

Grassroots Glen-Ed group proposes plastic bag fee

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
June 27 2018 3:41 PM



EDWARDSVILLE – A local grassroots organization is championing the use of reusable bags by residents of Edwardsville and Glen Carbon – through the possible use of a plastic bag fee.

Called “Bring Your Own Glen-Ed,” the group describes itself as a “growing coalition of citizens and community groups seeking to reduce the harm single-use plastic bags have on health, the environment and the local economy.” To remedy negative effects plastic

bags have on these things, the group proposed to the Edwardsville and Glen Carbon city administrations to look at several possible solutions for plastic bag use reduction, including a fee on the usage of all plastic bags in those communities.

“To encourage people to adopt an alternative, multi-solving habit of bringing reusable bags when they go shopping, numerous cities across the United States and the world have successfully established fees or bans on single-use plastic bags,” a summary provided to Riverbender.com by Bring Your Own Glen-Ed stated. “Even a small fee has resulted in consumer behavior change, resulting in dramatic reduction in plastic bag use as a result of such laws. Informed and inspired by these successes, Bring Your Own Glen-Ed is proposing a 10-cent fee on single-use plastic bags distributed at all grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants and other retail establishments throughout Edwardsville and Glen Carbon. All retailers would keep 100 percent of the fees they collect, which can be used for any legal purpose, while also saving money over the long term due to the lower number of single-use plastic bags they would have to keep in stock for their customers.”

But, how bad are single-use plastic bags for human health and the environment?

According to a blog post on the United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) website penned by Marcia Anderson, as few as five percent of plastic in the United States is recycled every year. The EPA stated Americans use as many as 380 billion plastic bags and wraps every year, which require somewhere in the neighborhood of 12 million barrels of oil to create. In theory, the small, handled convenience of plastic bags do take a massive toll on the environment.

When not disposed of properly, plastic bags are found everywhere – from nature preserves to parking lots, to drainage ditches to sewer mouths. Eventually, these bags find their way to waterways instead of deteriorating (plastic bags take more than 100 years to deteriorate). From major waterways – such as the nearby Mississippi River – these plastic bags make their way to the ocean, where some poor critters such as endangered sea turtles mistake them for other critters – such as jellyfish – on which they love snacking. Plastic in the ocean has also been blamed for mass fish die-offs as well as the deaths of several cetaceans, including whales and porpoises.

In 2017, Living Lands and Waters collected as many as 8,798 plastic bags from the Mississippi River Watershed, which is an area encompassing as much as a third of the United States, the petition posits.

As of Wednesday afternoon, a petition posted on [a petition site](#) has garnered 53 supporters of a 1,000 signature goal.

Edwardsville Mayor Hal Patton said he is in favor of Bring Your Own Glen-Ed's goals of reducing single-use plastic bag use in favor of reusable bags. He said the city recently purchased 1,000 reusable cotton bags for the group to distribute at the Goshen Farmers' Market. He drew a line, however, at the city requiring a fee for plastic bag use.

“There is not enough support to support a plastic bag ban or a 10-cent fee, but if this is an attempt for the group to get it to a ballot, we can let the voters decide,” Patton said. “Most of us in the city are not in favor of imposing fees and taxes, so we encourage people to do the smart thing and use reusable bags, which is an idea everyone should support. Hopefully, if enough people support the use of reusable bags, a ban or fee won't even be needed.”

A ban or fee on plastic bags is just the beginning for Bring Your Own Glen-Ed's ultimate agenda. Other environmentally destructive materials like Styrofoam as well as other wasteful single-use plastic implements such as plastic cutlery and straws are also listed as future targets in a summary sent to Riverbender.com.

“While our current focus is on reducing single-use bags, we acknowledge that other single-use plastics – such as straws, cutlery and to-go containers – are contributing to the problem,” the summary states. “As such, successful implementation of the proposed ordinance will serve as a launching point for continued outreach and engagement aimed at changing habits and cultivating a low-waste culture. Once passed, the single-use plastic bag fee ordinance in Edwardsville and Glen Carbon would be the first of its kind in the entire greater St. Louis Metropolitan region. Such an accomplishment would further position Edwardsville and Glen Carbon as exemplars of sustainable communities that are achieving triple-bottom line benefits through multi-solving approaches that improve quality of life for all.”

Schnucks Markets Senior Communications Specialist Paul Simon issued the following statement from Schnucks regarding the proposed ban:

"At checkout, we offer our customers the choice of plastic or paper bags, and most choose plastic," Simon said in an email. "We also sell reusable bags at a very reasonable price. Certainly, we would prefer not to inconvenience our customers by limiting their options or charging them more; however, Schnucks will always remain in compliance with the laws of the municipalities in which we operate."

Plastic bag bans and fees have been utilized across the world, including in Oak Park, Illinois, which has a population of 51,000, which is not much higher than the combined populations of Edwardsville and Glen Carbon. In 2018, Oak Park passed a plastic bag fee of 10 cents at all retail establishments with more than 5,000 square feet.

In the first month of the ban, the village collected more than \$10,000, which represented 200,000 bags purchased. This revenue was greater than expected, but it was never intended to be a source of dependable revenue for the village.

“I think this is the one and only time, on behalf of the Village of Oak Park, that I hope we get that revenue down to zero,” Oak Park Village Trustee Bob Tucker is quoted as saying in the release from Bring Your Own Glen Ed.

Chicago passed its own seven-cent single-use bag tax in 2017. Before the tax went into effect in Feb. 2017, shoppers took home an average of 2.3 plastic bags at every grocery store visit. The first month of the tax resulted in a 42 percent drop in the use of both plastic and paper bags. This tax also added as much as \$9.2 million to the city's coffers – as the City of Chicago gets five cents from the sale of each bag, with the remaining two cents going to the store's owner.

Comments on the petition agree with Bring Your Own Glen-Ed's sentiments.

“Plastic bags continue to collect in my house without any use and no easy way to dispose of them,” Hannah W. of Illinois commented. “They are damaging to the environment and should be replaced preferably with reusable bags or something that can be recycled.”

“I am aware of the negative impact of plastic bags on the environment and my family has been limiting its use for years,” Alison L., also of Illinois, commented. “We have a large collection of reusable bags that we use regularly. I would like our community to do more to reduce this common pollutant.”