

➤ **Article 28: Bylaw – Plastic Bag Ban**

8/17/16

Dr. Ken Stone, Petitioner, presented this article. The Town of Plymouth alone uses 18 million plastic bags annually and each plastic bag is utilized on average for 12 minutes. Less than 14% end up being recycled and it is cheaper to manufacture a new bag than to recycle an existing bag. By instituting a ban, the town will reduce waste by hundreds of thousands of pounds. Bags can currently be found all over the ground, in lakes and ponds, in the ocean, and up in trees all over Plymouth. These bags break down into micro pieces that leach toxins. The bags are causing destruction of ocean and sea life and killing animals on land and in the sea, annually over 2 million birds are killed and over 100,000 sea animals including whales and dolphins are killed by plastic bags.

In the Spring, there were 19 Massachusetts towns with plastic bag bans and today there are 36. 13 of those towns are on the cape and are similar to Plymouth in that they rely on tourism and retail. Sandwich and Bourne are working on passing plastic bag bans now. Nantucket was the first to ban plastic bags 26 years ago. States like California and Hawaii have state wide bans. Cities like Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles have city wide bans. Boston is currently working on passing a ban. 4.5 billion people worldwide, including in China, live comfortably with plastic bag bans.

This bylaw would eliminate the use of thin lightweight (< 3 mils thick) shopping bags in Plymouth. There will still be produce bags, meat/fish barrier bags, dry cleaning bags. This bylaw will not impact small businesses as the ban is only required for businesses of more than 3,000 square feet or with more than 1 location in Plymouth, so most independent retailers will be exempt. The large stores are ready to be on board with the ban as they already comply with this at other locations. They are familiar with this and the transition will not be a problem for them, in fact they will save money by not having to purchase the plastic bags. The Massachusetts Food Association also supports this plastic bag ban. The Board of Health here in Plymouth voted to act as the enforcement agency for the ban. There are many local organizations in support of the ban and many have provided official letters of support. It is hoped that the Advisory & Finance Committee will also support his article and recommend it to Town Meeting.

Public Comment:

Karen Edwards, a North Plymouth resident, is worried about the effects of these plastic bags on the environment as her great grandchildren grow up in town. She would like Plymouth to join neighboring towns in banning the plastic bags.

Questions:

- Understand the benefit to the environment and to big box stores but how does this benefit the taxpayer? It sounds as if it will cost the taxpayer more money to have to go out and buy small plastic bags to line their small trash cans with. Stores will likely not pass their plastic bag savings on to the consumer. (K Canty) A homeowner may have to spend \$10 or \$20 on small plastic bags or they could use a trash receptacle with a washable liner and not use plastic bags as a liner. Even if they buy plastic bags for this specific use it will still result in fewer plastic bags and help lessen the impact on the environment.
- Have stores been approached to voluntarily participate in eliminating use of the plastic bags? (S Stephenson) Voluntary does not work in this situation. No one wants to be the first for fear that they may lose a market share. Only a tax or ban works and we can't tax it so we must ban it.
- Would trade shows be included? (H Salerno) The focus is on large brick and mortar retail establishments.
- There are fines involved. Are there also potential criminal charges involved? (H Salerno) No, it would not be a criminal offense.
- Is there an appeal process? (H Salerno) that would be up to the Board of Health to establish those regulations. There have never been violations in the other communities, instituted bans work.

- The Board of Health is in support of imposing fines? (K Canty) Yes, it is simple for them.

Public Comment:

- Valerie Peck pointed out that garbage can go into anything, a plastic bag does not always have to be used.
- Everett Malaguti, Town Meeting Member, asked if restaurants will still be allowed to use take out bags and if everyone going to grocery stores will be required to purchase the \$1 reusable bags each time. Ken Stone replied that stores will still have free paper bags available. Some large thicker plastic bags may be available to purchase, Market Basket sells them for 10 cents. Many restaurants use paper and not plastic for carry out already.

Betty Cavacco made a motion to recommend Article 28: Bylaw - Plastic Bag Ban to Town Meeting. Harry Helm, second.

Discussion/Comments:

- It is good for the environment but environmental concerns could be addressed by promoting recycling. Why should the taxpayer absorb the cost? These plastic bags fill a gap that exists in our society. It is not in our best interest to pass this ban. (K Canty)
- I am in support. It sounds like town management and the Board of Health are in support. 18 million is a huge number and these bags are littered everywhere, a ban helps public welfare, many reusable bags are given out as promotional items so it may not cost the taxpayers anything, if this ban is passed there will most likely be a lot more given out as promotional items. (H Helm)
- This ban should be implemented at the state level, I do not want to put Plymouth businesses at a disadvantage to other towns. (M Lincoln)
- As a boater, I see these bags all over the waters, we need to support this ban now. (B Cavacco)

The motion carries (7-3-0). Robert Cote, Scott Stephenson, and Kevin Canty, opposed.