

Mount Desert Islander

Real People, Real Places, Real News

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By Becky Pritchard
bpritchard@mdislander.com

PLASTICS/1: *Bar Harbor gets on board*

BAR HARBOR — Single-use plastic bags for carrying out purchases from stores and polystyrene (Styrofoam) containers will be prohibited in two of four Mount Desert Island towns beginning next month.

Following a public hearing Tuesday, the Bar Harbor Town Council enacted new ordinances to ban single-use carryout bags, and polystyrene food service containers from Bar Harbor businesses.

Both ordinances take effect on Feb. 14. However, they carry a grace period through December 2019 to allow businesses to “deplete existing inventory,” according to the ordinances.

During the public hearing prior to the vote on single-use carryout plastic bags, most comments were in favor of the ban.

But a Bar Harbor shop owner, who did not give his full name, noted that plastic bags would continue to be

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brought to the island from Walmart and other large Ellsworth stores not affected by the ordinance.

In answer to this comment, resident Donna Karlson announced her intention of “bringing in my whole collection of totes the next time I go to Walmart.” Karlson said her one concern with the ban was making sure low-income families could afford reusable bags.

She suggested making bags available through the food pantry. “I’m leaning towards the ban,” she concluded.

Julie Veilleux, who owns Window Panes with her husband Greg, spoke in favor of the ban as a shop owner. She began describing the view from her window: “For the last seven or eight years we’ve witnessed a plastic bag high up in a neighbor’s tree. Every year it becomes more shredded and withered, but it’s still there.”

“Visitors buy things, then they throw the bags away as they try to fit their things in their luggage,” Veilleux said. She said she felt the ban would change the behavior of shop employees and customers who have become “too comfortable with plastic. It’s just become too convenient.”

“Let’s work together to make MDI single-use plastic bag free,” she concluded.

“Here we are in Acadia National Park: people come here not just for the stores, but for the natural beauty, as well,” resident Peter Jeffery said. The ban could be a selling point for Bar Harbor, that we’re committed to preserving the beauty of Acadia National Park.”

Logan Wilbur and Charlotte Partin, two of the high school students who introduced the proposed ordinance to the town council last month, spoke at the end of the public hearing.

“It’s very encouraging to hear all of the support of this ban,” Partin said, calling plastic pollution “a very urgent matter.”

Town councilors discussed the matter briefly before voting. Councilor Matthew Hochman said, “We need to start making the change and hope that other people will [also] make that change. We have to start somewhere.”

He told the high school students present, “Your work should be an inspiration to all of us.”

Councilor Judith Noonan said she can remember a time when “we managed to survive without the plastic bags. And I think we can survive again.”

The ordinances were each approved by a vote of 5-2, with Gary Friedmann, Erin Cough, Joe Minutolo, Noonan and Hochman voting in favor. Councilors Paul Paradis and Stephen Coston, who cast the dissenting votes, did not comment. At a council meeting last month, both said they were in favor of limiting plastic use, but did not want to institute new ordinances to regulate it.

(last line omitted in original)