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Cambridge City Council Votes to Ban Plastic Bags

[CAMBRIDGE, MA March 31, 2015] The Cambridge City Council last night voted 8-1 to ban single-use, lightweight plastic carryout bags. Cambridge's action made it the largest city on the East Coast to institute restrictions on plastic bags, joining nine other Massachusetts communities: Brookline, Falmouth, Great Barrington, Manchester, Marblehead, Nantucket, Newburyport, Newton and Provincetown.

The legislation also makes Cambridge the first municipality in the Commonwealth to require that retailers charge a fee for paper bags, in order to further encourage the switch to bring-your-own reusable bags.

City Councillors voting in favor included Mayor David P. Maher, Dennis Benzan, Dennis Carlone, Leland Cheung, Craig Kelley, Nadeem Mazen, Marc McGovern, and Denise Simmons. "I join with my colleagues to acknowledge all of the city officials, environmental advocates, and Cambridge residents who have been working to advance this legislation for many years," said Councillor Carlone. "We survived without plastic before, and we will do it again."

"The Cambridge City Council has shown true leadership with this vote," said Emily Norton, Director of the Sierra Club Massachusetts chapter. "Reducing plastic pollution of all kinds, including bags, is a high priority for us because of its ubiquity and destructive impacts. Plastic bags litter our roads and waterways, and marine animals mistake them for food, causing them to suffocate and die. Plastic also never degrades but rather ends up as tiny "microplastic" which have been found inside crustaceans, barnacles, worms and fish, and eventually in the bodies of those at the top of the food chain: us."

"Cambridge has long been a policy leader in Massachusetts," said City Councillor Marc McGovern. "We were the first city to ban smoking in bars and restaurants, and while we're not the first to ban carryout plastic bags, we are the largest. This will hopefully encourage other communities to act." In response to concerns about the potential impact on low income consumers who would be harder hit by a fee or the cost of a reusable bag, Councillor McGovern suggested the City purchase ten thousand reusable bags and distribute them to senior centers and low income housing complexes. He also suggested school children could design a logo for the bags.

The Massachusetts Sierra Club worked for several years on the plastic bag ban effort with Green Cambridge, led by Quinton Zondervan. "Every day I see plastic bag litter in our streets

and parks,” said Mr. Zondervan. “These bags wind up in our storm drains, into the Charles River, and then the ocean. This ordinance will help decrease this plastic pollution.”

ABOUT Massachusetts Sierra Club

Sierra Club is the nation's oldest and most effective grassroots environmental group. The Massachusetts Chapter was established nearly fifty years ago and has a strong track record of enabling Bay Staters to “enjoy, explore and protect the planet.” For more information visit us at masssierraclub.org.

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