

Tara Zrinski's resolution recommending restriction of single-use plastic bags and straws is approved

The Bethlehem Gadfly Climate Action Plan, Environmental Advisory Council, Serious Issues January 27, 2019

(The latest in a series of posts relating to Bethlehem's Climate Action Plan

and Environmental Advisory Council)

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Gadfly:

Thursday night January 24, Northampton County Council passed Tara Zrinski's resolution recommending to all municipalities the concept of banning single-use plastic bags and straws.

Zrinski has described the purpose of her resolution this way: "The resolution is not a ban on the use of bags or straws themselves but the recommendation that they be made of biodegradable materials. Single use plastic is one of the most wasteful forms of pollution to our earth and oceans. By using compostable straws and reusable or compostable shopping bags, we save tons of waste in landfills and oceans that would otherwise accumulate for 1000's of years. Plastic waste is one of many types of wastes that take too long to decompose. Normally, plastic items can take up to 1000 years to decompose in landfills. But plastic bags we use in our everyday life take 10-1000 years to decompose, while plastic bottles can take 450 years or more. This resolution will then serve as a template for distribution to the municipalities that will have the authority to enforce it. I think this is an important step to show leadership in the direction towards environmental responsibility and a commitment from the County to support the reduction of plastic that is



accumulating in our landfills and eventually makes its way to our oceans.”

[northampton county council resolution banning plastic bags](#)

Linked above you'll find a preliminary version of the resolution that passed 6-2-1 (2 no's and one “present”). A vote of “present” is used when the person does not want to vote yes or no and does not have a reason for abstention. The final version of the resolution will be in slightly revised form.

Chris Bartleson from the city of Bethlehem spoke in support of the resolution during the public comment period at the Open Space Committee meeting in the afternoon, stating 349 cities, towns, counties, and/or states in the United States have bans in place. (In Pennsylvania, the only town is Narberth.) Additionally, there were about a dozen citizens there to support the resolution that was passed later that evening in full Council, including Breena Holland from Lehigh University and a few of her students. The shame is they arrived a few minutes late and missed the public comment time.

Dale Sourback (Bethlehem Township), Peg Church, and Rik Sherry (both from the city of Bethlehem) all spoke in favor of the ban during the public comment period in the evening session. Dale supported the resolution and referenced volunteering for Meals and Wheels and hoping to see changes within that system to reduce plastic waste. Peg referenced the whales dying after ingesting plastic, the infamous picture of the turtle with a straw stuck in his nostril, and the fact that there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish by the end of the century. Rik spoke of his paddling/teaching experiences on the Delaware River with students. He indicated the trips incorporated clean-ups of the river and stressed the large number of plastic bags that were pulled out of the river.

On Page 3 of the version of the resolution linked above, Section 2 will be struck out of the final version. Zrinski stated that if a municipality chooses to create an ordinance banning single-use plastic bags and straws, it should determine how to implement the ban, including charging fees or not.

There was a bit of push back from Council Members Cusick, Ferraro, and Dietz. Dietz talked about the senior citizens who use plastic bags to pick up dog poo. What will they do? He also mentioned that it takes more energy to produce paper bags than plastic. I haven't looked this up, but he missed the point completely. It is not the monies collected that is important; in fact, some places don't have fees at all. It is not the goal to argue over whether plastic or paper creates more devastating greenhouse gases. The goal is the paradigm shift created for the public to always bring reusable bags no matter where you shop. Then you do not contribute to greenhouse gas emissions of bag production at all, and you will not pay any fees.

I bring my bags into department stores, farmer's markets, farm stands, grocery stores.

Make thinking sustainably when being a consumer the norm, not the exception!

Kathy

(Gadfly's understanding is that a proposal from our EAC for a resolution or ordinance pertaining to plastic bags is in the pipeline.)