

## **Paper vs. Plastic**

Could the residents of Smithtown benefit both financially and environmentally by switching from plastic to paper leaf bags?

Currently, the Town of Smithtown spends approximately 1 million dollars a year trucking our residents' leaves out of state to a landfill/composting facility in Pennsylvania. There are two primary reasons why the town uses this method of disposal instead of recycling its leaves locally. The first is the town's inability to process the 20,000 to 25,000 tons of leaves our residents dispose of every year in town owned facilities. The second reason is that privately owned facilities are incapable of bidding on the town contract to recycle (compost) the leaves in plastic bags because they are not permitted or zoned for this activity. Since our leaves are presently collected in plastic bags, any local facility accepting these bags would be considered a transfer station, which is prohibited in the Town of Smithtown.

This dilemma leaves the town no choice but to send over 600 truckloads of leaves out of state at a staggering cost to our taxpayers and our environment. This is why, at the Kings Park Civic Association's October membership meeting, I proposed the town establish a program that requires our residents to use biodegradable paper bags instead of plastic bags to dispose of their leaves and yard waste. Many counties, not just individual towns, in New York State have already successfully implemented a paper bag only policy for yard waste disposal. Brookhaven and other Long Island towns have also begun using paper instead of plastic. Unlike plastic bags, which are non-recyclable and have to be separated from the leaves with an expensive debagging machine, paper bags can be ground up with the leaves and other yard waste and recycled into compost. Also, unlike plastic bags, composting yard waste inside paper bags does not require a transfer station permit. This would allow privately owned local facilities, with the proper zoning, to bid on the town leaf recycling contract. These privately owned facilities could compost any excess leaves that the town yards do not have the capacity to handle. Switching from plastic to paper would also end our use of oil based, non-biodegradable plastic bags, take dozens of dirty diesel trucks off the roads, reduce our dependence on foreign oil, and could save our taxpayers up to 1 million dollars per year.

Some say the odor from the recycling process could be unpleasant to nearby residents and therefore local composting could be problematic, but there are many ways to mitigate odors by using proper composting methods. Many composting facilities have been consistently using these techniques for years with few complaints. Paper bags may be more expensive than plastic bags, but they will provide the town with an opportunity to recycle their leaves locally, benefiting both our taxpayers and our environment. I believe that Smithtown will experience the same positive results as other areas throughout the state that have made the switch from plastic to paper. I have spoken to other town and county representatives and they all tell me the paper bags are widely accepted by residents. The paper leaf bags are said to be durable and easy to use because they are self standing.

There are many reasons why we should explore and test a paper leaf bag recycling program in the Town of Smithtown, instead of discouraging it. The financial and environmental benefits are too great to ignore. Smithtown has a clear history of being one of the most environmentally friendly towns in the country, and I am confident our town leadership will embrace a plan that helps to improve our environment and reduces our tax burden.

Sincerely,

Michael Rosato  
President  
Kings Park Civic Association