



# Gloucester Daily Times

## Plastic foam containers banned in Gloucester

Gloucester businesses have 15 months to comply

By Ray Lamont Staff Writer  
Sep 13, 2017

Gloucester businesses using polystyrene or plastic foam cups and to-go food containers will have to find different packaging over the next 15 months after City Council banned the material Tuesday night.

A move to ban the thin plastic bags still used by supermarkets, pharmacies and other retailers remains a work in progress.

The council, on a 7-2 vote, approved the ban on the use of polystyrene when food or beverages are packaged on premises, with an effective date of Jan. 1, 2019. Councilors Steve LeBlanc and Joseph Orlando Jr. were opposed.

The order was one of the two brought forward by Ward 2 Councilor Melissa Cox, but her push to ban the plastic bags was sent back to a council subcommittee for changes and review.

The choices were debated at two public hearings Tuesday, one on each proposal, that drew a packed house to City Hall's Kyrouz Auditorium. A majority of speakers and audience members supported both bans. The proposals were backed by the Clean City Commission, and the Essex-based nonprofit Seaside Sustainability Inc., which led both hard copy and online petition drives in support of the changes.

"I'm extremely happy; it's an important step," Cox said of the polystyrene ban. "I'm optimistic we'll get through the plastic bag ban, too, once we get some issues clarified and questions answered back before the committee."

"The polystyrene containers are really made out of vile stuff," said Council President Joe Ciolino, who voted for the ban on polystyrene.

"I think it would be best suited for health reasons alone to switch (from polystyrene) to something that is microwavable and that people can re-use," Ciolino added. "I'd rather see my food packaged in containers that you can maybe run through the dishwasher once or twice and that you can use again."

"It's going to cost people more, but if I'm a consumer it would help if I know I can get to re-use them and then recycle them," he added. "The way I look at it, this will mean a new day for Gloucester."

Ciolino recused himself from any council debate or decisions regarding the plastic bag ban because his store, The Weathervane gift shop on Main Street, regularly uses the bags.

The costs to local businesses of replacing their foam cups and containers or plastic bags with paper or heavier plastic material weighed heavily on the debate Wednesday.

Deo Braga, who operates the Azorean and Italiano restaurants and eight Dunkin Donuts franchises across Cape Ann, said he understands the push for environmentally friendly change, but hopes residents and officials alike recognize the impact.

"We will have time to comply, and we're going to have to comply," said Braga, who noted that Dunkin Donuts has been working on alternatives for its polystyrene cups. He said his franchises tried paper cups on Cape Ann a few years back.

"People hated them," he said.

He noted that a conversion from styrofoam to paper cups will mean a cost hike of more than 25 percent, and said the change will mean buying "sleeves" for the cups to ease the heat on customer's hands. He said he's not certain whether that would mean an immediate price hike for customers, but said some increase seems inevitable, especially on the heels of other business cost hikes, such as increases in the minimum wage.

"Everything has to come with a cost; nothing is for free," Braga said, "and maybe now, we have to cut more trees to make more and more paper cups, did anyone think of that? The point is, business isn't easy. But if this is the law, we will adapt to it and comply. It is what it is."

LeBlanc and Orlando said the impact on local businesses of a polystyrene ban contributed to their "no" votes.

LeBlanc said local business owners to whom he spoke indicated their containers costs would double with the bans.

"My whole thought process is, I know (polystyrene) is environmentally unfriendly," said LeBlanc, who runs Platinum Painting. "But I also know as a small business owner that you have to keep an eye on costs, and I know a lot of our small businesses are going to be affected by this."

Orlando said he did not believe he or the council had all the information it needed — notably a lack of an economic impact study on the effect upon local business costs — to make an "informed decision" on either ban.

"I respect my fellow councilors and all of the work that so many people have put into this," Orlando said, "but I did not feel I had all the data I needed to vote to put an additional cost burden on our local businesses and on our tourism. I think we have a littering problem more than a plastic and polystyrene problem, and I think there can be other ways to address this."