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NYC Council Members and Environmental Groups Announce Legislation to Include a Fee on Paper Bags along with New Plastic Bag Ban

A critical part of the effort to reduce waste, rather than just shift it from plastic to paper.

New York, NY -- Today, New York City Council Members Brad Lander, Margaret Chin, Donovan Richards, Antonio Reynoso, Ben Kallos, and Keith Powers, joined by Council colleagues, environmentalists, environmental justice groups, and community organizations, announced their intention to introduce legislation to include a 5-cent fee on paper bags, as part of the plastic bag ban just passed by the New York State Legislature.

In cities, states, and countries around the world, a small fee on single-use bags has helped the vast majority of shoppers, across lines of income, race, age, and family size, to shift to reusable bags. The result has been a reduction of millions of tons of solid waste.

Without adding a fee, most shoppers will simply switch to free paper bags. Paper bags don't wind up in trees, storm drains, or the ocean, but they still have adverse environmental impacts. The manufacture and transportation of paper bags produce global warming emissions and are also a significant source of water and ground level air pollution. Most paper bags are not recycled and still end up in landfills. Meanwhile, the market for recycled paper has weakened since China has essentially ended the importation of recyclables from the United States. Finally, since paper bags are substantially heavier than plastic ones, an increase in the use of paper bags would mean New York City would spend even more than the \$12 million it spends each year to truck bag waste to landfills - disproportionately through low-income communities of color.

The State Legislature adopted a statewide plastic bag ban as part of the budget over the weekend. However, the legislation leaves the option of a fee on paper bags open to each municipality. In Suffolk County, where a 5-cent bag fee has been in place for a year, there has been a reduction of over 1 billion single-use bags.

Under the state legislation, 3 cents of the fee will go to the NYS Environmental Protection Fund, and 2 cents will go to the City for the purchase of reusable bags. Council Members and advocates promised a large-scale distribution of free reusable bags, focusing on low-income communities and seniors, to make sure everyone has the reusable bags they need.

“Adding a 5-cent fee on paper bags to New York’s new plastic bag ban will dramatically reduce solid waste and make the new policy a genuine win for the environment,” said **Council Member Brad Lander**. “Six years after we began this campaign, and two years after Albany pre-empted New York City’s attempt to solve this problem on our own, we were pleased that the State Legislature on Sunday finally made the right move for the environment by banning single-use plastic bags altogether. But make no mistake - our work isn’t done. Our policy must encourage people to switch to reusable bags, which everyone can do. I want to thank all of the environmental advocates who fought for many years to finally get rid of plastic bags, and who joined us today in support of the necessary next step in the process. After a six-year campaign, we are excited to be on the cusp of a big win for the environment.”

“More than two years after Governor Cuomo signed legislation pre-empting our law, we are finally close to achieving the goal of removing thousands of tons of waste from our parks, waterways, and landfills,” said **Council Member Margaret Chin**. “While I commend the Governor for supporting this latest proposal to ban plastic bags, we must take further action to truly realize our goal of dramatic waste reduction from all types of single-use bags. That is why I am joining Council Member Lander to introduce legislation that would allow for the collection of fees on paper and other single-use bags. A small fee has been proven to change consumer behavior and encourage the use of reusable bags — which is why we included a 5-cent charge in our citywide legislation. I look forward to working with our communities to make reusable bags widely available.”

“We have been organizing at the grassroots level for years in support of a thoughtfully crafted state-of-the-art bag law in New York City,” said **Jennie Romer, Esq., founder of PlasticBagLaws.org and coordinator of the Bag It NYC coalition**. “New York State has banned plastic carryout bags -- that’s incredible, but our work is not over. Paper bags have climate and clean air impacts and we’ve seen that a 5-cent fee on paper bags is needed to see a shift to reusable bags. The opt-in provision for a paper bag fee is the final step to a truly effective and equitable carryout bag policy in NYC.”

“The Lower East Side Ecology Center is pleased that New York State will ban plastic bags, and we support the 5 cent fee for single-use bags. With our recycling stream and waterways clogging in plastic bags this bill is a step to create a more sustainable city,” said **Christine Datz-Romero, Executive Director of Lower East Side Ecology Center**.

“For years my Council Colleagues, advocates, and I have been calling for a reduction in plastic and paper bag waste,” said **Council Member Antonio Reynoso**. “I am glad to see that Albany has finally taken some action by banning single use plastic bags. However, we know that this is not enough; lessons learned from other localities have shown that by banning plastic bags exclusively, consumers often transition to paper bag use. In order to meaningfully reduce waste, we need to change consumer behavior patterns by discouraging the use of paper bags and

encouraging the use of reusable bags. I applaud my Council colleagues for seeing this fight through to completion and look forward to supporting a fee on paper bags in NYC.”

“It was Councilmembers Brad Lander and Margaret Chin who first launched the sensible effort to end the litter and pollution from billions of plastic and paper carryout bags thrown out every year in New York City. Now, the State has stepped in to ban single-use plastic bags. But the mission is not complete. So a new city council bill that would place a five cent fee on paper is much needed, greatly welcomed and right on time,” said **Eric A. Goldstein, NYC Environment Director at the Natural Resources Defense Council.**

“Plastic bags pollute our waterways and cost taxpayers \$12 million a year in sanitation removal costs,” said **Council Member Keith Powers.** “A long-overdue plastic bag ban continues the positive trend of eliminating unnecessary waste and making green decisions for our City, including the polystyrene foam ban implemented this year. Thank you for Council Members Lander and Chin for their ongoing work on this, and the Senate for common-sense policy.

"New York's ban on plastic bags is a monumental achievement. We encourage the City to opt-in to the 5-cent fee on paper to fund environmental programs and free reusable bag giveaways, which are critical to offset potential costs,” said **Jessica Roff, Director of Advocacy & Engagement at Riverkeeper.**

“Thankfully, the State has finally come around to acknowledge that the City Council’s mission to eliminate plastic bags 3 years ago was the only course of action,” said **Council Member Donovan Richards.** “We have to divorce ourselves from fossil fuels and marry renewables. We have to divorce ourselves from bad behavior, and exercise best practices. Communities of color get the need to combat climate change and are smart enough to transition to reusable bags. We need the paper bag fee to make people stop and think for a second if they really need a bag or push them to start bringing their own. I’d like to thank my colleagues Council Members Brad Lander, Margaret Chin, and Antonio Reynoso for keeping this fight going strong for more than six years.”

“Today New York joins leaders from around the world in our fight to reduce waste and create more sustainable communities. This victory is a major win for advocates and activists who have worked for years to eliminate single-use plastic bags. North Brooklyn Neighbors stands with allies calling for a fee on all other single-use bags to ensure that the promise of waste reduction is fulfilled,” said **Anthony Buissereth, Executive Director of North Brooklyn Neighbors.**

“New York State's ban on single-use plastic bags is an enormous win, helping to create cleaner communities and a smaller environmental footprint. Thank you to all the New Yorkers, including my Council colleagues, who fought so hard to make our city more sustainable for generations to come. And building on this success, let’s continue to move toward the elimination of all single-use bags. For the sake of our overall environment and long-term quality of life—reusable bags are the only way to go,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal (Manhattan, District 6).**

"With plastic bags soon to be banned in New York, it's up to cities to reduce other types of bag waste. Paper bags contribute to climate change, add to local solid waste streams, and cost

taxpayers money,” said **Julie Tighe, President of the New York League of Conservation Voters**. “Implementing a fee on non-plastic disposable bags would encourage New Yorkers to bring their own reusable bags and raise funds for environmental programs. That's why NYLCV has been advocating for a fee on paper bags in addition to dealing with plastic bags for many years. We thank Council Members Lander and Chin for their longtime leadership on this important issue. We look forward to working with them and the entire City Council on paper bag fee legislation for New York City.”

"The State budget's inclusion of a plastic bag ban will help reduce waste and create a more environmentally conscious city and state. I am proud to have been one of the original co-sponsors of the city's legislative efforts implementing a fee on plastic bags, and I look forward to working with my Council colleagues to adopt a small fee for non-plastic single use bags. It's imperative that we reduce our reliance on plastics as they are filling our landfills and oceans and destroying our ecosystem. The plastic bag ban is a small step in the right direction to focus more on reusable materials and ditching single use items," said **Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez**.

“The long-awaited implementation of congestion pricing and a ban on plastic bags is great news for New Yorkers in the communities we serve. Residents will benefit from cleaner air and water, improved mass transit, safer streets and fewer vehicles traveling past their homes, schools and parks. Citizens Committee’s mission is to mobilize New Yorkers to improve their neighborhoods, and we are proud to have helped reach this milestone,” said **Peter H. Kostmayer, Chief Executive Officer of Citizens Committee for New York City**.

"Banning single-use plastic bags in New York State will make a significant difference in helping protect the environment," said **Council Member Ben Kallos**. "Any decrease in the 23 billion bags New Yorkers throw out every year means less oil being pumped out of the ground, less garbage for landfills and fewer plastic bags in our waterways or stuck on tree branches in our parks. New York City will be better because of this, proving that the hard work it took to get here was worth it."

"After years of watching the impact of pollution and congestion on my neighbors, I am thrilled and relieved that Albany is moving ahead with the bag ban and congestion pricing. I have fought so hard alongside other residents and groups like Citizens Committee to get to this point and I am so glad our hard work has paid off. This is an important step towards improving the environment in every community and reversing decades of inequity,” said **Diana Blackwell, President of Fred Samuel Resident Association (NYCHA)**.

"As one of the organizers of the first big meeting in Brooklyn on plastic bags with Councilmember Lander, I appreciate his continued leadership on this critical environmental and taxpayer issue along with Councilmember Chin. With the state legislature agreeing to ban plastic bags statewide, we look forward to New York agreeing to opt in to having a fee on paper bags so we promote the use of reusable bags instead," said **Mark Dunlea, Chair of the Green Education and Legal Fund**.

“The governor was only willing to get us halfway on bags, it’s up to us to finish the work of getting to a cleaner NYC and help NYers create less waste and litter,” said **Patrick Diamond, Vice Chair of SurfriderNYC.**

"Our planet is applauding New York for finally banning single-use plastic bags," said **Jen Chantrtanapichate**, founder of Cleanup North Brooklyn and Sixth Street Community Center. "This ban is long overdue and I'm eager to witness the positive impacts that it will have on our city and our environment. I was however disappointed to hear that a 5-cent fee on paper bags is merely an option for New York counties and not comprehensively folded into the plan. By imposing a 5-cent fee on paper bags, consumers will be more incentivized to use reusable bags and hopefully shift the consciousness about the environmental harms of bag waste—which is ultimately the most sustainable solution."

“We have a long way to go before we realize a truly green future, but let’s recognize that this is win for Planet Earth and all New Yorkers,” said **Mark Winston Griffith, Executive Director of the Brooklyn Movement Center.** “I look forward to seeing my neighborhood full of sustainable grocery bags rather neighborhood trees choking on plastic.”

“I’m happy to join my colleagues to support banning the bags! Single-use plastic bags overflow from garbage cans, get caught in the trees, blow in the streets, and collect in their corners and crevices of our alleys, stairwells and buildings. It is time that New York takes sanitation and environmental protection seriously and work to lessen the impact of our actions on future generations,” said **Council Member Peter Koo.**

"It is fantastic that Albany has finally acknowledged the scourge of single-use plastic bags; however, they sorely missed the mark of addressing the overarching issue of waste reduction," said **Christopher Chin, Executive Director of The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education (COARE).** "The effectiveness of a fee structure for bag reduction has been proven over and over, and around the world. More tellingly, so has the struggle and failure of legislation that lacks a fee component or a comprehensive approach."

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