



RE: Addressing Single Use Plastics in Emerson

Mayor DiPaola,

In the last year, our Commission has received a few inquiries from residents regarding the concept of a “plastic bag ban.” We were pleased to see that residents were interested in discussing this topic – likely inspired increased media coverage as well as local actions – with hundreds of cities and counties across the U.S. passing laws that ban or tax them since 2007.

Our Commission has discussed the topic at length and wanted to offer a few clarifying points. Plastic shopping bags commonly seen at our local grocery stores are not the core issue. In fact, many retailers based in Emerson currently offer plastic bags already made of recyclable content – which are noted on each bag, if you look closely. To those interested in the issue of plastics and how best to ensure the well-being of Emerson and our surrounding areas, we encourage residents to become educated on the term, “single-use plastic.”

Put simply, single-use plastics are goods that are made primarily from fossil fuel-based chemicals (petrochemicals) and are meant to be disposed of right after use – often, in mere minutes. Single-use plastics are most commonly used for packaging and serviceware, such as bottles, wrappers, straws – and yes, shopping bags. In most instances, its single-use plastics that contribute to land and waterway litter we see and creates the kind of plastic production that contributes to planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions.

What can the Borough of Emerson do about this concern?

Pursuing a “plastic bag ban” or ban on all single-use plastics is a decision not to be taken lightly. While our Commission is open to pursuing this conversation, there are impactful and immediate steps we can all take to eliminate the use of single-use plastics, thus decreasing its damage on our own neighborhood and beyond. As a team, we’re committed to working on the following three items to help curb the impact of single-use plastic on our Family Town:

First and foremost, recycling more plastic, more frequently, reduces its footprint. We are committed to expanding recycling resources and education, to best equip Emerson families to make the right actions when it comes to purchasing and using plastic items, and how best to dispose of them. One tool to mention is the Borough’s “Recycling Coach” – an interactive resource on the Borough website that helps explain how and when to best recycle items properly.

Second, we understand that with our changing landscape we are about to welcome new businesses to town in the years to come. Before pursuing an aggressive ban, our Commission has committed to building strong stakeholder relationships with Borough-based businesses in an effort to not only take in their feedback on plastics, but personally motivate their operations to adopt change.

And lastly, we've identified an opportunity to become more involved with Borough events to ensure a "zero-waste" execution. For instance, eliminating the use of single-use plastic items, increasing recycling bins and educating on-site at large gatherings (such as our annual Summer Picnic) can make a big impact over time – while keeping our neighborhood and parks cleaner in the process.



We're excited to get started on this work and are available for questions from you and the Governing Body, if needed.

Thank you,
Stephanie Clark
Chair, Emerson Environmental Commission