



# Gloucester Daily Times

## Reviving plastic bag ban proposal

Fine-tuned measure likely to be sent to council

By Ray Lamont Staff Writer

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MIKE

SPRINGER/Staff photo Joe Kelley of Gloucester loads plastic bags filled with groceries into his car Friday at Market Basket in Gloucester. The city is considering a proposal to ban plastic shopping bags. MIKE SPRINGER/Staff photo

One provision makes clear that the small produce bags customers peel off in supermarkets could still be used, another establishes a starting

date, and a third notes that The Open Door food pantry would be exempt for its mail carriers' food collection and other drives if a revised ban on thin plastic bags in Gloucester gains approval.

But all three members of City Council's Ordinance and Administration Subcommittee say they are on board with backing the ban, one that has been two years in the works and is on track to go to the full council next week.

"I didn't support (the proposed ban) the last time because of the way it was written," said subcommittee Chairman and Ward 3 Councilor Steve LeBlanc, who joined Councilor Jamie O'Hara in voting July 31 against positively recommending the ban. "But I can see it, I get it. As long as it is nailed down regarding any questions, I would support it."

O'Hara said he recognizes the plastic bag ban will mean cost increases for local businesses, and that those hikes may be passed onto customers. But, after voting against the ban in its July run before the subcommittee, with only Ward 5 Councilor Sean Nolan in support, he said he also recognizes the need for such a ban.

"I've done a lot more research on it," he said, "and it's clear to me it's something we, as a society, need to wrap our arms around along with other environmental issues. I'm hoping that, through education of our consumers, and getting people used to using reusable bags, we will be able to make it work."

Those sentiments are good news to Ward 2 Councilor Melissa Cox, with Nolan the council's primary advocates for the ban. The plastic bag ban would be the second piece of a two-part environmental package that calls for ban on polystyrene packaging of food and beverages, from coffee cups to "clamshell" containers used by restaurants for to-go orders. But while the council approved the polystyrene ban Sept. 12 at a public hearing that packed City Hall's Kyrouz Auditorium, the full council sent the plastic bag ban back to subcommittee for more work.

The proposal – technically an amendment to the city's existing ordinance governing trash, recycling and litter ordinance – will now specify that consumers and markets will still be able to use produce bags and that The Open Door will have an exemption from the rules. If it becomes reality, the ban would not go into effect until Jan. 1, 2019, the same effective date as the start for the polystyrene ban.

If the proposal gets a recommendation from the committee Monday night, it is expected to go back to the full council for its meeting of Tuesday, Oct. 10.

LeBlanc said he still has some questions – notably about the exception for the produce bags.

"I know I usually wind up with more of those than I do with the regular plastic bags," he said. "It makes me wonder, what's the point?"

But Eric Magers, who heads the Essex-based nonprofit Seaside Sustainability and is a member of the Clean City Commission, which has pushed for ban approval, said the measure marks an important "first step."

"You can only do so much at a time," said Magers, who as a teacher at Manchester Essex Regional High School worked with students to help pass Manchester's plastic bag ban that began in 2014. "They are still an environmental hazard, but I guess the good thing is, they're small."

LeBlanc noted Monday's 6 p.m. committee meeting in City Hall's first-floor conference room is not scheduled as a hearing, but that he will likely allow questions from residents. One question likely to be hashed out will be which city agency will enforce the new regulations.

Cox said she believes enforcement should come from the office of the building inspector, while the Board of Health suggested the Department of Public Works, and the DPW suggested the Board of Health, LeBlanc said. The plastic ban calls for penalties of \$50 for each violation, Cox said.

Magers said track records from the state's other 53 cities and towns that have similar bans in place show enforcement has not been an issue.

"We've found that (businesses) just generally comply," he said, "You don't get too many renegades on something like this. Once it takes effect, people get used to it and adapt to it pretty quickly. Hopefully that will be the case here, too."