

Alderman Leary,

As executive director of the American Progressive Bag Alliance (APBA), I've read about recent discussions to potentially ban plastic bags in Newton. I understand that this issue is of particular interest to you. On behalf of the APBA, I commend your commitment to enhancing sustainability practices within your community. We also make this a priority. However, we differ on which solutions we believe are best when it comes to environmental stewardship. With that in mind, I'd like to share some information with you that I hope you will take into consideration as you approach further discussions on this topic.

First, when it comes to the volume of plastic bags that end up as debris, the reality differs significantly from common perceptions. According to EPA data and scientific studies, plastic bags make up less than 0.5% of the municipal waste stream and traditionally a fraction of 1% of litter in most cities. It stands to reason that targeting such a small portion of waste and litter would have a negligible environmental impact.

And, to begin with, plastic bags are actually a lot more environmentally-friendly than you may think. They are 100% recyclable, contain recycled content (via true closed-loop recycling) and are reused for many household purposes. Meanwhile, alternatives to plastic bags come with a host of disadvantages. Other options, such as cloth and nonwoven polypropylene (NWPP) reusable bags, weigh more than plastic bags and take more energy and water to produce.

While banning plastic bags wouldn't do as much as some might hope in terms of environmental outcomes, such a policy would add very real costs to Newton businesses and residents. Since plastic bag alternatives are more expensive for stores to purchase and provide to shoppers, store owners would have no choice but to pass on these increased costs to consumers through higher prices.

What's more, a bag ban would infringe on consumer choice in a way that most people oppose. According to a recent [Reason-Rupe poll](#), 60% of those surveyed say they would oppose a ban on plastic bags where they live while only 13% would favor a tax on plastic bags.

It is our contention that recycling and increased consumer education, as opposed to a bag ban or tax, is the only true means to reduce waste while promoting sustainability. More and more individuals seem aligned with this thinking, as well. An independent survey conducted in Denver, CO revealed that residents overwhelmingly prefer recycling as an alternative measure: 89% of those surveyed said they prefer plastic bag recycling efforts at local grocery stores to a tax.

As the Board continues to explore this issue, know that enhanced recycling options remain a sensible way forward. For example, through its retailer collector program, [Bag-2-Bag](#), APBA member Hilex Poly enables people to deposit their used plastic bags and wrap into bins at local stores for recycling. Hilex has established over 30,000 of these retailer drop-off points, making plastic bag recycling even easier for consumers.

Going forward, know that you have a resource in the APBA should you seek additional information on the topic, as we feel there are more effective ways to promote a healthy environment without incurring some of the negative consequences that accompany bag bans. Please feel free to reach out.

Lee Califf
Executive Director, American Progressive Bag Alliance
SPI: The Plastics Industry Trade Association