

PLEASANTVILLE REUSABLE BAG INITIATIVE FAQs



SUMMARY

No store is permitted to distribute single-use plastic bags.

Exceptions:

- Meat, fish, and produce plastic bags
- Dry cleaning bags
- Large bags (28" by 36" or larger)

Stores may sell paper bags for 5 cents each. The stores keep the bag fees, which must be displayed separately on customer receipts. Stores may also sell reusable bags.

This measure is part of a larger educational campaign to encourage the use of reusable bags, contributing to a cleaner, healthier environment in Pleasantville and beyond. Single-use, disposable plastic bags are a major source of litter and pollution. These bags do not biodegrade and are difficult to recycle. (Westchester County does not recycle them.) Most are not used more than once. Paper bags are also harmful to the environment due to the amount of energy and water used to produce them, and the energy required to transport them.

BACKGROUND

Q: Why do we need to restrict the use of plastic shopping bags?

A: Most plastic bags are used for an average of only 12 minutes before being discarded. But the damage they cause is lasting. These bags often end up polluting our waterways, clogging sewers, endangering marine life, and causing unsightly litter. Plastic bags can take hundreds of years, if not longer, to decompose. As plastic breaks down, the particles contaminate the soil and water and eventually end up in our food chain. Plastic bags are difficult to recycle and consume nonrenewable natural resources.

Plastic bags:

- Cause litter and pollution
- Do not biodegrade
- Endanger wildlife
- Break down into particles that are found in our food chain
- Only a small percentage of plastic bags are recycled

Q: Why is there a charge for paper bags?

A: This will encourage residents to bring their own bags, which is the goal of this ordinance. Studies have shown that bag fees reduce single-use bag usage. Prior to being given a paper bag, customers must be asked if they want a bag and be informed that it will cost 5 cents. The bag fees must be included on the customer's receipt. Merchants will keep the fee to offset any bag costs. While paper bags are recyclable, they contribute to climate change.

Paper bags:

- 14 million trees are cut annually to produce these bags
- Thousands of gallons of water and three tons of woodchips are used to produce 1 ton of paper pulp
- Making the paper and transporting the bags uses significant amounts of fossil fuels

Q: Why aren't paper bags banned?

A: The objective of the initiative is to promote the use of reusable bags by reducing our dependence on single-use bags. When shoppers forget their reusable bags, they will still have the option of purchasing paper bags to carry their items out of the store.

Q: Can education help?

A: Yes, PleasantvilleRecycles is committed to educating the community about the downside of nonreusable bags. Check PleasantvilleRecycles.org for resources. Additionally, PleasantvilleRecycles will share the information at Pleasantville Day and other community events.

Q: Then why do we need to pass new legislation?

A: Sometimes education alone is not enough to change ingrained habits. As members of a community, we accept regulations that are imposed on us every day: We're not allowed to litter; we must recycle; we are required to pick up after our dogs; we must use a seatbelt. Our proposed legislation is similar to these forms of legislation, all of which have been accompanied by an educational campaign to build awareness of the issues. Retail establishments also impose rules that shoppers readily accept: Costco, for example, does not provide any bags to customers. Whole Foods does not offer plastic bags.

Q: Is this a new concept?

A: No. Many nearby communities have passed similar ordinances, including New Castle, Hastings, Larchmont, Mamaroneck, the city of Rye, Westport (CT), East Hampton, and Southampton. Additionally, other towns and villages in Westchester, such as Ossining, Croton-on-Hudson, Bedford/Mt. Kisco, and Sleepy Hollow, are developing similar ordinances. There are hundreds of towns, cities, states, and countries around the world that restrict or ban single-use shopping bags, and the number is growing consistently.

Q: Will this ordinance hurt local businesses?

A: No! Research has provided evidence that the long-term effects on stores are very positive. The number of single-use bags used by shoppers will decrease significantly, thereby reducing the business owners' costs.

Q: Won't the ordinance hurt consumers?

A: Most of us already have several reusable bags on hand, and more will be available for a minimal cost.

THE PROPOSED ORDINANCE

Q: To whom does the Reusable Bag Ordinance apply?

A: It targets retail transactions only.

Q: Who is exempt?

A: The ordinance does not apply to bags used in the home or to the sales of goods at yard sales, tag sales, other sales by residents at their home, and sales by nonprofit organizations.

Q: What plastic bags will still be supplied?

A: The ordinance does not apply to very thin plastic bags used for produce, meats, dry cleaning, newspapers, or other items. Additionally, thick plastic bags—those that at least 2.25 mils thick and sometimes called "reusable" shopping bags—are allowed, as are those measuring 28" by 36" or larger.

Q: How will retailers compensate for not being allowed to use single-use plastic shopping bags?

A: They will sell reusable bags and recyclable paper bags.

Q: What about the Pleasantville Farmers Market?

A: The Farmers Market will need to comply with the ordinance, although it has a year from the effective date to implement the restrictions.

Q: What is the effective date of the ordinance?

A: Six months after the date of passage.

Q: What if a store cannot comply within the six-month time frame?

A: A retail establishment can petition the Village for an additional six months of relief from the ordinance.

Q: What is a “recyclable paper bag”?

A: It (1) contains no old growth fiber; (2) is 100% recyclable; (3) contains a minimum of 40% post-consumer recycled content; and (4) displays the word “Recyclable” on the outside.

Q: What is a “reusable bag”?

A: A bag with handles that is specifically designed and manufactured for multiple reuse and: (1) Is machine washable or easily cleaned or disinfected; (2) Does not contain lead, cadmium, or any other heavy metal in toxic amounts, as defined by applicable State and Federal standards and regulations for packaging or reusable bags; (3) If made of plastic, is a minimum of at least 2.25 mils (thousandths of an inch) thick; and (4) Has a minimum lifetime of 125 uses, which for purposes of this subdivision, means the capability of carrying a minimum of 22 pounds 125 times over a distance of at least 175 feet.

Q: What if I forget my reusable bags?

A: Retailers can sell reusable shopping bags and recyclable paper bags (for at five cents per bag). Retailers are encouraged to promote the use of reusable bags and sell them with their logo, if desired.

Q: I already reuse my plastic bags. I bring them when I shop, use them to line my trash bin, or pick up dog waste! Why change things?

A: We congratulate you on reusing your plastic bags, but the fact is that most people do not. Also, these bags cannot be reused often, whereas reusable bags can be used hundreds of times. It is not necessary to line every small wastebasket with a bag—consider switch to using one large plastic bag for all your garbage. For dog waste, use newspaper bags and bags from packaging, which will still be available as well. In addition, garbage bags and other plastic bags will still be available for purchase.

Q: What happens if something spills in my reusable bag?

A: Reusable bags can be cleaned. Cloth bags can be included in any load of laundry. Reusable plastic bags can be wiped down with a disinfecting cleaner.

Q: I’ve heard that reusable bags contain a lot of bacteria. What do I do about that?

A: Periodically clean your reusable bags, and always wash any food you purchase. The food you purchase has bacteria on it and needs to be washed—no matter what kind of bag you use. Produce and deli meat bags, which will help contain much of the bacteria, are not affected by this ordinance.

Q: How will I carry my purchases if I forget to bring my reusable bags to the store?

A: Stores will be able to provide sell paper and reusable bags. But if you have just a few items, consider not using a bag at all and carry your purchases in your hands or cart.

Q: We already have so many bigger problems and issues. Should we really be spending our time on this?

A: Our health and climate change are two of the biggest issues we face. We owe it to our community and children to focus on them. Also, the solution is relatively easy to adopt, as the experience in so many other localities has shown.

Q: Why should I spend money on reusable bags when I get plastic bags for free?

A: There is minimal cost associated with purchasing a few reusable bags. Often you can acquire reusable bags for free from merchants, events, and conferences, and they last a long time.

Q: Aren't reusable bags made out of plastic too?

A: Reusable bags can be made from a variety of materials. Some are indeed made from plastic, often recycled plastic. All reusable bags, even when made out of plastic, last much longer than single-use bags and have a significantly smaller environmental impact.

Q: How do I remember to take my bags with me?

A: The more often you do it, the sooner it will become a habit. These ideas can help:

- Keep your bags in your car or purse
- Put something important in your bags (wallet, phone, etc.)
- Put a note inside the front door of your home and in your car reminding you to take them

FOR MERCHANTS

Q: Will I be able to market my store brand with my bags?

A: Paper bags can continue to include your store logo. Also, consider selling reusable bags with your logo on them. These bags can be used many times and can carry your message throughout town. People like to use attractive reusable bags even when they're not shopping. Show the community you encourage sustainable solutions—a great marketing message to people who care about preserving our environment for future generations.

Q: Won't people just shop outside of Pleasantville? Will we lose customers?

A: No. There is no evidence that shoppers will change their buying habits based on the history in municipalities where similar laws have been passed.

For more information, visit PleasantvilleRecycles.org