

Greening our Towns- Single-Use Bag Ordinance Wrap Up

On Thursday, January 19, 2017, representatives from 10 municipalities who have not yet passed single-use bag legislation, came together to hear from New Castle, Hastings, and the City of Rye on how they passed it in their towns. Steve Wolk from New Castle's Sustainability Advisory Board gave a presentation on how they accomplished their Reusable Bag Initiative. We then opened up the conversation to include Haven Colgate and Coco Zordan from Hastings, and Sara Goddard from the Rye Sustainability Committee to answer questions from the audience on more specific issues related to passing this type of legislation. Below you will find notes from the questions asked and responses given by our panel of experts.

Q: What do you say to people who oppose the reusable bag initiative by saying they want to use their plastic bags as trash liners or for picking up after their dogs?

A. Some possible responses:

- You can pick bags up for free from Westchester Community Center.
- In addition, many other items you buy at the supermarket come in plastic bags (i.e. produce and meat bags, bread bags)
- It's not worth it to degrade our environment and public health for free bags.
- You can wipe down your waste paper trash can.
- Before around 1967, there weren't disposable plastic bags.
- Keep a container in your kitchen to store all those clean bags you get from package deliveries, newspapers, dry cleaner, etc. Use the ones you need; take the remaining ones to recycling container at big box stores

General advice:

- "Find the sticking point in your community." Answer their questions well. Get them on your side so that they're your biggest supporters and the criticism will pass.

Q. Is it better to ban plastic bags and Styrofoam containers in one fell swoop?

A. There were a few different perspectives on this:

- Haven, Hastings: Yes! As a riverfront town, they associated bags and containers with a litter problem and the community supported getting rid of them all at once.
- Steve, New Castle: No, it didn't stick so they went forward, will circle back.
- Sara, Rye: depends on the "read/mood" of your muni. Feel it out. It doesn't make sense to force something that would undermine the entire proposed legislation

Q. Is the County moving forward with a reusable bag initiative?

A. It's not a high priority or something they'll pursue unless they get a lot of voter/municipal pressure.

Q. What's going on with New York State?

A. The [NY State Senate Bill S362](#) (which "Establishes a prohibition on the imposition of any tax, fee or local charge on carry out merchandise bags in cities having a population of one million or more") passed the Senate 42-18. Westchester Senators voted against it. Senator Felder argues that it will hurt low income residents. A lot of action is needed to call and write to legislators.

Q. Can they forbid a storefront from selling something?

A. Steve: No

Q. How do you push the town board past compromise and into policy?

A. A few different suggestions:

- Steve, New Castle: Speak with members personally and frequently, especially when getting close to a vote. Reiterate the voter support and make sure that you answer questions well. Maintain constant communication with policy makers, the board, and the mayor. Monitor active groups (ex: Chappaqua Moms) for negative communication so you can reach out with answers and positivity.
- Sara, Rye: It's critical to follow up with elected officials on their concerns. Ask them questions and answer theirs, preferably in person.
- Coco, Hastings: Their issue was with A&P and the Food Industry Alliance (FIA), not with officials.
- Haven, Hastings: Dig down deep into industry studies and fake science. Debunk FIA claims for officials.
- Steve, New Castle: Convinced Walgreens not to sue as part of FIA suit by showing customer support. "Do you want to be the plaintiff in town?"
- In response to concerns about contamination issues: You should be washing all food because of bacteria, not just because of reusable bags.

Q. The City of Yonkers recycles Styrofoam, but what do supermarkets do with the plastic bags returned?

- Steve, New Castle: They recycle them in plants (ex: Shop Rite's is in New Jersey) but it's not energy efficient.
- MJ Wilson, Irvington: The economics of petroleum prices make recycling plastic bags not financially viable.
- Sara, Rye: The NY State plastic bag recycling law requires big box stores of a certain square footage to carry recycling bins. Laws of this kind are not effective (they rely on customers to bring clean bags to the stores) and are usually supported by the plastics industry, as a PR move. The market for clean, recycled bags fluctuates widely and is typically not a profitable end product. Unlike glass or aluminum, for e.g., plastic bags/film can only be recycled a finite number of times - if that - before they degrade. As such, they are downcycled, even at times requiring additional treatment, into products that can't be recycled.

We then moved the conversation to begin talking about how to spread single-use bag legislation across more municipalities and then county-wide.

Q. How can we work as municipalities to get this to spread to the county level?

- Alan, Mount Kisco: A referendum on the ballot.
- Haven, Hastings: Support towns laterally, all interested focus on one municipality. Write letters to the editor, call, etc.
- Sara, Rye: Identify those communities that are on the cusp of passing legislation so those who have passed legislation already can help and support one by one until a critical mass/tipping point is reached to the county. Create a network of allies.

Q. Which municipality may be able to do this next?

- Mount Kisco and Bedford can work together.

Q. Can we send a copy of our weekly listserv convo to legislators to let them know there is work being done, like a progress report?

- Alicia: Yes!
- Steve: Let's go town by town. Gotta give legislators voters.
- Andrea, Pleasantville: Has a plastic bag outfit/costume to share!

Contact Information:

Our panel of presenters have all agreed to be contacted to help additional municipalities pass similar legislation in their communities. Please do not hesitate to reach out for assistance.

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Sara Goddard (City of Rye)- goddardsw@gmail.com

Steve Wolk (New Castle)- steve@wolkco.com

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In addition, always feel free to reach out to FCWC (fcwc@fcwc.org) and Greenburgh Nature Center (rcarpitella@greenburghnaturecenter.org)

Additional Resources:

Rye Sustainability Committee Retail Shopping Bag Ordinance and link to FAQ and additional resources

<http://www.ryeny.gov/rsbo.cfm>

<http://www.ryesustainability.com/reusable-bag-initiative/>

New Castle Sustainability Advisory Board's Dropbox of files for Reusable Bag Initiative

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/pg3j509mn2zeduy/AAC0ac6Ec2457p--l_clsft_a?dl=0

Hasting on Hudson Single-Use Plastic Bags & Styrofoam Containers Law

<http://www.hastingsgov.org/conservation-commission/pages/single-use-plastic-bags-styrofoam-containers-law-faq>

<http://ecode360.com/30773552?highlight=retail,bags,bag#30773552> for bags

<http://ecode360.com/30773573> for styrofoam

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