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News for Darien

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Statements from Darien Chamber of Commerce Director Opposing Proposed Bag Ordinance

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Here is a statement from Susan Cator, president and executive director of the Darien Chamber of Commerce, on the proposed checkout bag ordinance for Darien.

In addition to her written submission, Cator spoke at the Representative Town Meeting public hearing on Feb. 6 giving a slightly different version of the same statement. You can see a video of her comments at the bottom of this article.

Cator's Written Statement

I am Susan Cator, resident of Darien on Deepwood Road and also the president and executive director of the Darien Chamber of Commerce located at 10 Corbin Dr. in Darien.

Tonight I am here speaking on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce and our members impacted by this ordinance.

The entire Darien community we are sure believes that we all want to reduce and reuse. Our environment is important to us all.

While many in the Chamber knew of the BYOB [[Bring Your Own Bag](#)] effort, this “ordinance” was a total surprise. The Chamber only recently received this ordinance.

We shared it with our membership and asked for input. Some of our members knew about the “ordinance” while others did not. Some had had conversations with the BYO group but an “ordinance” was not part of that discussion.

A couple of members would not be affected since their “bags” already comply. Another retailer-a gift shop- does enough volume that they are working on redesigning their bags to comply and they can afford to do this. This shop is the exception in terms of “affording” to do this.

This ordinance will have a negative impact on the bottom line of our small retailers.

This ordinance is driven by the desire to remove single use plastic bags from our town, improve the use of bags brought by the consumer with them to the store, and establish a charge for a recycled paper bag of a certain quality. This blanket ordinance does not take into account the small businesses in our town and is not appropriately flexible for certain types of businesses.

To illustrate:

1) This 4 MIL bag from Helen Ainson is 100 percent made from recycled bottles and is 100 percent recyclable. How many of you have seen a Helen Ainson bag on the side of the road or on our beaches? This bag is REUSABLE. Erica Jensen, owner of Helen Ainson, purchases their bags in lots of 3,000 which for her shop is two- to three-year supply. These are in storage.

To insist that this particular business change bags for this ordinance in 6 months is not possible and unfair. As a result, Helen Ainson will either be fined until the bags are used up or the bags will be have to be disposed of in mass at our transfer station. (Helen Ainson is not the only retailer affected.) So then what really is the point in mandating this ordinance by complied with in six months?

2) This 12 MIL bag the ordinance will require is 100 percent more expensive than a 4 MIL bag. This added expense to slimmer profit margins at our retailers like Helen Ainson is unfair and a financial burden. How would you feel if the government told you your taxes would be increased by 100 percent with six months to prepare?

3) In addition, these type of bags are made in China. They are cost efficient. The tariff will go up from 10 to 25 percent this March according the distributor I spoke with.

4) This bag is from Westport that is acceptable by their ordinance 2.25 MIL product, not as reusable as the 4 MIL bag and is made from fresh plastic. It is not as environmentally friendly and is shown here only to illustrate the benefit of the 4 MIL bag used by Helen Ainson.

5) To address the other part of the ordinance which is the “Paper Bag” requirement. The “European Style” Paper bags that a grocery store uses that have paper handles. To meet the requirement of the ordinance, there are only three manufacturers in the U.S. that make these types of bags. Two of them only service customers with extremely high volume of 50,000 to 100,000 PER MONTH.

And the requirement of the ordinance (100 percent recycled paper with 40 percent post consumer recycled content) is 15 to 20 percent more in cost. A .10 cent surcharge to the consumer is not enough to cover this added expense. Why should the retailer be forced to go to these measures when it is the customers responsibility to be environmentally conscious.

Again, I would like to ask: How many times have you seen a Darien Sport Shop, Helen Ainson, Everything is Rosey, Tina Dragone bag on the side of the road or in the Sound? We have all seen plenty of single use plastic bags.

Who is going to regulate this ordinance? A volunteer? The BYO group?

If the ordinance is passed, the RTM must take into account the inventory each shop has AND have a reasonable expectation for liquidation of the bag inventory. Many stores do not have the volume of sales required to liquidate the supply in that short time frame.

One area in which the chamber can certainly stand up for our businesses is to tell those at this hearing that business is difficult. Margins are slimmer. This is for a variety of reasons. To say that our small business owners should just absorb this cost is not fair to them.

Darien is a town comprised of small businesses, unique shops and restaurants that are owned locally They are not “chains.” We do not live in a “cookie cutter” town. This blanket ordinance needs more thought put into it and more flexibility.

If you are targeting single use plastic bags, then adapt the ordinance. The ordinance should not penalize businesses that do not use single use plastic bags AND that have bags that are already environmentally conscious.

Thank you for your consideration of our small business community.

Darienite.com typically edits statements, letters to the editor and long quotes when a slight change of a word

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may clarify or prevent distraction. Readers can find unedited emails to the RTM about the proposed ordinance on the town government website. A video of the Feb. 6 public hearing is also online.

Comments by Cator at the Hearing

Cator spoke from about timestamp 10:58 to 14:47 in this video of the Feb. 6, 2019 Representative Town Meeting public hearing:

[RTM Hearing on Plastic Bags 2-6-19](#) from [Darien TV79](#) on [Vimeo](#).