

Local Environmental Action

Overview: Local environmental organization leadership, with achievements that included plastic shopping bag and polystyrene food and drink container bans, zero-waste events, ongoing regular roadside litter cleanups involving adults and students, action that encouraged the use of reusable water bottles, the promotion of recycling and composting, and the celebration and encouragement of volunteerism. Our success stemmed in large part from collaborating with others, including local, regional, and state organizations.

I've had a lifelong interest in the environment, which has driven some career choices and most of my volunteer work. Since moving to the Berkshires in extreme western Massachusetts, I've been active in a local environmental group and since 2015 have been the chair. The overview provides examples of what we've accomplished. I'd like to focus on one area: single-use plastics bans.

Single-use plastics are attracting increased attention because they are non-essential and have wreaked enormous environmental havoc worldwide. We decided to address the issue locally in 2015, when only about a dozen communities in the state had adopted bans. We partnered with adjacent towns, secured a technical assistance grant from the state, conducted research on the use and impacts of these plastics, held public meetings to identify local concerns and issues, and managed to get Town Meeting approval – despite the opposition (including quite vocal) of two of the town's three Select Board members. We then worked hard during the year-long transition to prepare the public and businesses for the changes. The roll-out was successful, although too many people are still not using reusable shopping bags.

This effort saw us generate a wealth of materials and taught us A LOT. To help them succeed with their bans, I've shared the lessons and documents with people from across the state and adjacent states and helped organize a statewide summit. Now more than half the state's population lives in 120+ communities that have adopted plastic bag bans, increasing pressure for a statewide ban.

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