

League of Women Voters of Lexington

Election Guide for the Monday March 5, 2018 Lexington municipal election

Question for Town Meeting Member candidates: A motion to ban or reduce plastic bags in Lexington may come before Town Meeting this year. Some nearby towns such as Bedford and Concord have such restrictions. What are your thoughts about banning or reducing plastic bags in Lexington?

Precinct 6

7 three-year terms

Mark V. Andersen

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Response:

I'm running again for town meeting to contribute to transparency and analytical decision making to serve the long-term interests of our Lexington. In parallel, I have setup a new website <http://mylocaltaxes.com> which can be used by voters throughout Massachusetts to benchmark their town's characteristics and performance against other towns. Please check out this website and email mylocaltaxes@gmail.com any comments you may have. The site's aim is to serve you, the voters.

I think taking action on plastic bags is important for all municipalities across our country. The most effective system I have seen is mandatory surcharges for plastic bags, which can serve as a transition to people bringing their own bags. It is not just the elimination of plastic bags which is desired, but the maximum reuse of all bags and cardboard boxes which are available for transporting items. I look forward to Lexington taking action on this issue.

Todd J. Cataldo

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Bebe Fallick

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Community Activities:

- 30-year Town Meeting member
- Town Clerk 1986-96

- Former member: Historical Commission, Conservation Commission
- Current member: Tourism Committee, Monuments and Memorials Committee
- Participated in the writing of the Demolition Delay Bylaw, the Tree Bylaw, and the Tourism Committee Bylaw
- Served as liaison from various committees to the Senior Center Site Committee, the Center Collaborative, the Scenic Byways Committee, and the Heritage Landscape Study
- Served on the Town Manager's Task Force on Demographic Change in Lexington
- Associate member of the Board of the Merriam Hill Association

Response:

Although I find the lack of plastic bags often extremely inconvenient and occasionally physically difficult, I recognize the negative impact of the bags on the environment, and would support a reduction. I have not seen the warrant article at this point, and wonder if the light weight bags available for wet produce and meat and poultry would continue to be available, not only for convenience but also for sanitary reasons.

Edmund C. Grant

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Phone: 781-861-1348

Community Activities:

- Town Meeting Member, 1985-present
- Board of Assessors, 2004-present
- Planning Board, 1990-1996
- Council On Aging 1985-1997
- Selectmen's Fund For Lexington 2011-present

Response:

As to reducing or banning plastic bags, I would consider supporting. I currently shop at Stop and Shop every week using the same environmental, non-plastic bags that I purchased some time ago.

Brian P. Kelley

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Jane Pagett

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Community Activities:

- 30 years as Town Meeting Member

- 7 years on Town Appropriation Committee, 2 as Chair
- 5 years on Minuteman Tech's Regional School Committee
- 3 years on Lexington's Council on Aging

Response:

I would support such an action. Worldwide (especially in third world countries), this ubiquitous trash is a blight on the natural environment, an eyesore around towns and villages, and certainly not the legacy we want to leave to mark our time on this earth.

As part of showing respect to the planet, we need to work with producers and grocers on the economics of different kinds of carry bags and continue the effort to have consumers supply their own bags. Creative incentives may be part of the total picture. Certainly, lighter-than-air, filmy pieces of plastic hanging from the trees should not be part of that picture. I will persist in raising questions around this issue.

Deepika Sawhney

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Community Activities:

Deepika Sawhney has lived in Lexington for over twenty years. She is passionate about education and building inclusive communities which assimilate and celebrate all ages, all abilities, all ethnicities and all income levels. In Lexington, as Fiske PTO President she championed the PTO funded Shade Structure project for the playground and assisted the principal in realizing the outdoor classroom area. In addition to Lexington, she has volunteered in middle schools in Lawrence and Dorchester, and is on the grants committee for two education focused philanthropies. To learn more please visit www.SawhneyForLexington.com

Response:

I believe that we should reduce our dependence on the cheap and easy convenience of plastic bags as the hidden long-term costs are very high. Most bags are not necessary in our day to day lives (except in some purchases such as meat for proper safe food handling), and are not reused. In our community, a very small percentage may be used for lining small waste cans or for picking up after dogs.

Most municipal solid waste in New England is taken to incinerators such as Wheelabrator, North Andover where it is used as fuel to generate electricity. Plastic in various forms is a large portion of this waste. However, not all plastic is so disposed. Some ends up as litter, causing grave environmental damage. In addition, in towns such as ours, where we follow single stream recycling, many well intentioned, but poorly informed, residents throw their plastic bags in with the weekly town recycling. This plastic clogs up the automated sorters used in materials recovery facilities. It wastes time, funds and requires workers to clamber on to large machines in order to remove the clogging material by hand. The correct method of disposal is to recycle unsoiled bags in

local grocery stores. As this is inconvenient, only about 1% of thin film single use plastic bags are recycled each year of 100 billion bags produced annually.

Clearly there are many issues related to our dependence on plastic bags and packaging. 61 towns in MA including Bedford and Arlington have banned plastic bags by all business establishments. These bans were proposed in order to

- promote environmentally sustainable practices
- reduce pollution caused by the photo degradation of such plastic in soil and water, and their detrimental effect on the natural environment
- reduce the negative impacts on storm drainage systems and recycling facilities

Ideally, we should reduce our dependence on all forms of non - medical, single use plastic, be it bags, produce clamshells, blister packaging etc. However, changing industry and consumer behavior is a slow and difficult process which requires careful study. For example: Sudden increased operational costs for local businesses without giving them and their customers time to adapt would not be viable. Simply switching to paper bags is also not environmentally viable. Another consideration: any steps taken in Lexington should ideally be taken in tandem with the neighboring towns of Burlington and Waltham. Many Lexington residents do their daily shopping in these towns and may choose to shop there exclusively after a ban, which will be detrimental to Lexington businesses.

Therefore, I would recommend a phased process to achieve these goals. Learning from the successes in towns in California, NY and DC, we could start with a 10-25 cent charge per bag at point of purchase leading to an eventual ban of plastic bags. In order to ensure success for such an effort we should couple it with similar efforts in neighboring towns, and an in-town campaign to raise awareness.

Resources: MassGreen.org, Sierraclub.org, Huffingtonpost.com

Ramin Taraz

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Community Activities:

Recently joint CAC

Response:

I would like to see data on whether these laws have actually caused a reduction in number of plastic bags that end up in trash. At the same time, I would like to see data on what is replacing plastic bags in these towns. I would support such policy in Lexington if the ban has shown a reduction of plastic bags without having shifted the problem to another form of trash.

Vinita Verma

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Phone: 781-862-2580

Community Activities:

- Lead coach for Science Olympiad teams at Diamond where my teams have consistently placed first in various competitions
- Big Backyard school events
- Various science and art related school activities
- Volunteer at Shishu Bharti, an Indian School which runs every Sunday at LHS
- Volunteer at Girls and Boys Scouts' activities
- Active volunteer for cultural and sports events town wide

Response:

I am in full support on banning or reducing plastic bags in Lexington. There is a proof to support this ban. Canberra, capital of Australia had banned the single-use plastic bags in 2011. In the six months prior to the ban, 266 tons of plastic bags were buried in landfill. Two years later, 171 tons of plastic bags were thrown away marking a 36% reduction in landfill.

The plastic bags should be banned for the following reasons:

1. **Plastic bags are not easy to recycle** – Plastic bags are said to present significant challenge in terms of recycling. Recycling facilities do not have the capacity to recycle plastic bags and thus do not accept them. The actual recycling rate is higher as is done in a special facility and thus more tax money is used.
2. **Plastic bags do not degrade** – Petroleum based plastic bags never degrade. Therefore, it adds to the landfills. Instead of degrading it gets broken down into small pieces which are swept down and end up in ocean.
3. **Plastic bags are harmful to wildlife and marine life** – Birds, animals and marine creatures such as sea turtles and fish often ingest pieces of plastic bags causing infection, suffocation and at times death.
4. **Plastic bags are harmful to human health** – Chemicals such as PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyl) together with PAHs (Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons) present in plastic bags can disrupt the normal functioning of hormones in the human body. Once the marine animals like fish consume these chemicals, it can easily reach humans if they consume those contaminated fish. They could develop cancer or other serious conditions.
5. **It helps spread awareness** – When we ban plastic bags, we keep our environment clean and safe and at the same time send message globally about the importance of environment protection.
6. **Incentive to research on eco-friendly technology** - With a ban on plastic bags, there would be an incentive to improve on eco-friendly technology.

Little history of single-use plastic bags:

The single-use plastic bag is also known as “the T-shirt plastic bag”, was designed in 1965, which we are given in a grocery store check-out line. By 1982, relatively few stores were using it and paper bags was preferred by customers. By 1985, 75% of supermarkets were offering plastic bags to their customers. Within the next decade, the plastic bag had captured 80% of the market. And now Americans are using over 100 billion plastic bags each year. Just how did the plastic bag become both so popular in our society and so problematic to the environment?



The plastic bag won hearts and minds of businesses because of the cheaper cost to purchase than paper bags. The paper bag can cost up to four times that of a plastic bag does. Plastic bags are also waterproof and stronger than paper bags—they can carry 1000 times their own weight. Consumers like it because of the convenience. In fact, in our modern lives, it has become part of us. However, the convenience of these plastic come at a very high cost to the environment and negatively affects human health. Several cities globally have begun banning the use of plastic bags while some have enforced restricted laws against the use of plastic bags because of its negative effects.



The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is urging everyone to stop the excessive, wasteful use of single-use plastic to save the world's seas and oceans from irreversible damage before it is too late.

Up to 80% of all litter in the oceans are made of plastic. Each year, more than 8 million metric tons of plastic end up in oceans, wreaking havoc on marine wildlife, fisheries and tourism, and cost at least \$8 billion in damage to marine ecosystems. According to estimates, by 2050, oceans will have more plastic than fish if present trends are not stopped. According to estimates, by 2050, 99% of earth's seabirds will have ingested plastic.

The Next Step: We should do our part to maintain the integrity of life in the ocean and land. We want to have a clean and safe environment for all the living beings on earth for now and generations to come. Therefore, I would propose a complete ban on single-use plastic bags and that customers should be charged money for thicker reusable plastic bags at stores. We should have signs posted everywhere in town to raise awareness for the same. We could start an awareness program starting from elementary schools. This act will inculcate sense of responsibility in customers and enforce them to be mindful about whether they need a bag for each purchase or get reusable bags from home.