

# Melrose plastic straw ordinance to take effect on Dec. 1

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It's been estimated that 73 percent of all beach litter is plastic and it's killing more than 1.1 million seabirds and animals every year. Since its invention in 1907, humans have created about 9.1 billion tons of plastic, most of which can stay in landfills for hundreds of years.

Plastic straws are often items that tend to end up in landfills because they are small and can fall through the machinery that sorts recycling. The city of Melrose has come up with a solution to reduce the use of plastic straws in an attempt to help the environment.

A new plastic straw ordinance will take effect on Dec. 1, as an attempt to reduce the distribution of single use plastic straws and beverage stirrers in all business establishments.

The ordinance is not a ban of plastic straws. If a customer asks for a plastic straw at a local business, they may receive one, but will also be encouraged to use it for more than one beverage. According to the ordinance, businesses will provide straws made of paper or other non-plastic materials and customers may bring their own straws for personal use.

However, this ordinance "does not prohibit the sale of packages of plastic straws in retail stores." The ordinance is not only is for business establishments, but for any city event that has beverages available for the public for consumption.

The Board of Health will be enforcing the new ordinance. A business that gets caught violating it will face a written warning on the first offense, a \$25 fine on the second, and a \$50 fine on the third and subsequent offenses.

Melrose resident Jeana McNeil is a volunteer with Zero Waste Melrose and explained plastic has always been an issue that needed a light shined on it. McNeil said plastic is “almost an automatic product and we use it without thinking,” and it is easy to substitute it with more environmentally friendly options.

Zero Waste Melrose, formally known as The Melrose Recycling Committee, has been around since the 1980s, but has recently gone through a rebrand over the last five years and now has a main area of focus on single-use plastic such as straws or plastic grocery bags.

This new plastic straw ordinance is something that has been talked about for a while by the Zero Waste Committee, and City Councilor Frank Wright brought it forward to the council.

#### Change of culture

This is not the first step the city of Melrose has taken towards creating a more eco-friendly environment. Back in December 2017, Melrose became the 61st Massachusetts community to approve a city-wide ban on disposable plastic bags.

McNeil was one of the co-leaders for that initiative and expressed that plastic has always been a “product on their radar.”

Melrose Mayor Gail Infurna expressed it as a “culture change,” but she believes “our community as well as our business owners are environmentally conscious” and is pleased they embraced the change.

Infurna said she supports the new ordinance and “any steps that we can take to reduce our plastic use will have a positive effect on our environment.”

“I must commend the Zero Waste Committee for their hard work in publicizing the new law, building public support, and even setting up containers of bags in places like City Hall where people can grab a reusable bag if they don’t have one,” she said.

The new ordinance will have an effect on some local businesses and Infurna feels, “it is a culture change, but I am sure our businesses understand the importance of reducing plastic use.”