

'Bath Bags' to roll out in advance of plastic bag ban

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BATH — The city will soon have a brand new bag.

“Bath Bags” – free, reusable containers geared toward addressing a ban on the distribution of disposable plastic shopping bags and polystyrene containers – will debut by the end of the month.

The City Council [authorized the ban](#) in separate votes last October and November. The decision followed two “Bring Your Own Bag” forums [hosted in September 2017](#) by Bath’s Solid Waste Advisory Committee, which has studied the issue since that January.

The delay in enacting the ban until April 22 – Earth Day – allows for time to spread the word, as well as allowing businesses to use up their disposable bag stock.

“The committee has been working behind the scenes, largely, trying to come up with a good, effective, education campaign,” Public Works Director Lee Leiner said in an interview Feb. 16, noting that the group is finalizing elements of its bag design, such as a logo and coloring.

“I think we’re getting really close to placing an order, and having those bags ... being manufactured,” he said. “We still are working on distribution plans and timing.”

Bath plans to spend about \$4,000 from City Council contingency funds to potentially fund as many bags; the final design will dictate the final cost. The order could be placed later this month, and the bags available in late March or early April.

“We’re trying to get as many bags as we can for the budget we have,” Leiner said.

A decal is also in the works to be supplied for display by the impacted businesses, informing customers of the change.

“We want a relatively simple but effective way to communicate what’s going on to the consumer,” Leiner explained. “And try to make some sort of uniform message through the city.”

The committee also plans to put the word out via social media, and get the word out with increasing frequency as Earth Day approaches, reminding residents to bring their Bath Bags to the store.

“Just like an annoying commercial, we’re going to try to be out there a lot,” Leiner said.

The policy is intended to clean up Bath’s environment by getting rid of bags that clog storm drains, adversely impact wildlife and waterways, and do not biodegrade.

The ban comprises non-reusable bags distributed at all Bath businesses. Although paper bags would remain available, users will be assessed a charge of 5 cents per bag the first year, 10 cents the second, and 15 cents from the third year forward. Businesses would retain bag revenues.

The escalated fees are meant to wean consumers off store-distributed bags in favor of bringing their own. Businesses can also choose not to offer paper bags.

The ordinance exempts bags without handles used to carry meat, produce, seafood and prescriptions, as well as bags distributed at short-term festivals, fairs and flea markets.

Reusable bags – made for repeated use, and able to be cleaned or disinfected – will be encouraged. If composed of plastic, such bags are to be at least 2.25 mils thick, have handles, and support at least 18 pounds.

Businesses would be able to give away or sell their own bags that meet reusable-bag standards, and “Bath Bags” would be made and distributed as part of the public education process.

Paper bags are considered a substitute for bags made of plastic because they biodegrade in the environment and are made from renewable resources, Leiner has said. However, paper bag manufacturing requires more water and energy, and more fossil fuels are required to transport the heavier containers, according to the committee, which also noted that no paper bags are made in Maine.

The ban on polystyrene foam is aimed at containers typically used for food preparation and sale, with the exception of raw meat and raw and live seafood. Similar to plastic bags, such containers add to litter, do not biodegrade, and require consumption of fossil fuels to make and transport, according to the committee.

Stores could continue to sell polystyrene products like foam cups, but restaurants, for example, will not be allowed to serve prepared coffee in a foam cup.

Copies of both ordinances are available at cityofbath.com, and the documents can also be emailed or picked up at City Hall.

Topsham’s 5-cent fee on single-use shopping bags and ban on the use of polystyrene foam containers took effect last May. Brunswick has also enacted a 5-cent fee on plastic and paper bags; Falmouth has a 5-cent fee on both kinds of bags at stores of more than 10,000 square feet; Freeport bans plastic bags and has a 5-cent fee on paper, and Portland has a 5-cent fee on both types of bags. Cape Elizabeth last fall approved a 5-cent fee on plastic bags and a ban on foam containers.