

NEWS RENSSELAER COUNTY LEGISLATURE Office of the Minority 270-2890
From Legislators Flora Fasoldt 466-1703 Peter Grimm 273-1500

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LEGISLATORS CALL FOR PLASTIC BAG RECYCLING COMMUNITY AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Rensselaer County Legislators want to step-up recycling of plastic bags throughout the County. In a resolution co-sponsored by Democrats Peter Grimm and Flora Fasoldt, the County's Environmental Management Council would develop a countywide plastic bag recycling educational campaign.

According to Grimm, a member of the Legislature's Environment Committee, "We need to do a better job of making it easier for people to recycle plastic bags. It begins with community awareness and convenient locations for recycling bins."

Grimm would like to see a countywide voluntary collection site campaign similar to those already being done by major grocery store chains. "Price Chopper and Hannaford have made plastic bag recycling bins available in their stores and are to be applauded for being such good neighbors in promoting environmentally friendly habits."

Grimm wants "to see the Environmental Management Council build on that model and locate visible plastic bag recycling bins throughout the county to encourage greater recycling among residents."

Fasoldt, who represents Nassau, Sand Lake and Schodack noted that, "Along with the recycling bins, there needs to be a community awareness and educational campaign on the harmful effects plastic bags have on our environment."

She added that "Plastic bags, made from fossil fuel-based polymers, are virtually indestructible and usual end up in landfills, taking years to break down. Furthermore, plastic bags are aerodynamic, easily escaping from the waste stream, winding up in trees, clogging waterways, polluting the water and soil."

Grimm and Fasoldt have been joined by fellow Democrats Ginny O'Brien, Keith Hammond, Kevin Harrington and Brian Zweig in supporting the plastic bag recycling legislation so far.

The United States lags behind many other countries, globally, in placing limits on plastic bags. Ireland and Germany levy fees for every bag handed out by stores, and several African nations have set thickness requirements that have effectively banned the flimsy thin bags that float in the air. China, the world's fastest growing economy, banned free plastic shopping bags and encouraged people to use cloth ones instead; and

Grimm says he would favor this community awareness campaign as a "first step in the process, before considering a ban or recycling requirement. I would favor a voluntary approach first and assess that down the road before imposing any ban. Eventually, we hope residents will transition to reusable shopping bags -- but in the interim, we need to address the high volume of plastic bags in use. The solution is easier recycling."

Recently, the New York City Council passed a law requiring stores to collect and recycle bags, following a similar law in the state of California. San Francisco passed the nation's first bag ban, which took effect in November. The only plastic bags now allowed for big grocers are made of compostable material. Similar regulations are being considered by cities nationally.

Commercial use of plastic bags began in the 1970s and now make up 90 percent of all grocery and retail shopping bags, with the United States using an estimated 100 billion plastic bags each year. Environmentalists now estimate between 500 billion to a trillion bags are produced annually worldwide.