and to get consumers to bring their own bags.

If paper bags are just given out for free, consumers won't change their behavior and no waste reduction will occur. The 10 cent fee is important to give people an incentive to remember their bags and to help stores recoup the higher cost of paper bags.

Supporting Organizations: Middletown Garden Club * Jonah Center for Earth and Art * ARTFARM * ECOIN * Connecticut River Conservancy * Middlesex Land Trust * Middletown Commission on Conservation and Agriculture * Middletown Resource Recycling Advisory Commission * Project Green Lawn