



NEW YORK CITY COUNCILMEMBER BRAD LANDER

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New Legislation to Dramatically Reduce Plastic Bag Use in NYC

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Bill announced today would put 10-cent charge on plastic or paper carryout bags provided at grocery and retail stores

New York City pays an estimated \$10 million to dispose of 100,000 tons of plastic bags in landfills each year

Today, City Council Members, New York environmental advocates, and local retailers announced new legislation to dramatically reduce plastic bag use. Similar laws in other cities reduced plastic bag use by as much as 90%.



The legislation, introduced by Council Members Brad Lander and Margaret Chin, would require retail and grocery stores to charge at least 10 cents for plastic bags, to make the cost of single-use bags clear to the consumer. The same charge would be placed on paper bags, to ensure an overall reduction in total bags used, regardless of type. The proposed charge would not be a tax – it would be retained by the store to cover the cost of providing bags. Customers who bring their own bags would not be charged.

[To view bill's full text click here](#)

[To view an outline of the bill and answers to frequently asked questions click here \(PDF\).](#)

"It can be easy to forget the impact we each have on the environment – an impact that really adds up when you have a city of eight million people," said **Council Member Brad Lander**. "The truth is, there are a lot of times that we don't really need a plastic bag. This common sense legislation will help New York cut plastic bag waste, both saving money and reducing litter, without effecting small businesses."

"This legislation represents a real, progressive step toward an environmentally conscious New York City," said **Council Member Margaret Chin**. "Too often at the register, we bag and double-bag, heedless of the severe environmental cost we all pay. In my district in Lower Manhattan, after a busy weekend, you can see these bags overflowing from trash cans and in the streets and gutters. The bags end up clogging our streets, littering our public parks, and costing taxpayers millions of dollars in clean up and waste removal. This bill incentivizes consumers to bring their own reusable bags and think twice before reaching for paper or plastic ones, which will cut back on pollution and ultimately protect New York City's invaluable green spaces and waterways that have been under threat for too long."

The bill is currently cosponsored by Council Members Jimmy Van Bramer, Daniel Dromm, Inez E. Dickens, Gale A. Brewer, Robert Jackson, Stephen Levin and Annabel Palma.

New Yorkers use 5.2 billion carryout bags per year, the vast majority of which are not recycled.^[1] As of 2008, plastic bags accounted for over 1,700 tons of residential garbage per week in NYC.^[2] Plastic bags get stuck in storm drains, exacerbating flooding and sewage discharges into waterways,^[3] and are the fourth most commonly found type of litter on U.S. beaches.^[4]

New York City pays an estimated \$10 million to transport 100,000 tons of plastic bags to landfills in other states each year.^[5]

"This legislation will dramatically reduce the use of polluting plastic bags and attack a persistent environment problem," said **Marcia Bystryn, president of the New York League of Conservation Voters**. "Experience has shown this innovative, market-based approach works wonders in other cities and it will work in New York City too. We applaud Council Members Lander and Chin for their impressive work on this legislation, which will be featured prominently in our next City Council Environmental Scorecard."

Take Action

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What does your neighborhood need? An improved park? Safer streets? New school technology? In participatory budgeting, you give your ideas and City Councilmember Brad Lander has set aside \$1 million to fund them. And your votes will decide which projects get funded.

[Learn more here.](#)

Shop Local

According to the "Saving Independent Retail" brief from the Pratt Center, "local businesses poured 68 percent of their revenue back into the local community, while for local chains the return was only 43%".

Find more compelling arguments for shopping and dining local here, and **learn ways to become involved in supporting the cause.**

Service

[Join me in recognizing people who have done service](#), and that you'll think about engaging in service yourself (or, if you already engage in service, increase your commitment to it).

Find great [stories of service](#), [ideas for how to get started](#) in serving the community, and a [list of organizations for which we encourage you to help out](#). You can also [nominate someone for a service award](#).

Other cities around the country (including Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.) have instituted similar laws, and seen plastic bag use fall as much as 90%. The bill is a hybrid of California cities that have adopted minimum 10 cent charges on bags that retailers get to retain with Washington, D.C.'s law that allows retailers to continue to use their current plastic shopping bags. Unlike in Washington, D.C., the charge is not a tax — retailers get to retain the revenue without record-keeping requirements. Unlike Los Angeles and San Francisco, there is not a plastic bag ban.

"This is a strong and thoughtful piece of legislation that builds on what we've seen across the country and that will work in New York City," said **Jennie R. Romer, founder of PlasticBagLaws.org**. "Legislation like this has been shown to lead to swift and significant changes in consumer behavior because consumers must make a decision as to whether they need a carryout bag for each particular purchase, taking into account any future use of the bag including use as garbage can liners or dog waste."

New York State currently has a voluntary plastic bag recycling program, but it has proven ineffective. While large retailers must take-back and recycle plastic bags, the program lacks enforcement and has failed to demonstrate significant reductions in plastic bag waste.

"Many of these types of measures which are now widely popular were opposed in the beginning," said **Peter H. Kostmayer, CEO, Citizens Committee for New York City**, "but, with time and the improvement in our air and water, the cleanliness of our restaurants, the satisfaction we all get from safer and more pedestrian friendly streets, and most importantly the years added to New Yorker's lives because of the smoking ban, New Yorkers have come to support them as I believe they will end up supporting a dramatic reduction in plastic bags."

The legislation is narrowly targeted at grocery and retail carryout bags, to avoid logistical burdens on consumers:

- Restaurants would not be covered due to limited alternatives for delivery and take-out food orders.
- Produce, meat and bulk food bags used within stores are exempt from the charge in order to protect food from contamination, as well as pharmacy counter bags for medicine.
- Street vendors that sell similar goods as retail and grocery stores would be covered; those that sell prepared food like restaurants would not be covered.

In addition, stores must waive the charge for providing paper or plastic bags for transactions where the customer is using food stamps to avoid additional barriers to food security. Emergency food providers, such as food pantries, would be exempt from the charge.

"This bill would allow the city to cut down on litter and plastic pollution in a way that is fair and equitable to both consumers and retailers," said **Eric A. Goldstein, senior attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council**. "We care deeply about the economic challenges of New Yorkers who are struggling to make ends meet and believe this legislation directly addresses their concerns."

Before the legislation goes into effect, the City would conduct a public education campaign and distribute free, reusable bags to the public. The bill requires that distribution put extra effort to reach low-income households and food stores in areas with high levels of food stamp usage.

"I am pleased to sponsor this important bill to protect our environment and save public dollars," said **Council Member Gale A. Brewer**. "Plastic bag charges have proven to be effective all over the world at reducing harmful litter and encouraging the use of reusable alternatives. Plastic bag waste costs the City tens of millions of dollars each year, can jam our recycling machinery, and causes damage to our environment as litter. This is a well-developed, meaningful piece of legislation which will go a long way toward improving the environment of New York City."

"Who will miss plastic bags once they are gone? No one," said **Colin Beavan, author of No Impact Man and executive director of the No Impact Project**. "So removing them from our waste stream is a totally painless benefit to New York City finances and to the natural resources we depend upon for clean food, water and air. I congratulate Council Members Lander and Chin for having the forethought to introduce this bill."

"Reducing the amount of plastic bags that go into our waste stream is vital for a cleaner, greener city," said **Council Member Daniel Dromm**. "With minimal effort, this legislation will encourage New Yorkers to think twice before using plastic bags. This means that there will be fewer bags clogging our sewers and getting tangled in our trees. We have seen great success from similar legislation in other cities. I look forward to similar success here."

"The Green Party agrees that NYC should join with other communities across the country in reducing waste and litter from the use of plastic bags in stores. This proposed ordinance builds upon successful models such as DC and can save taxpayers millions of dollars annually while reducing litter in our streets, parks and water bodies, helping to protect birds and other wildlife," said **Gloria Mattera, Chair of the Green Party of Brooklyn**, which helped organize a recent forum on plastic bags in Park Slope. "Ross

Mirkarimi, a Green Party member on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, introduced legislation in 2007 prohibiting large supermarkets and drugstores from providing customers with non-biodegradable plastic bags, making San Francisco the first city to regulate such bags.”

“This bill will have maximum environmental impact without exacerbating a very real food security problem in our city. I am thrilled to support it and look forward to working with Council Members Lander and Chin to bring about its swift passage,” said **Council Member Annabel Palma**.

“New Yorkers have to realize that plastic bags are not ‘free’,” said **Council Member Stephen Levin**. “The cost of plastic bags is very real for our environment and it is important that we as a city take a stand against pollution. I strongly support this legislation that will curtail the usage of plastic bags, reduce pollution of plastics, and protect our environment here in New York City.”

Council Member Inez Dickens said, “This bill is important because plastic bags are a major source of waste and reducing their usage is a goal this bill will help us to attain. This legislation allows us to take action to protect our environment and encourage responsible behavior.”

“Surfrider Foundation’s NYC Chapter has been working towards plastic bag legislation for the last two years,” said **Nick Lynn of the Surfrider Foundation**. “As an organization focused on healthy oceans and beaches, single-use plastic reduction is a paramount concern. We are excited to see NYC join the list of cities all over the world doing their part to minimize plastic pollution in all ecosystems.”

“Reducing plastic bags in our city will not only cut down on trash, it will beautify our streets, support small businesses, and give New Yorkers yet another way to show how an individual truly can make a difference,” said **Tara DePorte of the Human Impacts Institute**.

References

[1] Bureau of Waste Prevention, Reuse and Recycling, New York City Department of Sanitation, “Question: How Many Plastic Bags Enter the NYC Residential Waste Stream Each Year?” November 7, 2008, received from the NYC Office of Management and Budget.

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] Jennifer van der Kleut. “Stormwater Management Agencies: Plastic Bags Clog Drains, Pollute Water,” *Patch.com*, February 14, 2013, <http://redwoodcity-woodside.patch.com/groups/going-green/p/stormwater-ma...>

[4] Ocean Conservancy, “Tracking Trash: 25 Years of Action for the Ocean,” 2011, pg. 66.

[5] Elizabeth Rosenthal, “Is It Time to Bag the Plastic?” *New York Times*, May 18, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/19/sunday-review/should-america-bag-the-p...>