

## **Our Opinion: Plastic bags must go**

*Berkshire Eagle*

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Given their many environmental drawbacks, plastic bags are on the way out in America. Massachusetts can hasten that day by becoming the first state to ban the use of plastic bags at large retail stores.

Lawmakers on the joint Environmental, Natural Resources and Agriculture Committee on Monday advanced legislation banning the bags at retail stores larger than 4,000 square feet. Plastic bags are essentially forever, and they pack landfills, clutter streets and defile waterways. They are a legitimate danger to coastlines, as washed up plastic bags can kill seals, turtles and other marine creatures that consume them or are caught in them.

Senator James Eldridge, an Acton Democrat, made reference Tuesday to the Great Pacific Ocean Garbage Patch, a floating dump created by manmade products, many of them plastic bags. Not surprisingly, Manchester-by-the-Sea is one of two Massachusetts communities to ban plastic bags (Brookline is the other), and Nantucket Island also has banned them.

According to Roxanne Zak of the Sierra Club, speaking to State House News Service, only 5 percent of the more than 1 billion plastic bags thrown away by Americans are recycled annually. Removing the resin in plastic bags makes it expensive to recycle them, as does the food waste that tends to cling to them. While paper bags are preferable, their use should be reduced and can be if shoppers bring their reusable shopping bags with them.

The legislation exempts small retailers and the bags grocery stores and bakeries use to avoid creating a hardship for businesses competing with massive chains, but ideally they will discontinue the use of the bags before it becomes necessary at some future date to expand the legislation. Like too many products created for the sake of convenience, plastic bags are useful for a few moments before becoming eyesores and threats to marine life for centuries. The Legislature should approve their ban this session and Governor Patrick should sign the ban into law.