

Sponsors: Knox/Potrzuski

**Discussion~Direction~Decision
regarding the ban/taxation of plastic bags**

Note: Bags for Change will provide a 5 minute presentation.

Why create legislation to reduce the number of disposable plastic bags provided in Sitka?

- Plastics are getting into our food and our bodies^{1,2,3}.
- Toxins from plastics are affecting reproductive health in children and infants, women and men⁴ and could affect fish health⁵.
- Plastics last forever in the environment and are made from petrochemicals (oil).
- Concentrations of microplastics are dramatically increasing in the Pacific Ocean⁶.
- Plastic bags can damage and kill wildlife. Plastic bags litter our community and increase the waste we must ship south. Two million bags are given away each year at our two grocery stores costing stores (and consumers) ~\$100,000 yearly.
- Using fewer disposable bags is a sustainable behavior we can choose to change.

Pros and Cons of fee vs. ban vs. ballot question options for single use bag reduction

Option 1 – Assembly ordinance - fee for single use bags (Bags for Change preferred option)

Pros

- Customers have a choice; they can either bring bags or pay to get bags.
- Fees generated would help fund schools and reduce residential electricity rates.
- Likely to have the greatest impact on reduction because it incentivizes behavior change and forces customers to make a conscious decision to purchase a bag.⁷
- Still lets people have bags (plastic or paper) if they want them.

Cons

- Requires tracking & effort to collect & remit the fees at stores and City.
- Fee must start high or rise regularly to discourage return to disposable bag use.
- People will pay more money at the stores if they do not bring their own bags.

Option 2 – Assembly ordinance - bag ban

Pros

- Relatively easy and cheap to implement – just stop providing bags.
- Simple; no tracking required.
- Lead to a greater reduction of plastic in the environment.

Cons

- Strict regulation is needed to discourage a move to thicker plastic disposable bags.
- Does not generate funds for schools or electrical rates.
- No choice for people; they must bring their own bags or buy reusable bags at store.
- To avoid moving people to paper disposable bags and potential lawsuits, a fee generally needs to be implemented on paper bags⁸.

Option 3 – Place a question for a bag fee or ban on the ballot

Pros

- The people of Sitka ultimately decide.

Cons

- There will be a cost of putting it on the ballot.
- It will substantially add time to the implementation of future legislation.

Community Bag Polling results

Two polls – one formal and one informal – were conducted in Sitka.

The formal poll was conducted from 2-4 pm on Saturday, February 10 at all three of Sitka's grocery stores (SeaMart, AC Lakeside, and Market Center). Seven Mt. Edgecumbe High School students with the help and coaching of three adult volunteers stopped nearly every shopper into those stores and asked them to answer a 1-minute poll about plastic bags in Sitka. We estimate that between ½ to 2/3 of the shoppers who entered the stores from 2-4 pm answered the poll.

All poll-answerers were 18 years old or older and currently live in Sitka. Except for demographic information, only one question was asked.

In Sitka, should single-use disposable plastic bags be:

A) Banned = 48 (19%)

B) Provided, but for a fee that would be used to support Sitka Schools and to reduce residents electric costs, = 129 (51.2%)

C) Handed out for free, = 42 (16.7%)

D) No opinion = 33 (13.1%)

An informal poll was posted on Sitka Chatters Facebook page on January 17, 2018. It gave the options of No Action, Ban or Fee (the fee option did not explain the intended use of the funds).

Informal poll results on 2/11/2018: 195 = No Action; 225 = Take action on bags (132 = Ban; 93 = Fee).

¹ Kinver, M. 2017. Video captures moment plastic enters food chain. BBC News. March 11, 2017.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-39217985>

² Rochman, Chelsea M., Akbar Tahir, Susan L. Williams, Dolores V. Baxa, Rosalyn Lam, Jeffrey T. Miller, Foo-Ching Teh, Shinta Werorilangi, & Swee J. Teh. 2015. Anthropogenic debris in seafood: Plastic debris and fibers from textiles in fish and bivalves sold for human consumption. Scientific Reports 5, Article number: 14340 (2015).

<http://www.nature.com/articles/srep14340#results>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/feb/14/sea-to-plate-plastic-got-into-fish>

⁴ Yang CZ, Yaniger SI, Jordan VC, Klein DJ, Bittner GD. 2011. Most plastic products release estrogenic chemicals: a potential health problem that can be solved. Environ Health Perspect 119:989–996.996; doi:[Online 2 March 2011]10.1289/ehp.1003220 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3222987/>

⁵ Ingested plastic transfers hazardous chemicals to fish and induces hepatic stress; C.M. Rochman, E. Hoh, T. Kurobe, & S.J. The, <http://www.nature.com/articles/srep03263>

⁶ 15-Year Study Indicates Huge Increase in Pacific Ocean Microplastics;

<https://www.newsdeeply.com/oceans/articles/2018/02/13/fifteen-year-study-indicates-pacific-ocean-microplastics-are-getting-worse>

⁷ <https://www.biocycle.net/2016/08/15/ubiquitous-plastic-bag/>

⁸ <https://www.plasticbaglaws.org/litigation/>