

# Should Bethlehem ban single-use plastic bags?

The Bethlehem Gadfly Uncategorized April 4, 2019

**Take the “Connecting Bethlehem” survey**

*(The latest in a series of posts relating to the environment, Bethlehem’s Climate Action Plan, Bethlehem’s Environmental Advisory Council)*

The headline says it all! What do you think?

*Nicole Radzievich, “Should Bethlehem ban single-use plastic bags?” Morning Call, April 2, 2019.*

Taking aim at plastic pollution, the city’s Environmental Advisory Committee wants to prohibit city businesses from offering single-use plastic bags to customers to carry out their purchases and require businesses to charge a 10-cent fee at the point of sale on paper bags, many of which aren’t recycled.

**[See the EAC proposal here:  
EAC.Plastic.Bag.Ordinance.Proposal]**

“With everything going on in Washington, we thought that if they’re not going to do anything, this is something we can do here and make an impact,” said Elizabeth Behrend, EAC member and head of the waste reduction committee. “It’s important that we put forth the effort to care for our environment.”

Narberth, Montgomery County, in October became the first borough in Pennsylvania to regulate plastic bags, imposing a 10-cent fee on the bags and requiring customers to ask for plastic straws rather than they being distributed by default. From Boston to Seattle, individual municipalities have imposed either fees or bans on plastic bags in recent years. In January, Northampton County Council passed a resolution calling for municipalities to rein in plastic consumption, stopping short of imposing fees on single-use plastic bags. County Councilwoman Tara Zrinski said she didn’t have enough support among her colleagues to include fees and who wanted to get the resolution



passed. Zrinski said there is a notion — which she doesn't ascribe to — that fees on bags are akin to a tax on the poor. She said many groceries in poorer neighborhoods don't offer bags and said there are grant opportunities that could purchase reusable bags for certain neighborhoods.

Alex Baloga, president of the Pennsylvania Food Merchants Association, said there are better ways to address issues plastic bags pose than forcing stores to levy fees on customers or banning them all together. He said the focus should be on education and recycling — which businesses are doing in-store.

If and how this plastic bag ban will play out in Bethlehem is unclear. The EAC submitted its proposal to City Council in February and Behrend made her pitch to City Council earlier this month during courtesy of the floor when anyone can talk about anything. Council hasn't scheduled any committee meetings on it.

City Council President Adam Waldron said the proposal won't be considered unless a council member calls for it to be discussed. Councilman J. William Reynolds, chairman of the Human Resources and Environment Committee, said he agrees that plastic bag use needs to be reduced but the question is the most effective in doing that. Reynolds, who pushed for the city's first climate action plan, said he had to review the specifics of the proposal before taking a position and looked forward to hearing what Mayor Robert Donchez's administration has to say about it.

In an interview Donchez said he was not ready to take a position on the proposal until its vetted, but there's merit in having a discussion. He said he would like to see how policies have played out in cities as large and diverse as Bethlehem. Initially, he said, he has concerns about imposing fees on bags.

Behrend said the proposal would serve as a starting point for discussion and the EAC is open to feedback. Her committee is also working on plans to get the schools involved. The idea is to launch coloring contests for students to design reusable bags that could be sold at fundraisers to get the word out about the dangers of plastic bags.

It sounds like this proposal might need a little push. If you support consideration of such a ban, nudging local officials seems in order. Note that contact info for the Mayor and councilpersons can be found on the Gadfly sidebar.

Gadfly will take a look at the politics of the Narberth proposal next time. (photo credit Douglas Graves/Bethlehem Press)

*It's Thursday, April 4, do you know where your local Climate Action Plan is?*

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