

LOCAL LAW “D” FOR 2019

A LOCAL LAW TO INCENTIVIZE THE USE OF REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS AND TO INSTITUTE A FEE ON THE USE OF PAPER BAGS IN ALBANY COUNTY SHOPPING ESTABLISHMENTS

Introduced: 02/28/19

By Ms. Cunningham, Messrs. Reinhardt, Mss. Lekakis and Plotsky, Messrs. Dawson and Fein, Ms. McLean Lane, Messrs. Joyce, Higgins, O’Brien, Bullock and Mayo:

BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNTY LEGISLATURE OF THE COUNTY OF ALBANY, as follows:

Section 1. Title.

This Local Law shall be known as the “The Albany County Reusable Shopping Bag Incentive Act”

Section 2. Legislative Purpose and Findings.

The Albany County Legislature hereby finds and determines that it is imperative that the use and reliance on single-use plastic shopping bags must be reduced, and ultimately, eliminated. Further, the data and evidence supporting the massive proliferation of single-use plastic bags in Albany County, the State of New York and in our nation is troubling and the future of our planet depends on legislative bodies such as the Albany County Legislature taking proactive steps to mitigate and eliminate the unnecessary usage of single-use plastic bags in Albany County.

Environmental Impact: The Environmental Protection Agency’s data indicates that between 500 billion and 1 trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide each year. The United States is purportedly responsible for using approximately 100-260 million plastic bags annually. To manufacture 100 billion plastic bags, 12 million barrels of oil is required. The production and disposal of single-use plastic bags has significant environmental consequences and impacts including the contamination of the environment, the depletion of natural resources, the use of non-renewable polluting fossil fuels and increased clean up and disposal costs and challenges.

It is now believed that there are 5.25 trillion pieces of plastic debris in the ocean. Of that mass, 269,000 tons float on the surface, while some four billion plastic microfibers per square kilometer litter the deep sea. Ocean debris, which predominantly consists of plastic pollution, has dire consequences for ocean mammals and birds, which commonly mistake plastic bags for food. Plastic bags have been found in the intestines and stomachs of marine life, and one in three leatherback sea turtles have been found with plastic in their stomachs. Plastic ocean debris is

responsible for killing an estimated 1,000,000 seabirds and 100,000 ocean mammals each year. At least 267 different species have been negatively affected by plastic pollution, including plastic bags.

Over-reliance on plastic: The average American family takes home almost 1,500 single-use plastic bags each year, and a single-use plastic bag is used for an average of 12 minutes. Other data suggests that an average family accumulates 60 plastic bags in only four trips to the grocery store. The average American recycles one plastic bag out of every 200 used.

The Albany County Legislature applauds Governor Cuomo and the New York State for their inclusion in the 2019 New York State Budget of the “New York State Bag Waste Reduction Act” and further intends to take steps to institute a paper bag fee to ensure that bag waste is further reduced. The Albany County Legislature is concerned that without the imposition of a fee, along with the creation and implementation of aggressive efforts to educate consumers to change behavior to begin using reusable bags, Albany County will experience a new environmental problem that results from the overuse of paper bags. This will yield to increased landfill use for the increase in paper bag usage, prices in local grocery and convenience stores increasing due to the increased costs associated with a move from plastic to paper bags and other potential unintended negative consequences.

Section 3. Definitions

For purposes of this Local Law, the following terms shall have the meanings indicated below:

- (a) “Covered Store” shall mean an establishment engaged in the retail sale of personal, consumer, household items including but not limited to: drug stores, pharmacies, grocery stores, supermarkets, convenience stores, foodmarts, gas stations, hardware and home improvement stores, stationary and office supply stores and food service establishments that provide carryout bags to consumers. Covered stores also include all apparel, clothing and shoe stores, including those in malls.
- (b) “Customer” shall mean any person obtaining goods from a covered store.
- (c) “Person” shall mean any natural person, firm, corporation, partnership or other organization or group, however organized”.
- (d) “Paper Carryout Bag” shall have the same meaning as set forth in Title 27, Section 27-2801 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law.
- (e) “Retail Sales” shall mean the transfer to a customer of goods in exchange for payment occurring in retail stores, sidewalk sale, farmers’ markets, flea markets and restaurants. The term “retail sales” does not include sales of goods at yard sales, tag sales, or other sales by residents at their homes.

- (f) “Reusable Bag” shall have the same meaning as set forth in Title 27, Section 27-2801 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law.
- (g) “Paper Carryout Reduction Fee” shall have the same meaning as set forth in Title 27-2805 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law.

Section 4 Imposition of Fees for Use of Paper Bags

- (a) In accordance with Section 27-2805 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law, Albany County establishments subject to the ban on Plastic Carryout Bags set forth in Section 27-2803 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law shall charge customers a Paper Carryout Reduction Fee of \$.05 for each Paper Carryout Bag the Establishment provides to customers. On the effective date, all covered stores shall indicate on the customer receipt the number of Paper Carryout Bags that are provided to customers and the fee at which they were charged for the use of such bag.
- (b) Exempt individuals that shall not pay the \$.05 fee include any customers identified in Section 27-2805 Subsection 3 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law.
- (c) The \$.05 fee shall be reported and paid to the New York State Commissioner of Taxation and Finance per the requirements identified in Section 27-2805 Subsection 4 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law.

Section 5 Distribution of Fees and Transparency of Fee Collection

- (a) Per Section 27-2805 of the New York Environmental Conservation Law, forty percent of the fee shall be provided to Albany County for the purpose of purchasing reusable bags for Albany County residents, particularly those of low-income or limited means.
- (b) The Albany County Comptroller, upon receipt of these funds, will provide these funds to the Albany County Department charged with implementing this local law, for purposes of offsetting costs for purchasing reusable bags for Albany County residents, as well as to provide funds to offset expenses for programs, advertising and other initiatives identified in the Model Consumer Education Program (Section 8a of this local law).

Section 6. Responsibilities and Obligations of Covered Stores.

- (a) All covered stores shall post signs at or near the point of sale located in such Covered Stores to notify customers of the provisions of this Local Law. Covered stores shall also indicate in signage that recyclable paper bags will be available for a charge of \$.05 each recyclable paper bag
- (b) Covered Stores must make available, on the customer receipt, the itemized number of recyclable or reusable bags used, on the sales receipt, including online receipts.

- (c) No Covered Store shall provide a credit to any person specifically for the purpose of offsetting or avoiding the carryout bag charge required by this Local Law.
- (d) Covered Stores shall be encouraged to work with organizations seeking to donate reusable bags for customer use that would allow for wide, free distribution of free reusable bags.
- (e) Covered stores shall also be encouraged to adopt “leave-a-bag” “take-a-bag” initiatives that encourage consumer engagement on the use of reusable bags and that aim to enable wide adoption in communities with a high proportion of customers with limited incomes.

Section 7. Deduction from Employee Wages Prohibition

Covered stores are prohibited from making a charge against, or deduction from, the wages of an employee to offset any penalty levied against the covered store pursuant to this local law.

Section 8. Albany County Responsibilities, Enforcement and Penalties.

- (a) Consumer Education Program: Upon the date of enactment, the Albany County Executive shall designate a Department within the Albany County government to immediately begin work to put into place a model Consumer Education Program with the following goals:
 - i. Work collaboratively with all covered stores (in particular the large grocery stores and convenience stores) to hold County-supported round table discussions at various locations around the County about how to best educate consumers about the impending state plastic bag ban and the Albany county paper bag fee.
 - ii. Develop educational marketing materials with a uniform message to help educate Albany County residents about the impending bag ban/fee law. These marketing materials shall include web based informational campaigns as well as signage for stores to utilize to educate consumers. Paid advertising in highly trafficked locations including bill boards, signage on buses, etc. shall also be considered

Work with covered stores to identify constituencies who may be late adopters of using reusable bags. Once identified, special outreach shall be made to these “late adopter” constituencies to encourage and facilitate their adoption of using reusable bags. These efforts could include outreach to social or employment centers that are frequented by the “late adopter” populations and other outreaches. This effort may also include the purchase of reusable bags by Albany County as a tool to encourage adoption of the use of reusable bags by the “late adopters”.

- (b) Department that will oversee this Local Law: The Albany County Executive shall deem the appropriate department within Albany County Government to oversee the enforcement, implementation of regulations and other guidance to secure the successful implementation of this Local Law. Further, the County Executive shall inform the Legislature of his or her recommendation to ensure enforcement of this Local Law. In addition, on an annual basis, the Department selected by the Albany County Executive to oversee and implement this local law shall prepare an annual recycling report that includes information detailing the success of the effort to eliminate the commercial use of plastic bags and include information such as:
- i. the effectiveness of this local law in reducing the use of paper bags;
 - ii. the land fill space that is affected by the use of paper bags;
 - iii. the number of notices of violation issued pursuant to this Local Law; and
- (c) Compliance Assistance to Business and Retail Community: The County Executive shall ensure that information regarding this Local Law, its effective date, penalties and other relevant compliance information shall be distributed via website and other electronic means in order to ensure that Albany County's Covered Stores shall be well informed about all aspects of compliance and adherence. The Albany County Department that will oversee and implement this law shall provide electronic templates regarding the imposition of the bag fee that covered stores shall be able to print out and display at points of sale. This template shall be easily downloadable from the County website and hard copies shall be made available at the Albany County Office Building for retail operators who need signage. In addition, the Albany County Department that will oversee this local law shall engage the business and retail community affected by this local law prior to the implementation date to provide technical and other assistance and information, and shared approaches regarding compliance. These outreaches to the business community shall include county-wide business round tables.
- (d) Violations: In accordance with Section 27-2807 of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law, penalties will be levied. Additional penalties related to violations regarding the implementation of the Paper Bag Carryout fee covered in this local law will be the following:
- i. Any Covered Store found to be in violation of the provisions of this law a first time shall be issued a written warning.
 - ii. Any Covered Store found to be in violation of the provisions of this law a second time shall be liable for a civil penalty not to exceed \$100.00.
 - iii. Any Covered Store found to be in violation of the provisions of this law a third time shall be liable for a civil penalty not to exceed \$250.00.
 - iv. Any Covered Store found to be in violation of the provisions of this law a fourth time shall be liable for a civil penalty not to exceed \$500.00.
 - v. For each subsequent violation, daily fines of \$100.00 shall be instituted and applied for violations of this Local Law until compliance is achieved.

- vi. The Albany County Executive's designee department shall have the discretion to institute additional punishments for those Covered Stores that persistently violate this Local Law.

Section 9. Severability.

If any clause, sentence, paragraph, section or any part of this local law or the application thereof to any person, individual corporation, firm, partnership, entity or circumstance shall be adjudged by any court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid or unconstitutional, such order or judgement shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remainder thereof, but shall be confined in its operation to the clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section, or part of this law, or in its application to the person, individual, corporation, firm, partnership, entity, or circumstance directly involved in the controversy in which such order or judgement shall be rendered.

Section 10. Reverse Preemption.

This local law shall be null and void on the day that a statewide law is in effect, incorporating either the same or substantially similar provisions as are contained in this local law or in the event that a relevant state or federal administrative agency issues and promulgates regulations preempting such action by the County of Albany. The Albany County Legislature shall determine by resolution whether or not the identical or substantially similar statewide law or relevant pre-emptive state or federal regulations have been enacted for the purposes of triggering the provisions of this section.

Section 11. Effective Date.

The effective date of this local law will be simultaneous to the effective date of the single-use statewide bag ban, March 1, 2020.

*Referred to Law and Conservation, Sustainability and Green Initiatives
Committees – 3/11/19*

Favorable Recommendation Law Committee – 10/28/19

*Favorable Recommendation Conservation, Sustainability and Green Initiatives
Committee – 10/29/19*

A motion was made to call the pervious question and on long roll call the following voted in favor: Messrs. Beston, Bullock, Burgdorf, Cahill, Ms. Chapman, Messrs. Clay, Commisso, Crouse, Ms. Cunningham, Messrs. Dawson, Domalewicz, Drake, Ethier, Feeney, Fein, Frainier, Grimm, Hogan, A. Joyce, R. Joyce, Mss. Lekakis, Lockart, Messrs. Mauriello, Mayo, Mss. McKnight, McLean Lane, Messrs. Miller, Peter, Ms. Plotsky, Messrs. Reinhardt, Simpson, Smith, Stevens, Tunny, Ward and Ms. Willingham – 36

Those opposed – 0

The motion passed.

On long roll call vote the following members voted in favor: Messrs. Bullock, Cahill, Ms. Chapman, Messrs. Clay, Commisso, Ms. Cunningham, Messrs. Dawson, Feeney, Fein, Frainier, A. Joyce, R. Joyce, Ms. Lekakis, Mr. Mayo, Mss. McKnight, McLean Lane, Messrs. Miller, Peter, Ms. Plotsky, Messrs. Reinhardt, Simpson and Ms. Willingham – 22

Those opposed – Messrs. Beston, Burgdorf, Crouse, Domalewicz, Drake, Ethier, Grimm, Hogan, Ms. Lockart, Messrs. Mauriello, Smith, Stevens, Tunny and Ward – 14

Local Law was adopted – 11/12/19