

Hello All, I'm Anne Watson, the Mayor of Montpelier, speaking on behalf of the Montpelier City Council and the voting public of Montpelier. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your committee about our proposed charter change relating to single-use plastics. This particular ballot item giving us authority to regulate single-use plastics passed by a significant margin. This vote was 3-to-1, or more specifically 78% of those who voted on the item voted for it (Yes: 3322 (78%), No: 930 (22%), Total: 4252).

Prior to my being mayor, I was a city councilor, and ever since I became a city councilor I have fielded questions about why plastic bags are still an option in our city. When I became mayor, it became clear through our goal setting session that banning plastic bags was a high priority for our city council. Through that discussion, it became clear that some people were interested in the possibility of banning plastic straws and other single-use plastics. Paper and compostable straws are becoming more common, indicating that there are market alternatives to these single-use plastics products.

Shortly after the council announced their goals, a constituent group formed particularly to work on this subject, the Citizens Against Plastic Pollution. They were active in educating the public and deserve a lot of the credit in getting us this far.

When I knew that this issue was going to come up with the council in a real way, I preemptively reached out to Shaws, our one major grocery store that still uses plastic bags to make sure that they were aware of the conversation and that they felt included in the process. I anticipated that they would oppose such a measure, but instead they said they thought it would be fine. In fact, since then they have already started the process of transitioning away from plastic bags.

As a part of our council research, we learned that Brattleboro had already set a precedent to ban plastic bags. This ordinance rests on the an existing line in their charter that says that Brattleboro can “regulate solid waste.” So what we’re asking for is a much smaller permission than what Brattleboro already has permission to do. We’re not asking to have a municipally-run solid waste management system and the latitude to regulate all solid waste, just single-use plastics.

I know there’s at least one bill under consideration now that would potentially ban plastic bags throughout the state of Vermont. I sincerely hope that passes, but I hope that its passage would not prevent this body from approving the wishes of Montpelier voters to also address pollution from single-use plastics, and pass this charter change. We would like to codify this public value. *Why are we as a municipality* pursuing this charter authority? Because there is no level of government too small to do the right thing. And we as a community have determined that for us, this is the right thing.