

ORDINANCE NO. 2023-890

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

AN ORDINANCE OF UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, AMENDING THE TOWNSHIP CODE TO CREATE A NEW CHAPTER, SINGLE-USE PRODUCT REGULATIONS, TO REGULATE THE DISTRIBUTION AND USE OF SINGLE-USE CARRY-OUT BAGS, SINGLE-USE PLASTIC STRAWS, SINGLE-USE PLASTIC UTENSILS, AND EXPANDED POLYSTYRENE FOOD SERVICE PRODUCTS; TO PROMOTE AND FACILITATE REUSABLE BAG, STRAW, UTENSIL, AND CONTAINER USE; AND TO ADD FINDINGS, DEFINITIONS, FEES, REQUIREMENTS, ENFORCEMENT, PENALTIES, AND EXEMPTIONS RELATING TO THE DISTRIBUTION AND USE OF SINGLE-USE CARRY-OUT BAGS, REUSABLE BAGS, SINGLE-USE PLASTIC STRAWS, SINGLE-USE PLASTIC UTENSILS, AND EXPANDED POLYSTYRENE FOOD SERVICE PRODUCTS

WHEREAS, the Pennsylvania Second Class Township Code authorizes the Board of Supervisors of Upper Merion Township to make, amend, and adopt ordinances that are consistent with the constitution and laws of the Commonwealth when necessary for the proper management, care, and control of the Township and the maintenance of peace, good government, health and welfare of the Upper Merion Township ("Township") and its citizens;

WHEREAS, Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, known as the Environmental Rights Amendment (the "Amendment"), provides that people have the right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As a Trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people;

WHEREAS, the Amendment imposes two basic duties on the Commonwealth and its political subdivisions, such as the Township, to: 1) prohibit the degradation, diminution, and depletion of the public natural resources, and 2) act affirmatively via legislative action to protect the environment. *Pennsylvania Environmental Defense Foundation v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 161 A.3d 911 (Pa. 2017);

WHEREAS, this ordinance is enacted to achieve the Township's duties under the Amendment by minimizing the degradation, diminution, and depletion of the public natural resources within the Township and to affirmatively enact legislation designed to protect the environment within and around the Township;

WHEREAS, for the reasons set forth in more detail below, the Board of Supervisors intends to preserve, maintain, and enhance the health of its residents and visitors, as well as the public natural resources and common property within and around the Township, by regulating the distribution of single-use bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products within the Township;

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors has met the procedural requirements of the Second Class Township Code for the adoption of the proposed ordinance, including advertising and holding a public hearing; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors, after due consideration of the proposed ordinance at a duly advertised public hearing, has determined that the health, safety, and general welfare of the residents of Upper Merion Township will be served by this amendment of the Upper Merion Township Code to regulate the distribution of single-use bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products within Upper Merion Township;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED AND ENACTED by the Board of Supervisors of the Upper Merion Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, it is hereby enacted and ordained by the authority of same, as follows:

I. Code Amendment. A new Chapter entitled “Single-Use Product Regulations” is hereby added to Part II, General Legislation, of the Upper Merion Township Code to provide as follows:

SINGLE-USE PRODUCT REGULATIONS

§1. Purpose and Findings.

A. Purpose. The purpose of this Chapter is:

- (1) To reduce the use of single-use bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products within the Township.
- (2) To curb litter on the streets, in the parks, and in the trees, protect the local streams, rivers, waterways and other aquatic environments, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce solid waste generation, promote the use of reusable, compostable, and recyclable materials within Upper Merion Township, and to preserve the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of Upper Merion Township.
- (3) To relieve the pressure on recyclers servicing the Township, who cite single-use bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products as a major source of contamination and inefficiency within the recycling stream.
- (4) To relieve the pressure for Township utilized landfills to manage the disposition of single-use products.
- (5) To reduce consumption of and exposure to microplastics, forever chemicals, and other chemicals found in plastics that have been scientifically shown to lead to health issues, including hormonal imbalances, infertility, and cancer.
- (6) To encourage township residents and businesses to adopt innovative solutions to transition away from single-use plastic products in favor of more cost-effective, reusable alternatives and more sustainable single-use alternatives.

B. Findings.

- (1) The use of single-use bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products has severe environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions, litter, harm to wildlife, ground level ozone formation, atmospheric acidification, water consumption, and solid waste generation.
- (2) There are several commercial establishments within Upper Merion Township which provide single-use bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products to their customers, sometimes without the request or the desire of the customers.
- (3) Single-use plastic bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products do not readily decompose.
- (4) Approximately one hundred billion single-use plastic bags are discarded by United States consumers each year. Given the difficulty of recycling these materials, less than 1 percent of single-use plastic bags are returned for recycling in the United States, and in Upper Merion Township, such bags are not curbside recyclable. Upper Merion residents alone are estimated to consume up to 18.5 million single-use bags each year.
- (5) Numerous studies have documented the prevalence of single-use plastic bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products littering the environment, blocking storm drains, entering local waterways, and becoming stuck in or upon natural resources and public property.
- (6) The taxpayers of Upper Merion Township pay the costs related to the cleanup of single-use plastic bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products from the roadways, trees, sewers, waters, and parks within the Township.
- (7) Recyclers cite single-use plastic bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products as a major source of contamination within the recycling stream, leading to increased costs to the Township and decreased efficiency.
- (8) From an overall environmental and economic perspective, the best alternative to single-use plastic bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products is a shift to reusable alternatives followed by single-use compostable or recyclable alternatives.
- (9) There are several alternatives to single-use bags, single-use plastic straws, single-use plastic utensils, and expanded polystyrene food service products readily available in and around Upper Merion Township.
- (10) It is recognized that single-use paper bag manufacturing, transportation and resource consumption also affect the environment, but they are biodegradable, single-stream recyclable, and provide a practical retail establishment alternative consistent with most local

and state single-use plastic regulations and prohibitions. Although preferable to single-use plastic bags, eventually the overall effects of producing, providing, and allowing single-use paper bags should also be mitigated to reduce waste, litter, and natural resource depletion by encouraging, facilitating and promoting reusable bag use.

- (11) An important goal of Upper Merion Township is to procure and use sustainable products and services.
- (12) An important goal of Upper Merion Township is to preserve the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of Upper Merion Township.
- (13) It is Upper Merion Township's desire to conserve resources, reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions, waste, litter, water pollution, and to protect the public health and welfare, including wildlife, all of which increases the quality of life for the Township's residents and visitors.
- (14) Studies and past experiences have shown that prohibiting the distribution of single-use plastic bags at the point of sale and placing a mandatory charge on other single-use bags reduces plastic litter and use of single-use bags and promotes the use of reusable bags.
- (15) As required by the Environmental Rights Amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution, it is incumbent upon the Township to preserve the natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the Township.
- (16) It is the duty of the Board of Supervisors to conserve resources, reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions, waste, litter, water pollution, and to protect the public health and welfare, including wildlife, all of which increases the quality of life for the Township's residents and visitors.

§2. Definitions.

For purposes of this Chapter, the following terms shall be defined as follows:

CUSTOMER – Any person purchasing goods or services from a Commercial Establishment, whether directly or through a delivery service. A Customer shall include a person receiving goods from a Commercial Establishment to deliver to another person who purchased such goods.

COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENT - Any store or retail establishment that sells perishable or nonperishable goods, including, but not limited to, clothing, food, and personal items, directly to the customer and is located within or doing business within the geographical limits of the Upper Merion Township. Commercial Establishments include, but are not limited to, a business establishment that generates a sales or use tax; a drugstore, pharmacy, supermarket, grocery store, farmers market, delicatessen, service station, a temporary or seasonal market or vendor, food truck, convenience food store, food mart, or other commercial entity engaged in the retail sale of a limited line of goods that include milk, bread, soda and snack foods; a public eating establishment (i.e. a restaurant, take-out food establishment, or any other business that prepares and sells prepared food to be eaten on or off its premises or delivered off premises); and a business establishment that sells clothing, hardware, or any other nonperishable goods.

EXPANDED POLYSTYRENE - Blown polystyrene and expanded and extruded foams that are thermoplastic petrochemical materials utilizing a styrene monomer and processed by a number of techniques, including: fusion of polymer spheres, known as expandable bead polystyrene; injection molding; foam molding; and extrusion-blow molding, also known as extruded foam polystyrene. Styrofoam shall be included as Expanded Polystyrene.

EXPANDED POLYSTYRENE FOOD SERVICE PRODUCT – A product made of synthetic resin of polystyrene or expanded polystyrene that is used for selling, providing, or transporting food or beverages including, but not limited to, food containers (including “clamshell”, hinged, or lidded packaging/food containers), plates, hot and cold beverage cups, and/or trays. However, an Expanded Polystyrene Food Service Product shall not include:

- a. food, beverages, or other items that have been packaged in Expanded Polystyrene outside the Upper Merion Township for general distribution;
- b. a product made of Expanded Polystyrene that is used to package raw, uncooked, or buttered meat, fish, poultry, or seafood;
- c. a package or container containing multiple Expanded Polystyrene Food Service Products packaged by the manufacturer at the time of manufacturing and sold for home or business use.

OPERATOR – A person in control of, or having responsibility for, the operation of a Commercial Establishment, which may include, but is not limited to, the owner or manager of the Commercial Establishment.

PLASTIC – A synthetic material made from linking monomers through a chemical reaction to create a polymer chain that can be molded or extruded at high heat into various solid forms that retain their defined shapes during their life cycle and after disposal, including material derived from either petrochemicals or a biologically based polymer, such as corn or other plant sources.

PRODUCT BAG – Any bag without handles used for the following purposes:

- a. to carry meats, vegetables, fruits, or other similar perishable, raw, or uncooked food item to the point of sale inside a Commercial Establishment;
- b. to package and carry bulk items such as dried fruits or vegetables, nuts, grains, or candy;
- c. for reasons of public health and safety, to prevent food items from coming into direct contact with other purchased items or a person’s skin;
- d. to contain hot, prepared foods;
- e. to contain or wrap flowers, potted plants, or similar items;
- f. a bag used solely to contain live animals, such as fish or insects sold at a pet store; or

- g. to transport caustic chemicals sold at a retail level.

RECYCLED PAPER BAG – A paper bag that meets the following requirements:

- a. contains no old growth fiber;
- b. contains a minimum of 40% post-consumer recycled content; and
- c. is labeled in a visible manner as “recyclable” with the percentage of post-consumer recycled content of the bag.

REUSABLE BAG – A bag that meets the following criteria:

- a. Is designed and manufactured to withstand repeated uses over time;
- b. Is machine washable or made from a material that can be readily cleaned and disinfected; and
- c. Is designed and manufactured to have the capability of carrying a minimum of eighteen (18) pounds.

SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAG - Any bag that is made predominantly of plastic and is made using a blown-film extrusion process, other than a Reusable Bag, as defined below, provided at the check-out stand, cash register, point of sale, or other point of departure for the purpose of transporting food or merchandise out of the establishment. The term does not include Reusable Bags or Recycled Paper Bags. This definition specifically exempts the following from the category of Single-Use Plastic Bags:

- a. Product Bags;
- b. a bag sold in packaging containing multiple bags and packaged at the time of manufacturing, including food storage bags, garbage bags, or pet waste bags;
- c. newspaper delivery bags;
- d. a bag provided by a state, federal or local government agency;
- e. laundry or dry cleaner bags.

SINGLE-USE PLASTIC STRAW - A Straw provided by a Commercial Establishment that is primarily made of Plastic, and not including Straws composed of non-plastic materials such as bamboo, sugar cane, agave, corn, wood, hay or paper. In addition, a Single-Use Plastic Straw shall not include the following:

- a. Straws packaged with beverages prepared and packaged outside of the Township, provided such beverages are not altered, packaged or repackaged within the Township.

- b. Straws provided with a beverage on private property used as a residence;
- c. When provided by a state, federal or local government agency;
- d. a package or container containing multiple Single-Use Plastic Straws packaged by the manufacturer at the time of manufacturing and sold for home or business use.
- e. When provided as an assistive device to reasonably accommodate a disability.

SINGLE-USE PLASTIC UTENSIL - A Utensil provided by a Commercial Establishment that is made predominantly of Plastic, and not including Utensils composed of non-plastic materials such as bamboo, sugar cane, agave, cornstarch, plant matter, or wood. In addition, Single-Use Plastic Utensils shall not include the following:

- a. When provided with food on private property used as a residence;
- b. When provided by a state, federal or local government agency;
- c. When packaged with food prepared and packaged outside of the Township, provided such food products are not altered, packaged or repackaged within the Township;

STRAW - a tube designed or intended for transferring a beverage from its container to the mouth of the drinker by suction or for the stirring of a beverage. A Straw shall include drink stirrers, devices used to mix beverages, and splash sticks, even if such items are not in the form of a tube.

UTENSIL - A device designed or intended for transferring food from its container to the mouth of the consumer. A Utensil shall include forks, spoons, knives, sporks, and chopsticks.

§3. Single-Use Plastic Bags.

Effective January 1, 2024, Commercial Establishments are prohibited from providing a Single-Use Plastic Bag to a Customer. This prohibition applies to Single-Use Plastic Bags provided for the purpose of carrying goods away from the point-of-sale of a Commercial Establishment and to takeout deliveries, including deliveries utilizing a delivery service, from a Commercial Establishment located within Upper Merion Township. The point-of-sale in such transactions is deemed to be at the Commercial Establishment, regardless of where ordering or payment for the transaction physically occurs.

§4. Recycled Paper Bags.

- (1) Effective January 1, 2024, Commercial Establishments are prohibited from providing a non-Recycled Paper Bag to a Customer at the Commercial Establishment or through a delivery service.
- (2) A Commercial Establishment may provide a Customer a Recycled Paper Bag at the point of

sale if the bag is provided to the Customer for a charge of not less than ten cents (\$0.10) per bag. A Commercial Establishment may opt out of such charge for prepaid takeout orders or deliveries. Commercial Establishments shall post signage that is visible to Customers at the point of sale that advises the Customers of the per bag charge.

- (3) All monies collected by the Commercial Establishment under this Chapter for provision of a Recycled Paper Bag shall be retained by the Commercial Establishment.
- (4) Any charge for a Recycled Paper Bag shall be separately stated on a receipt provided to the Customer at the time of sale and shall be identified on the receipt.
- (5) A Commercial Establishment shall not be permitted to waive, rebate, or otherwise reimburse a Customer for any portion of the Recycled Paper Bag fee in a manner that results in a charge less than the minimum required hereunder unless the Customer is effectuating payment through an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, a payment or voucher issued by/through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), or a similar government assistance program related to retail food purchases.

§5. Single-Use Plastic Straws.

Effective January 1, 2024, Commercial Establishments are prohibited from providing a Single-Use Plastic Straw to a Customer at the Commercial Establishment or through a delivery service, except upon the request of the Customer.

§6. Expanded Polystyrene Food Service Products.

Effective January 1, 2024, Commercial Establishments are prohibited from providing an Expanded Polystyrene Food Service Product to a Customer at the Commercial Establishment or through a delivery service.

§7. Single-Use Plastic Utensils.

Effective July 1, 2024, Commercial Establishments are prohibited from providing Single-Use Plastic Utensils to a Customer at the Commercial Establishment or through a delivery service.

§8. Reusable Bags.

- (1) A Commercial Establishment may provide a Reusable Bag to a Customer at or before the point of sale if the Reusable Bag is provided to the Customer for a charge of not less than ten cents (\$0.10) per bag.
- (2) All monies collected by a Commercial Establishment under this Chapter for provision of a Reusable Bag may be retained by the Commercial Establishment.
- (3) Any charge for a Reusable Bag shall be separately stated on a receipt provided to the Customer at the time of sale and shall be identified on the receipt.

- (4) Customers may use bags of any type that they bring to the Commercial Establishment themselves for the purpose of carrying goods or other materials away from the point of sale, without incurring any charges for such bag. In addition, Customers shall be permitted to carry away purchased items without a bag.
- (5) Nothing in this Section shall be construed to prohibit the retail sale of Reusable Bags to Customers. In addition, nothing in this Section shall prohibit the free distribution of Reusable Bags by entities that are not Commercial Establishments for promotional purposes or by Commercial Establishments, for promotional purposes, in instances where the Commercial Establishment is not selling its goods.
- (6) A Commercial Establishment shall not be permitted to waive, rebate, or otherwise reimburse a Customer for any portion of the Reusable Bag fee in a manner that results in a charge less than the minimum required hereunder.

§9. Temporary Signage Requirement.

Beginning sixty (60) days after the enactment date of this Ordinance, and for six (6) months after the effective dates set forth above, Commercial Establishments shall post conspicuous signage at all points of sale informing Customers of the following:

- (1) that Single-Use Plastic Bags, non-Recycled Paper Bags, Plastic Straws, Single-Use Plastic Utensils and Expanded Polystyrene Food Service Products will no longer be provided by the Commercial Establishment as of the date the above stated prohibitions;
- (2) the mandatory, minimum charge (or the desired higher charge, if a higher charge is desired by the Commercial Establishment) for a Recycled Paper Bag provided by the Commercial Establishment;
- (3) the date such charges for Recycled Paper Bags will commence;
- (4) what types of bags and purchases are impacted; and
- (5) any other information Upper Merion Township may require by regulation.

§10. Exemptions.

The Township Manager or their designee may, upon written request of a Commercial Establishment, exempt a Commercial Establishment from the requirements of this Chapter for a period of one (1) year from the effective date of this Ordinance upon a finding by the Township Manager or their designee that the requirements of this Chapter would cause undue hardship to the Commercial Establishment. An "undue hardship" shall be found only if the Commercial Establishment demonstrates one or more of the following:

- (1) that it has a unique circumstance or situation such that there are no reasonable alternatives to the use of Single-Use Plastic Bags or Expanded Polystyrene Food Service Products;
- (2) Compliance with this Chapter would deprive the Commercial Establishment of a legally

protected right, with such right being specifically identified by the Commercial Establishment;

- (3) Additional time is necessary to deplete an existing inventory held by the Commercial Establishment, as of the effective date of this Ordinance, of Single-Use Plastic Bags or Expanded Polystyrene Food Service Products;

§11. Enforcement.

- (1) The Township Manager or their designee has the responsibility for enforcement of this Chapter and may promulgate reasonable rules and regulations to enforce the provisions thereof, including, but not limited to, investigating and reporting violations and issuing verbal or written warnings and/or fines.
- (2) Any Operator and/or Commercial Establishment that violates or fails to comply with any of the requirements of this Chapter, after an initial written warning notice has been issued for that violation, shall be in violation and subject to the penalties established herein.
- (3) Any Operator and/or Commercial Establishment that receives an initial written warning notice may file a request for an exemption pursuant to the procedure in §9 above if the warning is issued within a year of the effective date of this Ordinance.
- (4) After a written warning is issued, and if additional violations occur, an Operator and/or a Commercial Establishment shall, upon conviction in a summary proceeding under the Pennsylvania Rules of Criminal Procedure, be guilty of a non-traffic summary offense and shall be punishable by a fine as set forth below, plus court costs and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the Township through enforcement proceedings. The fines for violations of this Chapter shall be as follows:
 - (a) \$50.00 for a first offense occurring within twelve months of the written warning;
 - (b) \$100.00 for a second offense occurring within twelve months of the first offense;
and
 - (c) \$250.00 for a third offense occurring within twelve months of the second offense, and for each subsequent offense occurring within twelve months of the immediately prior offense.
- (5) For the purposes of enforcement under this Chapter, a separate offense shall occur each day an Operator and/or Commercial Establishment is violating a requirement of this Chapter. In addition, penalties may be imposed against both, or either, the Operator and/or the Commercial Establishment for the same violation of this Chapter.
- (6) In addition to or in lieu of the penalties set forth in this Chapter, Upper Merion Township may seek additional legal, injunctive, or other equitable relief to enforce this Chapter.
- (7) The penalty provisions of this Chapter shall not limit the ability of the Township to enforce other Township ordinances and to utilize the penalties, remedies and procedures provided

under such other Township ordinances and/or Federal or Commonwealth laws.

SECTION II. Severability. The terms, conditions and provisions of this Ordinance are hereby declared to be severable, and, should any portion, part, or provision of this Ordinance be found by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, unenforceable, or unconstitutional, the Upper Merion Township Board of Supervisors hereby declares its intent that the Ordinance shall have been enacted without regard to the invalid, unenforceable, or unconstitutional portion, part or provision of this Ordinance, and the remainder of the Ordinance shall remain in force.

SECTION III. Repealer. Any and all other ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with the terms, conditions and provisions of this ordinance are hereby repealed to the extent of such irreconcilable conflict.

SECTION IV. Effective Date. This Ordinance shall become effective upon enactment as provided by law, with enforcement of this Ordinance to occur on the specific date(s) set forth in Section I above.

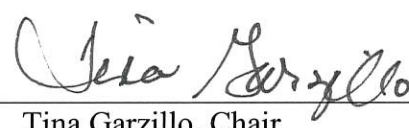
SECTION V. Failure to Enforce Not a Waiver. The failure of Upper Merion Township to enforce or delay enforcement of any provision of this Ordinance shall not constitute a waiver by Upper Merion Township of its rights to future enforcement hereunder.

ORDAINED AND ENACTED by the Board of Supervisors of Upper Merion Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, this 13 day of July, 2023.

ATTEST:

**UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

By: 
Anthony Hamaday, Township Secretary

By: 
Tina Garzillo, Chair
Upper Merion Township
Board of Supervisors

Advertised Ordinance in Times Herald: 6/28/23
Proof of Publication Dated: 6/28/23
Hearing Held: 7/13/23
Ordinance Adopted 7/13/23 as Ordinance No. 2023-890
Ordinance Entered: 7/18/23