

What Does this Article Do if Approved?

This article would authorize the Select Board to petition the state legislature for a special law requiring that retail establishments in Sudbury charge at least \$0.10 for each new checkout bag.

Any money collected for bags would be retained by the retailer.

The special law must be passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor to go into effect.

Why Vote Yes for this Article?

Reusing bags is the best choice for the environment and for our pocketbooks. Both ecological impacts and financial costs are spread out over multiple uses. Several common types of reusable bags beat disposable bags on most environmental impact metrics after a very achievable number of uses.¹

Switching from plastic to recycled paper bags is NOT a clearly positive outcome. Even though paper doesn't persist in the environment like plastic, using paper still has appreciable ecological costs. Paper production, transportation, storage, and recycling are all energy- and water-intensive activities that result in significant greenhouse gas and other harmful chemical emissions.²

Bag laws that don't charge for bags – like Sudbury's – risk being environmentally counterproductive by significantly increasing paper bag use. Study after study shows that many consumers continue treating bags received for free as disposable, regardless of its material or how it is labeled.³

A small charge for new bags is the most effective tool for promoting bag reuse. A charge reduces mindless consumption and actively encourages people to carefully consider the numbers and types of bags they need.⁴ In one example, a plastic bag ban w/ a \$0.10 fee on paper in Los Angeles County increased reusable bag use from 5 to 45% and those using no bag at all from 17 to 40%.⁵

Shoppers can SAVE money with a transparent, easily avoidable bag charge. You are already paying for bags whether you like it or not! Bags cost money and these costs often go unnoticed because they are hidden in the cost of other goods. A charge gives people the choice to not pay for unwanted new bags.

Recycling is getting expensive. Recycling costs have skyrocketed and are an increasing drain on personal and municipal finances.⁶ Using more disposable paper bags that need to be recycled is not helping. A bag charge helps by reducing the total amount of bag waste generated.

Bag charges help businesses reduce costs. Required charges significantly reduce the number of bags that retailers must buy and handle, lowering their expenses. They have gone into effect in Massachusetts cities,⁷ in California,⁸ and worldwide without evidence of harm. Notably, the Mass Food Association, representing most grocery stores in our state, testified IN SUPPORT of a statewide bag charge this legislative session.⁹

This bag charge is not a tax. All money collected for bags is kept by the retailer for any lawful purpose, including helping stores defray the costs of switching to the most sustainable options or, as some retailers have chosen, to be donated back to the community.¹⁰

Voting 'Yes!' continues what we've started. So far, state law has blocked towns in Massachusetts from directly adopting bag charges. Passing this article puts Sudbury on a path to a solution and shows that we don't want to settle for anything but the best, data-driven solutions.

You can help pass laws to promote reusable bags in your community! To learn more or to join this campaign, please email: campaigns@ma.surfrider.org

References

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