

## **Reusable Bag Task Force Update to Bedford Town Board**

### **May 9, 2019**

The Reusable Bag Task Force (RBTF) meets monthly and reports to the Town Board about our activities to promote the use of reusable bags and decrease the use of disposable carryout bags which are harmful to the environment.

Since appointed by the town in June 2018, the RBTF has been working with retailers, educating the public to promote reusable bag use, distributing free reusable bags, and tracking the effectiveness of these efforts. The Reusable Bag law went into effect on April 1, 2019. The law requires large retailers to impose a fee on all plastic and paper carryout bags with the intent of further stimulating use of reusable bags over disposable bags.

New York State has recently passed a plastic bag ban that will go into effect on March 1, 2020. It appears that this law will ban all plastic bags in all stores. Other impacts of the law and how it will impact our retailers and customers are not yet clear.

### **RBTF Activities**

#### **Benchmarking**

To measure the success of the law and education efforts, the RBTF will obtain data from the Food Industry Alliance of NY showing percent change of bag purchases by the three local grocery stores as compared to the same quarter the previous year.

Jay Peltz of the FIA reported on May 7: bag purchases by the three grocery stores in the first quarter of 2019 as compared to the bag purchases by the same retailers in the first quarter of 2018 shows that plastic bag purchases declined 26.1% and paper bag purchases declined 48.8%. It is likely this is due to the signage and education efforts combined with the stores anticipating the coming law.

RBTF will also continue to do semi-annual on-site counts to tally the bag choices of customers as they leave the stores over a 3-hour period on Saturday mornings.

- In October 2018, the RBTF tallied customer bag choice at DeCiccos in Katonah, ShopRite in Bedford Hills, and Key Food in Bedford Village, and found that around **13-15%** of customers chose reusable bags.
- On March 30, 2019, after months of education efforts and free reusable bag distribution, the RBTF again tallied customer bag choice and found that at DeCiccos and ShopRite the percent of customers using reusable bags increased to nearly **30%** and at Key Food to **18%**.
- The RBTF will do additional store counts in the coming weeks to get a sense of how the law has impacted reusable bag use since April 1<sup>st</sup>. Based on casual observation by our team and reports from the grocery managers, it appears that many more people are bringing reusable bags when they grocery shop.

## **RBTF Education and Free Bag Efforts**

The RBTF carried out an educational campaign to promote reusable bags and educate customers about the law in cooperation with the three large grocery stores in Bedford over the past several months.

- RBTF designed signage and flyers for the stores to display since February.
- Over 5,000 FAQ and info flyers were distributed at stores and tabling events
- 10,000 bags were given away by stores and the RBTF
- Sponsors paid for bags: Houlihan Lawrence, State Farm, BVBA, Truck)
- A new supply of reusable canvas bags are being sold at the Town Clerk's office
- Take a Bag, Leave a Bag stations are set up around town where people can find free reusable bags or donate excess bags
- The RBTF has contacted many small retailers to ask them to post signs and table tents to encourage reusable bag use
- RBTF regularly posts on social media channels to further promote reuse
- The RBTF has worked with the Record Review to regularly inform the public
- Grocery retailers have made efforts to educate customers with signs, announcements, posts on social media, message in their circular, training of employees, and now are working on permanent signage to encourage people to "remember your reusable bag" when they arrive.
- The RBTF and the grocery retailers have had weekly phone calls to discuss the status of the educational efforts and the impact of the law. Now that the law is in effect, we have changed these to monthly status calls.
- The RBTF will schedule additional tabling events at the stores in May-June
- RBTF will continue regular social media posts to keep bag choice top of mind

## **Impact of Implementation**

The large grocery stores report that the law went into effect smoothly at the grocery stores. There were relatively few complaints by customers and most people were well prepared. The grocery stores have had to reposition bags so that people cannot just take them without paying for them.

There was some initial confusion about whether one could get a free bag to wrap up a package of meat. However, certain bags are exempted from the law including plastic bags for uncooked meat, fish or poultry, bags for bulk items or produce, bags for sliced or prepared foods, a newspaper bag, and bags for prescription drugs.

## **Box Stores**

CVS has been successful in messaging about reusable bags and are complying with imposing the fee for bags at the register.

The RBTF still has work to do at Pier One and Kohl's. The corporate offices of Pier One and Kohl's have been hard to reach and the store managers do not fully understand what needs to be done or are unwilling to fully comply with the town law. The RBTF has recently visited managers and additional flyers have been dropped off for them to inform customers at their registers.

Pier One apparently has replaced their disposable bags with free slightly thicker plastic bags. In many communities where thin plastic bags are banned or require a fee, many stores have opted to simply provide different plastic bags that are considered "reusable." The Town of Bedford anticipated this and included a 25-cent fee on reusable bags to avoid this problem. We have reached out to headquarters to let them know that these thicker plastic bags are not free but require a 25 cent fee to avoid a fine from the Town.

### **State Law**

New York State has recently passed a plastic bag ban that will go into effect on March 1, 2020. This will ban distribution and sales of all plastic bags by all retailers in the state.

The state law authorizes cities and counties to opt-in to impose 5-cent fee for paper bags. Out of this fee stores will remit 3 cents to State Environmental Protection Fund and 2 cents to the city or county. It is not clear whether Westchester County will opt-in for this fee and how and when Bedford's fee structure will be affected.

It appears everyone is eager for more guidance from the state on how this law will work.

### **In conclusion**

We are impressed with the level of cooperation by the three large grocery stores in town. They distributed more than 8,000 reusable bags and did everything we asked of them to promote the coming law and ensure a smooth transition. We appreciate the time and money they spent to do this and feel it was well worth it.

The law appears to be working to increase reusable bag use and benchmarking will continue over the summer to track this progress. The RBTF will continue education efforts along with the retailers so that when the state law takes effect, that will also be a smooth transition that will influence reusable bag use even further in the Town of Bedford.

**Respectfully Submitted,  
The Reusable Bag Task Force**

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