

## Another MDI town to consider plastic bag ban

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MOUNT DESERT — Less than a week after voters in Southwest Harbor enacted bans on plastic single-use carryout bags and polystyrene food containers, members of the Mount Desert Board of Selectmen Monday night indicated their strong support for the same prohibitions here.

They voted 4-0 in favor of a motion by Selectmen Rick Mooers, in which he said, “This concept is absolutely wonderful.”

The two ordinances proposed by the town’s sustainability committee are aimed at reducing litter and harm to the environment. The committee is recommending that the selectmen place the ordinances on the warrant for the town meeting in May.

One ordinance would prohibit stores and restaurants from giving or selling plastic single-use carryout bags to customers. It states that stores may, at their discretion, “make a reusable bag or paper bag available to the customer for free or for a fee.”

However, it goes on to say that it is “the express purpose of this ordinance to discourage the use of single-use carryout bags, including paper bags.”

Under the proposed ordinance, customers could bring any type of bag to a store for carrying out merchandize.

The proposed polystyrene ordinance states that no establishment in Mount Desert shall “serve or sell prepared food in – and no food packager shall package food in – polystyrene foam food service containers” and that “no party shall sell or distribute [such containers] within the town of Mount Desert.”

However, the ordinance would allow for exceptions. It states that items pre-packaged in polystyrene outside the town of Mount Desert “may be sold without repackaging those items” and that items may be packaged in polystyrene for shipping to places outside Mount Desert.

The proposed ordinance also states that uncooked meat and seafood may be sold in polystyrene foam containers.

Under both of the proposed ordinances, the town manager or his designee would have primary responsibility for enforcement. If a violation occurred, the store or restaurant owner would be

issued a “written warning notice.” A second violation within a year would bring a fine of up to \$100. Subsequent violations would cost up to \$200 each.

“Each day that a violation occurs shall be considered a subsequent violation,” both of the proposed ordinances state.

If approved by voters at town meeting on May 7, the ordinances would go into effect the following day.

Most of the discussion at the selectmen’s meeting on Monday was about making sure store and restaurant owners are aware of the proposed plastic bag and polystyrene ordinances and to find out if they have any concerns or objections.

“I would say that the majority of restaurants and businesses that would be affected by this are fully aware of this [nationwide] movement and are already making the transition,” said sustainability committee member Gordon Beck.

Nevertheless, he and sustainability committee Chairman Phil Lichtenstein said they intend to make sure no one is left in the dark.

“We’re going to go door to door to as many businesses as possible and explain that this is their chance to speak up,” Lichtenstein said.

Beck added, “The intention is to give them enough of a heads up as they are ordering [supplies] for next season, so they can go into town meeting supportive of this as the right thing to do and to be prepared for it to go into effect the next day.

“It seems to me to be common sense to give them absolutely as much advance notice of something that’s coming.”

Beck said that, after talking with business owners over the next few weeks, the sustainability committee will finalize the language of the proposed ordinances for the selectmen to consider placing on the town meeting warrant.

“I’m wholeheartedly in support of all this,” Mooers said. “I just want to make sure that everybody is aware of what’s coming down the road.

“I think it’s a no-brainer and will probably pass without any major discussion at town meeting.”

Selectman Martha Dudman said of the proposed plastic bag and polystyrene ordinances, “It’s good, not only because it’s the right thing, but also because I think it’s a selling point for our town, to show we’re paying attention to things like this.”