

Dear Mr. Califf,

Thank you for your email. I appreciate that you took the time to reach out and express your concerns about Newton's plastic bag ban. Be assured that your concerns have been carefully considered. We have not taken the action to ban the thin, single use, point of sale bags lightly.

The problem with plastic bags is not that they take up a lot of volume in the waste stream; the problem is they do not biodegrade. This is particularly problematic in marine environments where plastics photo degrade into microscopic pieces, competing with plankton in the food chain, and concentrating persistent organic pollutants, like PCP's and transforming our oceans into a toxic soup.

Plastic bags are consistently in the top ten in beach litter statistics. They are far from an insignificant type of litter as you suggest. But more than that, they are deadly to marine life. Millions of marine mammals, sea turtles and birds become entangled or ingest plastic bags with fatal consequences.

Yes, technically plastic bags are 100% recyclable, but the fact is that very few of the some 100 billion plastic bags that Americans use every year actually get recycled. Recycling rates remain abysmally low. Most are burned, buried or littered. Estimates vary from less than 1 percent to about 5 percent. Even if we tripled the recycling rate for plastic bags, the rate would still be too low to solve the problems they pose in our environment. The economics of plastic bag recycling is very troublesome. It costs less to produce a new bag than to recycle one. The City of Newton currently does not recycle plastic bags. Consumers must bring them back to participating stores for recycling. If recycling worked on a large scale for this product we would do it.

The fact is that voluntary programs don't work. I participated in a webinar on Plastic Bag and Plastic Film Management sponsored the Product Stewardship Institute. We discussed programs that have successfully managed plastic bags resulting in dramatic reductions in litter. Brian Houghton of the Mass Food Association, the trade organization for food industry and supermarkets was also part of this discussion.

The problem remains despite efforts by the Mass Food Association and the MA Department of Environmental Protection to work together to push voluntary programs to reduce plastic bag use and increase recycling efforts among retailers and supermarkets. Though these efforts are laudable, they have clearly been ineffective. Now they seem to have given up on it completely. A local market, Stop N Shop ended its 5 cent rebate program to customers who brought their own bags.

In Newton, the Plastic Bag Working Group, which includes, the Economic Development Director and the Director of Sustainability, supports this ordinance, and the larger effort behind it, i.e., the whole concept of "zero waste". The Working Group spent time canvassing select village centers in the City to gauge the impact of such a ban on our small businesses. We discovered that the impact would be little to none, as most of

these businesses do not use the targeted bags. Nevertheless, we did agree to exempt businesses under 3,500 sq ft of retail space from the ordinance.

The effort is aimed at working with consumers and retailers to encourage the use of reusable bags, not to switch to paper bags, which also have environmental costs to produce. But paper biodegrades and is easily recycled, and it is not made from fossil fuels.

I have used the APBA as a resource, and I particularly enjoy visiting the website: <http://www.bagtheban.com/>. They have helped me in coming to the conclusion that there are some products that we are just better off without, and plastic bags are one of those products.

I'm afraid the APBA solutions to the problem with plastics in the environment are impractical, unworkable and way too little too late.

Please see attached photos that I took of the scope of plastic bag litter in my community.

Kind regards,

Alison Leary
Newton City Council
Ward 1