Why Are Communities Choosing to Limit Distribution of Single-use Plastic Bags?

✓ They are wasteful

In recent years, Northampton residents received an estimated ten million plastic shopping bags annually. The majority are used for minutes before being discarded. Statistics as to the percentage of US trash they comprise are based on weight and do not accurately represent the situation. Continuing to use disposable bags reinforces a troubling "throw-away" mentality.

✓ They are difficult to recycle

Plastic bags cannot be placed in curbside recycling bins because they create litter and clog sorting machinery at recycling facilities. Some grocers provide collection sites, but a very small fraction of bags dispensed in stores are actually collected. In addition, they are often made into products that are not recyclable, such as plastic lumber.

✓ They don't biodegrade

Plastic takes hundreds of years to photodegrade. As the bags break into smaller and smaller pieces, they attract contaminants and enter soil, water and wildlife.

✓ They spoil the landscape

Flyaway bags create eyesores, when caught in fences, trees and brush. Loose bags can also clog storm drains and waterways, exacerbating flooding.

✓ They are dangerous to wildlife

Animals and aquatic life get caught in or ingest plastic bags or pieces of bags. Small bits of plastic can enter the food chain, creating concerns for fish and meat consumption.

✓ They are not sustainable

The Earth has a limited amount of natural gas and petroleum, the natural resource from which plastic bags are made. There are more important uses for the remaining quantity of this resource.

✓ They are expensive

While single-use plastic bags are inexpensive to manufacture, their producers take no responsibility for their product's long-term impact. They are expensive to recycle and expensive to remove from the environment. It is unfair to lay the burden of their impact on taxpayers and future generations.

For these reasons, the City of Northampton has joined the ranks of hundreds of communities choosing to discourage the use of single plastic bags via bans and fees. In addition to the Massachusetts communities of Brookline, Cambridge, Great Barrington, Manchester, Nantucket, Newburyport, and Provincetown, we join 88 municipalities in California, municipalities in ten other states and the countries of Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Great Britain, Haiti, Italy, Ireland, Mali, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tanzania in this proactive effort.

