

Swarthmore Borough Environmental Advisory Council
Preliminary Report on the 2023 Single-Use Plastics Survey for Swarthmore Borough Community
28 Feb 2023

Process

The purpose of this public opinion survey was to gather the perspectives of Swarthmore Borough community members in order to better consider minimization strategies for single-use plastics - or those plastics used once then thrown away or recycled - in the Borough. The survey was administered by the Environmental Advisory Council (EAC), which is appointed by the Swarthmore Borough Council to advise and educate on environmental matters. The survey was administered one day in December via in-person solicitations downtown and throughout the month of February among the following community groups and platforms: Borough website (“In the News” section); The Swarthmorean newspaper letter to the editor; Swarthmore neighborhood of the Nextdoor social media site; Swarthmore Public Library via paper surveys and posted URL/QR codes; assorted Facebook social media sites including Swarthmore Borough page, Swarthmore Town Center group, EAC page and WSSD Neighborhood Swap & Bulletin Board group; Interfaith Council email; etc. The online survey will close on February 28.

Preliminary Results

The survey currently has **205 responses**; the goal was 100+. Below are the results regarding support for initiatives, followed by the results of the rest of the survey including all responses to the two open-ended questions.

A. Which of the following initiatives do you support to reduce plastic waste and litter?

Initiative Number	Support	Oppose	Unsure
1. Volunteer efforts by interested parties	89%	9%	<1%
2. Educational materials and resources for businesses on cost-effective alternatives to single-use plastics	82%	13%	5%
3. Greater customer access to reusable bags	90%	5%	2%
4. Additional drop-off locations for plastic bag recycling (in addition to the Co-op)	81%	11%	6%
5. An ordinance prohibiting a business from providing single-use plastic shopping bags to consumers	67%	19%	15%
6. An ordinance restricting the distribution of plastic straws and stirrers	65%	13%	25%
7. A checkout fee of 10-25 cents for each disposable PAPER shopping bag used (retailer would use fee to purchase paper bags)	63%	13%	24%
8. Green business certification program for businesses that reduce their reliance on single-use plastics	89%	9%	<1%

B. Do you live in Swarthmore Borough?

81% Yes
19% No

C. What is your age?

0% 10-17
23% 18-26
56% 27-61
21% 62+

D. Which of the following best describes your purchasing frequency at all businesses in Swarthmore Borough?

38% Multiple times per week
43% Weekly
16% Monthly
2% Less than monthly

E. When making purchases, how important is it to you to be able to receive single-use plastic shopping bags and/or plastic straws/stirrers?

12% Important
15% Neither important nor unimportant
73% Unimportant

F. How often do you use reusable bags (cloth or other durable material, intended for reuse) when shopping?

65% Always or often
24% Sometimes
11% Rarely or never

G. What prevents you from using reusable shopping bags? *Respondents could only mistakenly select one choice*

1% Too expensive
75% Forget to bring
14% Want single-use plastic bags for other purposes
10% Other *Details to be added*

- H. How could the Swarthmore Borough Environmental Advisory Council best support your efforts to no longer use single-use plastics, whether that be shopping bags, straws/stirrers or other plastics? *Open-ended question; all answers listed*
1. Increased education of businesses about sustainability practices
 2. Slowly phasing these items out and educating people about why such a change is needed. Not an easy issue especially for some of the businesses in town.
 3. Let the businesses do what they want. The actions of the local businesses do not need to be policed by local government. The simple customer choice of where they spend will deem what businesses make money or not.
 4. I reuse plastic bags when I get home. They become bags for small trash cans. Although with the Co-Op not using them anymore I don't really go to places that provide them in the town. when Wegmans switched their pickup service to re-usable bags I suddenly started ending up with 3-5 "re-usable" ones a week. Eventually had to throw them out as what do you do with so many bags?
 5. Now that I have a 2 year old she needs plastic straws to drink at restaurants. Any paper straw will fall apart when she plays with it.
 6. Take-one, leave-one bags
 7. Give our alternatives
 8. Provide residents and shoppers with reusable shopping bags. Many can be expensive, but i consistently use every free reusable bag I get.
 9. Provide paper or free reusable bags.
 10. Ban the distribution of all of these single-use plastic products by businesses in the Borough. Require Hobbs and Dunkin to let people use their own reusable coffee cups.
 11. Great solution above! Go for all of it!
 12. Biodegradable alternatives wherever prepared food is sold.
 13. Just do not allow plastic shopping bags,,,. .
 14. Lead referendum efforts restricting single use plastics by biz community. Alleyway trash cans illuminates this problem; plus a real eyesore.
 15. Like the disposable bag "library" at the coop and would like to see that installed other places too. Could also have a plastic bag reuse library with standards, like clean, dry, no holes. Would also like to see the coffee shops switch to paper lids. Finally would like the college to be more open to using their industrial composting capabilities to support borough businesses who use industrially compostable plastics.
 16. Sounds good to me
 17. Based on experiences of communities across the country, an ordinance banning plastic with a fee for paper works best.
 18. Ban as many single use plastics as possible
 19. Restrict plastic utensils as well as straws. Expand the recycle center and its maintenance. Help vendors find alternatives to shrink wrap or cling wrap. Help vendors find alternatives to packaging plastic utensils in plastic bags, when offering plastic utensils cannot be avoided. Offer a container re-use exchange (your containers might nest nicely in mine, and mine in yours, for re-use). Promote compostable cellulose based cellophane bags to vendors. Provide a collection and re-use service for non-recyclable plastic packaging from online order deliveries. For Swarthmore-based businesses that ship or deliver, restrict non-recyclable plastic packaging material, and educate them on alternatives. Provide water bottle refilling stations with high quality water - you could even charge for them. When a vendor offers multiple brands of an item, and some are packaged with less plastic than others, provide an incentive for them to either eliminate the ones with more plastic or promote the ones with less or none. Assist residents in acquiring, installing, and maintaining washing machine lint traps, to prevent particles of acrylic and polyester clothing from entering the water supply. Make bag dryer racks available for recloseable bags that could be washed and dried for re-use, but are often discarded (eg.

from the co-op deli). Promote bringing your own produce bags and bulk containers, making it easy to mark containers with tare, especially at the co-op. Promote bringing your own reusable containers to Swarthmore restaurants and truckathons.

20. I think the biggest challenge is take out containers. If businesses would allow us to bring our own containers to place takeout in that would be significant.
21. Regular communications about options to reduce use, tips, best practices, recycling options etc.
22. As a parent I have come to realize that eliminating the use of disposable cutlery, straws or bags is virtually impossible. But I would live to see non plastic alternatives that are more easily recycled or compostable more widely available. Even if this would be with a small surcharge. Also making the means to dispose of them more widely available would be helpful. Especially for items that are graded as compostable but are really only meant for industrial composting.
23. Charge for and provide reusable shopping bags.
24. An ordinance prohibiting plastic bags and straws.
25. I grew up when paper straws and wooden stirrers were offered. In Vermont I've seen compostable flatware & stirrers. I like the "bag library" at the Coop. Maybe more stores could offer that or sell their own durable shopping bags.
26. Any or all of the above.
27. Give free paper alternative products
28. Provide free clean reusable bags
29. When I'm in PA (I actually have a Swarthmore mailing address although I'm in Springfield Twp) I shop at Giant and would be interested in coordinating talking to their manager and managers of other nearby businesses on Baltimore Pike with other activists.
30. Education and incentives
31. I need to move beyond a single use plastics to issues, such as plastic on meat purchases or endless products at the co-op.
32. Outlaw plastic bags
33. Remove not only plastic but styrofoam containers (aria)
34. Better communicate the opportunity to buy bulk spices etc at the Co-Op. Great value and much better for the environment, plus tremendously convenient.
35. Not reusable straws which again are worse for the environment and are used like single use straws. Instead of charging customers more why not provide incentives for bringing one's own straws or bags? Instead of charging more to people already paying - why not try incentivizing good behavior with discounts. That is way more likely to work. And mean that people are not purchasing these "reusable" items just to dump them in the landfill where they take 3-4 times as long to disintegrate.
36. Just make it the law like other towns and cities have, well before us.
37. Accept more types of plastic for recycling, as some supermarkets do. Wrappers, etc
38. Prohibit them from being used in the Borough and work with neighboring communities to institute similar restrictions.
39. Those damn #6 containers at Bamboo Bistro, to whose sushi my family is quite attached.
40. Encourage reusable beverage containers and compostable take out food containers. Discourage trash producing events like Food Truck night, or require the event to improve its environmental foot print.
41. Incentivize businesses
42. Incentives for bringing your own cup, bag etc. Plastic should not be the free default.
43. An ordinance prohibiting the use of single use plastic.
44. Invent a straw that isn't awful, wood stirrers are a reasonable alternative
45. Make alternatives readily available and free of charge, educate cashiers and store employees to promote use of non-plastic options
46. Probed alternatives for those who need them

47. Please do not make a bunch of throw-away paper “educational materials” because it defeats the purpose by creating even more waste.
48. There are other municipalities that have banned single-use plastics and styrofoam. I don’t see why Swarthmore can’t institute a ban. I’d pay a bit more for costlier, green alternatives.
49. Better education on proper recycling of plastics. Often there are food contaminated plastic containers in recycling and it negates recycling. What about plastic cups like dunkin donuts has? It's more than bags and straws
50. The solution is monetary incentives. If you really want to be successful you need to charge people for use of single use plastics or you pay incentives to people to not use single use plastics
51. Encouraging businesses (incentivizing businesses) to change their offerings (bamboo stirrers, etc) Explaining clearly what can/can’t be recycled (pizza boxes? Who knows?)
52. I think many people already bring their own shopping bags to buy groceries at the Co-op. I would like to see the gift and clothing shops maybe offer cloth bags to take items home as opposed to paper bags if that cost wasn't prohibitive to owners (maybe earns them a green business certification). I would also like to see food businesses stop using plastic cups and utensils for takeout. There are compostable alternatives. I think the best way forward is for the EAC to work with businesses to compel them to stop by promising a green certification program and, most importantly, pushing Borough Council to pass an ordinance prohibiting single-use plastics as other towns have done.
53. Create more opportunities to purchase items using refillable containers (i.e. detergents). Make durable, refillable, uniform containers available for bulk items at the co-op or other retailers.
54. Green Certification sounds like a positive approach to encourage change. With education & options, businesses can proactively create a roadmap to reduce plastics. Take out containers present another major source of single-use plastic. Perhaps the Green Certificate could picture a road with progress marks?
55. Sell us reusable bags at a discount (online order) or sell in the stores
56. By making them less readily available, and making alternatives more available. Encouragement or nudges to move away from single-use plastics such as small extra costs or signs can also go a long way for discouraging use of plastics on a consumer end.
57. I’d support a town-wide campaign to end single-use plastics in Swarthmore and then promoting the borough as plastic-free, or something like that.
58. Happy to pay for other types of bags that stores offer but it would have to be a nominal fee or only what the owner paid for the bags. For other towns/stores where I shop, I resent when stores “up charge” the bags and try to make a profit off the bags. It’s as if I’m paying for the privilege of shopping at that store. So I recommend that, if the stores in Swarthmore move away from plastic, just offer a free or inexpensive alternative.
Also, I think there are good alternatives for plastic stirrers (wood?) so that is a reasonable shift. However, there are no good alternatives for plastic straws. Paper straws are useless and get soggy within minutes of any drink, rendering them useless. I guess owners can just not include any straws and only offer them to those customers who ask for one. That will help with waste. But if someone does ask for a straw, it should be plastic.
59. Provide education to residents and businesses about the problems with continuing plastic use, such as continued extraction of fossil fuels, harm to fish & wildlife, trash on beaches and elsewhere.
60. get borough council to ban straws, stirrers, and most single-use plastics, especially styrofoam. I don't know if there should be an exception for delivery by Grub Hub/Door Dash etc. from a single-use plastic ban
61. Have a bank of re-usable bags as they do in the Co-Op
62. Ensure that they are not offered in the borough - although I bring my own shopping bags and don't take straws or stirrers

63. Push fee and prohibition policies at county or state level.
64. Free reusable bags
65. Complete ban on plastic
66. Na
67. Help encourage Borough Council to ban the availability of this unnecessary, polluting, destructive waste.
68. Provide reusable bags in stOres
69. Swarthmore is doing a good job with plastics.
70. Banning.
71. Swarthmore provides free reusable bags;
72. Making reusable ones more accessible
73. Don't hand or sell plastic bags to costumers when they purchase at stores.
74. Maybe provide more reusable bags to those who may need it. The co-op have good reusable bags that are only a couple bucks which is great
75. Provide bags or strong alternative
76. Provide bags or strong alternative
77. dont let businesses give out plastic
78. Provide resumable bags at checkout. Anyone can drop off there too. Like the co-op

I, Please leave any additional comments below. *Open-ended question; all answers listed*

1. In addition to the co-op, it would be great if there was a drop off location at the recycling center too.
2. Regarding straws, if the switch is to paper straws individually wrapped in plastic, this is no improvement. Businesses need to stop providing any straw unless the customer asks for it.
3. Please be aware of the ableism of plastic straw bans and their negative impact on those that truly need them.
4. Unfortunately ... Single- use straws aren't very good. So I know there will be resistance to that. Single use plastic water bottles would be a bigger concern to me.
5. Take-out food containers are the next frontier. I take out food when I'm in DC from a restaurant there that's very sustainable in its take-out container materials--mostly cardboard.
6. Local committees can suggest, but besides that you should have no say in what the business offers.
7. Anti-SUP is the "sexy" environmental issue of the past 10 years, but economists argue that it's miss-guided. Less than .1% of plastic in the ocean comes from they US, most is from China. Landfills are no longer a threat to the environment or public health. State-of-the-art landfills, with redundant clay, plastic liners, and leachate collection systems, have now replaced all of our previously unsafe dumps.
8. Single use straws should be available for those with mobility disabilities on an opt-in basis. Not everyone needs them, but those who do greatly need flexible, clean, plastic straws for use.
9. Thank you for doing this!
10. Thanks for your work.
11. I am supportive of a "paper straw first" policy but don't feel that they should be banned as they're not appropriate for all beverages. Absolutely fine with wooden/corn/bamboo/etc stirrs.
12. Eliminating single use plastics and charging for paper bags will reduce shopping in our already struggling borough.
13. Waste reduction requires some lifestyle changes. Some waste is very difficult to address locally, especially from medical supplies. Thank you for researching plastic waste. I also hope to see both paper and food waste addressed. For food waste, composting is great, but not letting it go to waste is even better. I freeze tasty waste such as cilantro and mushroom stems, and cook it into tasty vegetable stock. Help small households to purchase only what produce they need at the co-op and farmers market, rather than buying pre-packaged bunches that feed a family of four. If that is not possible, open

a food exchange. I'll give you half my bunch of cilantro and half my bunch of carrots in exchange for half your eggs. Encourage people to eat more plant based meals and less meat with tasting stations and recipes. We don't all have to be perfect vegans. A simple shift would help. Paper: maintain the recycle center dumpster more often. Work with the post office to allow opt-out from bulk mail, if possible. Seek re-use solutions to boxes from home deliveries and online purchases. I don't know about you, but I have a stash of empty boxes of various sizes for those moments when I simply need a box - could we have a used empty box store? Add a vendor to the farmer's market for cloth hankies and napkins. Switching to cotton hankies has reduced my household trash volume by at least a third. Thanks again for your research into tackling waste. I've been carrying reusable shopping bags for 30 years.

14. Straws seem like a pretty minor item to focus on, it seems like the bigger issue is disposable take out containers and cups. Would love to see some initiatives to reduce use of all single use plastics/styrofoam. In an ideal world, we'd have municipal composting and most businesses would offer compostable containers. I would be willing to pay extra for that!
15. Thanks for trying to help the community -- keep up the good work.
16. There are companies that reduce single use plastic bottles. E.g., AWSM Sauce for condiments; Blue Land for cleaning supplies. Maybe some of those lines (or others) could be introduced at the Coop.
17. I have a hard time believing the plastic bag recycling options really result in the bags being recycled, since there is hardly any market for such materials, based on my understanding.
18. (continuing) The volume of business by Giant, Martindales, and the Springfield Mall far exceeds all Swarthmore businesses. Yet Swarthmoreans patronize these businesses. Why confine yourself to the borough. I have constructed handouts that I pass out.
19. Thank you
20. The fight over plastic bags is a drop in the ocean compared to other larger environmental issues. Anything that raises costs for consumers must have a clear economic benefit alongside the environmental benefit, these benefits must be material in relation to the cost, and they must have a material net benefit in relation to other environmental causes that have a direct impact on life (such as preventing and cleaning up air and water pollution). Suggest focusing your efforts there.
21. In the above it is confusing whether you mean "would support" or "currently support" and what exactly entails support.
22. Banning plastics is not the answer. Switch to paper with wax no straw needed cups. Switch to biodegradable options. But for gods sakes don't follow the moronic media example which is causing much environmental harm in the name of democratic politics with absolutely no common sense behind it.
23. It is really surprising to me that other municipalities have done this and we haven't. I would expect a single use plastic ban in swarthmore to address more than just bags and straws. How about takeout containers? I see no reason why we aren't just carrying our own lidded containers into 320 or the Coop to carry out our prepared foods.
24. Thank you for your work on this important matter.
25. Ordinances to restrict or charge for single use plastics will further depress the already marginal business environment in swarthmore and annoy customers.
26. I just randomly saw this in Nextdoor. Where else is it promoted? Will it extend into Farmers Market season, when people can complete it in person?
27. Thank you
28. Please research the increase in purchasing single use plastic bags (like trash bags) when plastic bag bans are implemented.
29. Some people with disabilities need plastic straws. You should consider if you are making life harder for children and adults who rely on these straws. It's not helpful to tell them they must remember their own

straw every time they go out. Imagine yourself in their shoes if they get to the location, realize they left theirs behind at home, and now they lack the tool needed to consume their drink. Paper straws do not work for people with oral problems because they quickly become soggy.

30. The discussion should include discouraging or banning the use of styrofoam as well.
31. See above
32. Single use plastics are ubiquitous and too embedded to change usage behavior. They simply need to be removed; people will adapt.
33. I usually carry 2-3 bags with me. But I will put stuff back rather than buy a 4th bag. I feel like if you buy enough to fill more than the bags you brought, you should not be penalized for purchasing extra.
34. Thank you for taking action on this and all your hard work!
35. I would ask the committee to encourage Swarthmore Farmers' Market to continue having free reusable bags available in 2023. Many of us have bags to donate to the cause. Thanks for doing the survey!
Eager to hear results.
36. Rather than penalize by charging for paper bag how about reward by offering discount if using our own reusable bag
37. Thanks Nathan for your interest
38. Thank you for conducting this survey!
39. N/A
40. Could do more to limit paper.
41. Stop providing single use plastic bags
42. I'm really concerned about plastic beverage bottles, esp. bottled water. I would love to see some action to cut the use of these. More difficult than with bags for sure.
43. I am concerned about imposing a ban on single use plastics at the farmers market. As an example, some farms pre-bag their leafy greens to help with sales. I support a ban on bags to hold items at checkout (end of a purchase.)
I would want confirmation bags are actually being recycled before starting a recycling program, as there is limited market for some recycled plastics.