

COMMITTEE ON ORDINANCES, CHARTER AND RULES
APRIL 29, 2019 AT 6:07 p.m.
COMMITTEE ROOM
WOBURN CITY HALL

Voting Members:

Present: Chairman Lindsay Higgins, Alderman Michael Concannon, Alderman Edward Tedesco,
Alderman Mark Gaffney, and Alderman Mercer-Bruen

Non-Voting Members:

Present: President Michael Anderson, Alderman Richard Gately, and Alderman Robert Ferullo.

Absent: Alderman Joanne Campbell

* * * * *

Order to amend Woburn Municipal Code by adding Section 8-14 Reduction of Checkout Bags by Retail Establishments: Alderman Higgins said she would welcome comments and discussion on the proposed order to ban single-use plastic bags in the city. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said this is the committee's first formal meeting on the proposed ban. She said she sent an email to Ward 5 residents about the plastic bags issue. She said she has started to get feedback on both sides, and it has broken down about equally between people who want the ban and people who don't. She said she is also concerned that people may not be aware the council is considering a ban on single-use plastic bags. She said she was surprised the opinions were roughly equal on both sides. She said some people who are opposed to the ban have valid reasons for doing so. She said she hopes this meeting will consist of a conversation rather than a recommendation from the committee. Alderman Concannon said there are some towns in the area that have moved forward with a ban on plastic bags. He said there are a couple of towns that have enacted a ban that are now reconsidering it. He said he has been contacted by a few people about the plastic bag ban. He said he appreciates the involvement and interest from members of the community, especially the young people who are present in the audience. He said he appreciates and applauds their sincere interest in protecting the environment. He said he does have some concerns, though he is not a big fan of plastic bags, nor is he a member of the plastic bag lobby. He said he has a concern about the role of government and whether action is necessary or appropriate in this instance. He said he is starting to hear from a lot of people who want to see single use plastic bags go away. He said there is seems to be not a lot of opposition anymore from retailers. He said if that's the case, then he's not sure government action is necessary because if people don't want to use plastic bags and retailers don't stock them anymore, the situation will work itself out without the council's involvement. He asked what type of action the council should take, and if a resolve is better than an ordinance. He asked the city of Woburn is being asked to solve a broader problem and he's heard there is legislative action that may take place at the Statehouse. He said his first reaction when something like this comes up is government works best when it governs the least. He said he will keep an open mind and that he appreciates everyone's passion. He said he is all ears to the discussion. Alderman Gately said he has received many phone calls and emails. He said he is in favor of this ban to be enacted. He said he has seen the damage single use plastic bags can cause. He said he does not believe they are a necessity any more. He said he believes the only way a ban can be enforced is by government. He said the plastic bags have done a lot of damage. He said he hasn't used single

use plastic bags in five years. He said there are no plastic bags in his house. He said he is in favor of a ban on single use plastic bags and the council needs to do it right. Alderman Tedesco said he echoes Alderman Concannon's comments. He said he will keep an open mind. He said he thinks this is more of a market decision than a government decision. He said this may be a decision left to the ballot, though he is not ordinarily a big fan of legislating at the ballot box. President Anderson said he is not a bleeding heart. He said when plastic bags replaced paper bags, people got upset, but now we're all used to plastic bags. He said there is littering with plastic bags. He said town after town has banned plastic bags, but those towns are not Woburn. He said it is a lot easier to have single use bags but banning them is the right thing to do. He said he recognizes there will be inconvenience, but it's the right thing to do. Alderman Gaffney said he doesn't like plastic bags. He said if Woburn joins with the other communities that have banned plastic bags, then they won't be flying around the city. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said she is surprised the feedback she has gotten has been equal on both sides. She said she thinks there are more people who want to participate and the committee should hold at least one more meeting on the matter. She said she thinks the council ought to get the word out. She encouraged citizens to let the council know how they feel. She said there are many people who don't know the council is considering a ban. Chairman Higgins said notice is not required because there is no public hearing component. She said she is not opposed to holding another meeting on this subject. She said the council may want to consider holding a public meeting that is advertised. Alderman Mercer-Bruen suggested meeting as a committee of the whole or in the council chamber. President Anderson said the council could suspend the rules at its meeting next Tuesday to take input from the public. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said she could send notice to the constituents in Ward 5. Chairman Higgins said she is willing to open the debate to the public. Motion made by Alderman Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Alderman Tedesco to send a communication to Woburn Business Association Executive Director Heather Maguire notifying her of the debate to ban single use plastic bags and inviting her to the council's meeting on May 7 to address the matter from a business perspective; approved, 5-0. Alderman Gately said there is a lot of business before the council for its next two regular meetings. Alderman Mercer-Bruen suggested holding the debate at the May 21 meeting. President Anderson said he would prefer to hold the debate on May 7. Alderman Mercer-Bruen said each alderman can get the word out. Alderman Gaffney asked how quickly a ban on plastic bags would be implemented. President Anderson said the proposed ban would go into effect on January 1, 2020. Alderman Mercer-Bruen asked if the Building Inspector is the enforcement agent. Alderman Tedesco said the enforcement agency would be the Board of Health. President Anderson said the second reading for the proposed order will occur at the May 7 meeting. He said he would hate for the discussion to get lost in the weeds. He said the public should be invited, so the debate will probably get kicked out until later. He said he wants to wait to see what happens next Tuesday. Motion made by Alderman Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Concannon to open the committee meeting to comments from the audience; approved, 5-0. Chairman Higgins asked if anyone in the audience wished to address the committee about the proposed order to ban single use plastic bags. Meredith Jones, 4 Sherman Terrace, said she is a second grader at the Malcolm White Elementary School. She said she is in favor of a ban on single-use plastic bags. She said the bags get stuck in trees, and animals choke on them. Margaret Jones, 4 Sherman Terrace, said she is a fourth grader at the Malcolm White Elementary School and she supports the ban on plastic bags. She said the reduction of plastic bags will help protect the environment. She said adopting a ban on plastic bags would be another thing Woburn can be proud of. Avery Mason, 11 Lydon Court,

said she is a second grade student at the Goodyear Elementary School. She said she is in favor of a ban on single use plastic bags. John Spence, 30 Main Street, said his experience with paper bags is the hand holds break really easily and said they should be reinforced. He said there only seems to be one size for paper bags. Motion made by Alderman Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Concannon to return to the regular order of business; approved, 5-0.

Motion made by Alderman Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Concannon to adjourn; approved, 5-0. Chairman Higgins adjourned the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees