

Vineyard Conservation Society is proposing the elimination of single-use plastic bags on Martha's Vineyard. Our proposal is specifically aimed at eliminating point-of sale plastic bags with thicknesses of less than 4.0 mils. This proposal exempts in-store bags carrying produce, deli, meats, and bulk foods.

The ban targets these plastic bags because, unlike other bags, they are not suitable for reuse or recycling. They easily tear or puncture and while fewer than 3% are returned by consumers for recycling, many fewer are actually recycled, since the natural resource and financial cost to do so outweighs their resale value. Neither Bruno's nor the MV Refuse District accepts plastic bags in their recycling streams. One ton of bags costs about \$4000 to recycle and can be resold for around \$32. It is much cheaper to just keep making new bags. In the US alone, each year we devote around 1.6 billion gallons of oil to making these bags -- significant resources, that could be put to better use elsewhere.

The targeted bags catch easily in the wind, blowing out of trash cans, trucks and waste management facilities and ending up in our environment. Ten percent of the debris on the US coastline is plastic bags. They are so common we stop really seeing them. But if you start to pay attention, they are everywhere, even here on Martha's Vineyard. As Islanders, the overwhelming plastic pollution in the oceans should be of foremost concern. These plastic bags contribute to significant marine and land mammal deaths, clog storm drain systems and at the very least are detriments to the aesthetic beauty of a place.

There is also a real financial cost to dealing with the bags either in the waste stream or as pollution. The plastic bags are often mistakenly thrown in with single-stream recycling. The cost for handling a ton of recycling has surpassed the cost for a ton of trash. This spells a possible crisis for community recycling, locally and nationwide. The number one contributor to contamination in the recycling stream and the resulting cost increase, is plastic bags. The bags also cost money when we pay our town workers to pick them up. They cost us money if the natural beauty and resources that largely draw people to visit our community are negatively impacted by the bags floating through sunset picnics, beach days, and down otherwise lovely town streets.

There are hundreds of communities in the US that have passed ordinances banning these bags. Most notably, our neighbor Falmouth passed a bylaw in fall 2014, and Nantucket did this 25 YEARS AGO. In addition, in Massachusetts, Provincetown, Barnstable, Harwich, Cambridge, Brookline, Great Barrington, Newton, Newburyport and Manchester-By-the-Sea all have local ordinances, with many more towns, including Truro and Chatham in progress.

And the bans work. The last thing we want to do is hurt local businesses or individual consumers in our community. But, despite concerns, the bans have not proven to do either of these. What does happen is that consumers change their habits, pollution is drastically reduced and valuable natural resources are not ill-used.

We feel this is an important and worthwhile Island issue. Phasing out these single-use bags is becoming the norm in the communities around us. It helps us take care of our Island land and ocean environment and makes a statement that we care, and that we expect our visitors to do the same. Hopefully this sentiment goes beyond just these bags and influences how each of us, resident, or visitor makes small choices to help protect this place we love. Please join us in supporting this proposal.