

## **To the Editor: Plastic bag ordinance**

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<https://www.mdislander.com/opinions/to-the-editor-plastic-bag-ordinance>

Together we are a group of concerned Bar Harbor citizens who have brought to the town council two ordinances that will restrict the distribution of single-use plastic bags and polystyrene containers in our town. In cooperation with other concerned citizens from Mount Desert, Tremont and Southwest Harbor, we have reinforced the efforts of four students from our island who have been committed to making a difference.

We have offered educational events related to plastics and the ocean in local libraries and for each town council or select board. We have surveyed local businesses and worked to address any potential barriers to making these ordinances work for them; in fact, many area businesses have already started changing their practices based on these efforts and their convictions.

Why are we (and you) concerned about reducing our use of plastics? Plastic never goes away. It just degrades into smaller and smaller bits (“micro-plastics”) that have become major contaminants to water and food supplies.

We can no longer support use of materials that will last forever to make bags that are “disposable.” In fact, only a small fraction of single-use plastic bags are reused and/or recycled.

Plastic pollution of oceans and waterfront landscapes is a serious problem. We do not want our local waters polluted further — nor do we want our seafood, so important for our economy, to be subject to bans because of contamination. Finally, plastic waste in our town is downright ugly and not an image we want to project to the world.

Why should Bar Harbor limit single-use plastics? A “clean green” environment is part of our image and attracts the tourists that are a local economic engine. In the past, we have seen examples of how a “green” image is beneficial: the enthusiasm and energy generated among those who contributed to a lighting ordinance in Bar Harbor led to the tremendously successful and economically beneficial Acadia Night Sky Festival.

Additionally, since our visitors frequently come from municipalities with even stricter ordinances; they will applaud our local efforts to safeguard our environment.

Why, when so many individuals share these concerns, should we restrict use and distribution of plastic through ordinance rather than voluntary compliance?

While it is true that many businesses have voluntarily quit distributing single-use plastic bags and/or polystyrene containers, many have not for reasons of habit or custom, or the perception that their customers might complain. In the many other Maine towns with similar ordinances, businesses have said that they appreciate these ordinances because they clarify what is and is not permissible, and because they become a “shield” against the occasional customer complaints.

While it is true that restricting single-use plastic bags is but one small step in the struggle against environmental pollutants, it is a positive step for our town as part of its local environmental stewardship.

When you shop, please remember to bring reusable bags and try to limit any purchases that are made of or packaged in materials that will never “go away.”

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