



January 2011

BYOB? Yes, everyone is invited

Bring Your Own Bag! to your favorite retail store.

We're talking about using your own reusable bag and eliminating the use of 'one-time-use' plastic and paper bags when shopping at Wilton grocery and retail stores.

Their use should be discontinued, *but not by Government action*. We, individually, should discontinue their use because they are environmentally harmful and are an unsustainable use of limited natural resources.

The US EPA estimates that Americans throw away over 100 billion plastic bags a year. Those that are land filled may take 1,000 years to break down and incineration results in the pollution of our atmosphere. A larger number of discarded plastic bags end up in our streams, rivers and oceans resulting in serious harm and death to birds and marine life. The Long Island Sound is one of our national treasures. The good news is that in 2009, dolphins returned to the Sound and in 2010 marine scientist are reporting the highest whale counts off Long Island in over 20 years. Both species are especially likely to ingest plastic bags and die as a result.

Millions of trees are harvested each year to produce paper bags that are used once. Trees put oxygen in the atmosphere and remove CO₂. Paper bags consume four times more energy to manufacture and transport than plastic. Given these facts, we believe that our community will voluntarily "do the right thing" and use reusable bags when shopping and discontinue the use of plastic and paper bags.

Care for the environment and nature are two of the core values that define Wilton. Eliminating the use of plastic and paper single use bags is consistent with those values.

Preservation of open space and nature were the top two community values and priorities identified by the Planning and Zoning Commission during their recent work with Wilton residents to update our Plan of Conservation and Development.

Some of our most valued institutions and organizations reflect those values. Millstone Farm and Ambler Farm are centers of excellence for sustainable farming. Trout Unlimited and the Norwalk River Watershed Association are supported for the work they do in sustaining a healthy Norwalk River. Wilton has been designated a Tree City USA. Only seventeen municipalities in Connecticut have received that honor. The Wilton Land Trust seeks to preserve open space and create a sustainable environment in those spaces. We could cite many more examples that attest to a culture of conservation and sustainable living.

Sustainability simply means protecting our environment and using our resources in a manner that preserves them for our children and our children's children. Wilton actively supports that value as it affects our town and is visible. But there is only one atmosphere and only one planet. The damage caused by the use of these bags may be unseen in Wilton, but the damage they do to the planet and the atmosphere affects us also. This is an opportunity for our community to take a small step toward being stewards of the planet.

We know that a change like this may cause some inconvenience but we believe our community will do the right thing. Your Board of Selectmen believes that also. Although many cities and municipalities in the US have banned by ordinance or law the use of these bags, the Board has requested that Wilton Go Green launch an educational campaign and events to accomplish the same result voluntarily. The Board will revisit the subject in six months . . . we hope to be able to show at least a 50% reduction in use by that time.