

# **ARTICLE 37: Authorize Select Board to Petition to Impose a Checkout Bag Charge**

**2/28/2022**

**Joseph Stein, 21 Thoreau St**

With help from Surfrider Foundation (MA Chapter)

## ARTICLE 37: Authorize Select Board to Petition to Impose a Checkout Bag Charge

### Summary

This article would authorize the Select Board to petition the state legislature for a special law requiring that retail establishments in Concord charge a minimum of \$0.10 for each new checkout bag distributed. Any money collected for bags would be retained by the retailer.

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### Purpose

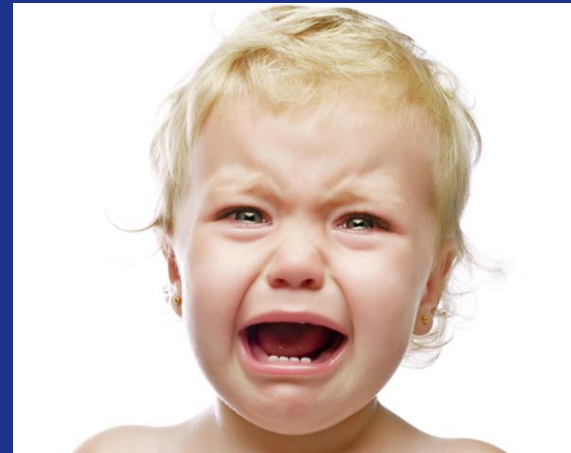
1. Incentivize consumers to **reuse checkout bags**, the most environmentally sustainable and economical option
2. Give consumers the **choice to not pay** for unwanted or unneeded new checkout bags
3. Allow collected money to be **retained by the retailer** to help defray the costs of switching to more sustainable checkout bag options
4. To **reduce waste and disposal/recycling costs** borne by Town and its residents

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- Not a tax. Money collected would remain with retailer
- Transparency via explicit bag charge on receipts
- The special law must be passed by the MA legislature and signed by the governor to go into effect

**This Article replicates warrant articles that were recently passed at  
2021 town meetings for Lincoln and Sudbury**

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## Good for the Environment

- Studies show that a small, required charge is the best tool for encouraging bag reuse and reducing unnecessary new bags.

### Effect of \$0.10 bag charge + plastic bag ban in Los Angeles County, CA

5% → 45%

Reusable Bag Use

17% → 40%

No Bag Used

Source: "Plastic Bag Bans: Analysis of Economic and Environmental Impacts." *Equinox Center*, 2013.

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- Studies also show that when consumers receive free checkout bags, they generally treat them as disposable
- Reusing bags is the best option, as environmental costs **are spread over repeated uses**

### Number of Uses Needed to Beat Single-Use Plastic Bags on GHG Emissions:



**Paper: 3**



**Polypropylene: 11**



**Cotton: 131**

Source: "Life cycle assessment of supermarket carrier bags." UK Environment Agency. Report SC030148. 2011.

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- Ban-only policies can have unintended consequences
- They **shift people to using and disposing paper bags**
  - Paper better on degradability, but worse on net GHGs, water use, chemical emissions, deforestation.
- They **risk being environmentally counterproductive**
  - Concord's Plastic Bag Reduction Bylaw (2015) bans single-use plastic checkout bags, but retailers can be exempt by increasing bag thickness (to make them "reusable"), violating bylaw intent
- A checkout bag charge (coupled with a ban on single-use plastic checkout bags) is **the most** effective policy



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# Good for Concord Residents

- We are already paying for bags! A transparent, easily avoidable charge allows shoppers to choose to save money by reusing bags
  - Non-woven PP reusable bag: ~\$1.00 / 52 uses = <2 cents/use
  - Disposable paper bag: ~10 cents/use
- Reduced demand for checkout bags reduces waste and disposal/recycling costs borne by Town and its residents

Source: Martinez, K., *et al.* "Polyethylene Retail Carrier Bags from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam." Publication 4605. *United States International Trade Commission*: Washington, DC, 2016.

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## Good for Concord Retailers

- “Free” check-out bags add to retailer overhead – a checkout bag charge will help defray these costs
- A bag charge levels the playing field, and helps stores switch to the most sustainable options
- Massachusetts Food Association testified IN SUPPORT of a statewide bag charge during 2019-2020 legislative session

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### It Works

- MA cities → Boston, Haverhill, Newton, Cambridge, Framingham
- MA towns → Sudbury, Lincoln
- California (2014), Maine, Vermont
- Denmark (1993), Ireland (2002), Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands

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## **A Win-Win-Win!**

- A Win for the Environment
- A Win for Concord residents
- A Win for Concord businesses

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