



## **Report of the Zero Waste Committee to 2022 Town Meeting**

### **Introduction**

Zero Waste Arlington's mission is to foster greater participation in all forms of waste reduction to improve health and restore the environment.

2022 was to be the year when Zero Waste Arlington (ZWA) took direct aim at the scourge of single-use plastics. Following on the successful debut of the *Earth to Arlington: Let's Talk Trash* webinar series in 2021, we pledged to put out Year 2 webinars that focused exclusively on plastic waste reduction.

As we said in our 2021 report, many industry leaders will tell you that we cannot recycle our way out of the plastics problem. Blue bin contamination, and China's National Sword policy, have made this reality very plain to anyone who looks beyond the blue bin, and at what happens to "recycled" plastic waste after our blue bin materials are collected. Very little (<10%) blue bin plastic is transformed into new plastic products.

Out of this sentiment, our first focus regarding single-use plastics was on bottled water sales in Arlington. That successful 2022 initiative is described below. ZWA will utilize the tailwind of that political success to amplify our messaging about single-use plastic reduction to bring it further into the consciousness of Arlington's residents and businesses. While we support potential state-level legislative initiatives regarding "Extended Producer Responsibility" that are geared primarily toward communities where recycling is lagging and are supported by industry, we are not deterred from our mission to reduce single use plastic demand and consumption.

### **Single Use Plastic Water Bottle Ban**

On May 4, 2022, Arlington Town Meeting passed a single-use plastic water bottle ban by a vote of 199-42. This bold action reaffirms our Town's environmental leadership and sets an example of good stewardship for a green and sustainable Arlington.

- More than 1.5 billion beverage bottles are sold each year in MA. Only around 20% get recycled. The rest end up in landfills or incinerators which pollute our air and water, or as litter.
- Discarded plastic destroys habitats, harms wildlife, and affects public health by contaminating the food chain. Plastic is petroleum based and a contributor to climate

change. We can't recycle our way out of the single-use plastic pollution crisis—we need to reduce our consumption.

- Bottled water has a low-cost, local, and readily available substitute: tap water! We want to encourage the consumption of Arlington's high quality tap water in restaurants, at refill stations, and with reusable water bottles.

#### The new bylaw will:

- Prohibit the sale of plastic bottles of non-carbonated, non-flavored water in sizes of 1 liter or less.
- Apply to any business in Arlington that sells bottled water, as well as to events, Town buildings, schools, and houses of worship.
- Take effect November 1, 2022.
- Make Arlington the 24th and largest municipality in Massachusetts to pass single-use plastic bottled water restrictions, starting with Concord in 2012.
- Reduce litter in our streets, parks, and waterways.



**Want to get involved?** Contact [zerowastearlington@gmail.com](mailto:zerowastearlington@gmail.com) or follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/zerowastearlington>.

## Outreach & Education

Since the beginning of the pandemic ZWA has switched outreach to the online medium and made use of the Zoom subscription that we acquired last year to fulfill our mission. We have used Zoom since Feb 2021 to hold our monthly public meetings which have attracted several more Arlington residents bringing new energy and ideas.

Since the pandemic we have effectively done most of our outreach via online resources including social media (our ZWA Facebook page), our listserv, and hosting webinars. We have put our zoom subscription to good use hosting the webinars and our monthly meetings and subcommittee meetings.

**Social Media:** ZWA recognizes the power of social media and its reach to a larger audience, especially during the pandemic. To that end we are actively managing the The [ZWA Facebook page](#), posting relevant content at regular intervals. As of May 2022 we have 753 followers, up from 665 followers 12 months ago. Our primary means of communicating more formal announcements with the ZWA community is through our Google groups email account, which currently has 242 participants.

**Webinar Series:** In March 2021, ZWA launched a new webinar series "**Earth to Arlington: Let's Talk Trash,**" to increase levels of engagement with Arlington residents about solid waste issues

(plastics, in particular), with a focus on the "reduce" and "reuse" legs of the 3 Rs we are all familiar with.

The March 3, 2021 webinar focused on the Fall 2020 *Recycling IQ* (trash-recycling audit) program, which we reported on at the last Town Meeting. This was followed by two additional webinars in June and November 2021. The webinars were very well attended with the June webinar garnering 83 registrations and the November webinar 76 registrations - both webinars had a lot of engaged viewers. We plan to pick up on the webinar series again later this year.

### ***Beyond Recycling: Divert More Trash and Get to Zero Waste - June 23, 2021***

Since Arlington's trash hauling and processing contract was up for renewal in 2022, Zero Waste Arlington wanted to help residents stay informed about what program options control disposal costs while increasing valuable materials recovery. In this webinar we discussed new options the Town could pursue, such as financial incentives and regulations for households and businesses/restaurants to reduce their waste, contain litter, and participate in diverting organics from their trash.

The webinar was moderated by Scott Mullen, Zero Waste Arlington committee member, and featured Kirstie Goodwin Pecci, an environmental attorney, and director of the Zero Waste Project at Conservation Law Foundation, and Julia Greene, our MA Department of Environmental Protection Mass. DEP Municipal Assistance Coordinator.

- [Watch the webinar recording](#)
- [Webinar PDF slides](#)

### ***Amping Up the Other 2 Rs (Reduce & Reuse) - November 10, 2021***

This webinar took aim at pre-consumption behavior and explored the options available to residents so that our community can make meaningful strides toward Zero Waste. Implementing these other two "Rs" is the obvious path toward reducing trash tonnage to meet our Town's goals. We're not just talking about carrying a refillable water bottle anymore. How can we make this a more socially-acceptable movement... Even a lifestyle choice?

Scott Mullen moderated a panel of speakers including Lauren Fernandez (Zero Waste Analyst at [Conservation Law Foundation](#)), Sarah Levy (Owner of [Cleanland](#)), and Veronika McDonald King (Founder of [Everything is Free Arlington, MA](#)), who shared their insights and discussed waste reduction strategies.

- [Watch the webinar recording](#)
- [List of reuse and reduce resources](#) compiled from the webinar.

**ZWA Website:** With the number of efforts that the committee is involved in we felt the need to design and host our own website - zerowastearlington.org. To that end we have engaged the services of a designer to layout the website for us. Committee members and volunteers have spent the last several months working on an outline of the website and content which has been provided to the designer. ***We plan on a July 1 launch.***

## 'The Story of Plastic' Community Screening

To foster awareness and encourage discussion and action in our community, in March 2022, we sponsored a community screening of the Emmy award winning documentary '[The Story of Plastic](#)' at the Capitol Theater.

*The Story of Plastic* is a searing exposé revealing the ugly truth behind plastic pollution and the false solution of plastic recycling. From the extraction of fossil fuels and plastic disposal to the global resistance fighting back, *The Story of Plastic* is a life-changing, Emmy-winning film depicting one of the world's most pressing environmental issues.

Stay tuned for additional screening programs sponsored by Zero Waste Arlington

## Campaigns

**No Plastic, Please!** Arlington residents have clearly expressed a strong interest in reducing single use plastics as was reported by over 4000 respondents to the Town's 2020 Survey. This led to our No Plastics, *Please* (NPP) campaign, an awareness initiative targeting both restaurants and their customers. We had invested a significant amount of time planning for this campaign where participating restaurants would be expected to either ask the customer if they want single use plastics included in their order, or just default to not giving single use plastics unless they are requested. The pandemic had us hit pause on the campaign but we have picked it up again and intend to merge it with our larger Plastics Reduction efforts. Stay tuned for more on the campaign.



## Solid Waste Statistics

In FY 2021 Arlington diverted **230,935 lbs** of textile through the Bay State Textile recycling program earning Arlington school **\$11,546.75**. Additionally Arlington's contractor JRM hauled **12,414 tons** of municipal solid waste (MSW) to the Wheelabrator incineration plant in North Andover and **5,538 tons** of recycling from our blue bins/barrels/carts to its Greenworks material recovery facility (MRF) in Peabody for sorting, baling, and sale.

The monthly Reuse & Recycling Center (R&RC) continues to be popular, bringing in hard to recycle, less incineration-friendly items such as large/bulky rigid plastic, Styrofoam, electronics, and scrap metal. The R&RC collects books, and is also piloting a Swap Shed in Spring-Summer 2021.

***Everyone should utilize the Recycling Center to help Arlington increase its diversion rate!***

**Join the efforts of Zero Waste Arlington!**

**We meet virtually at 7:00 PM the 4th Thursday of every month.**

**Follow us on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/zerowastearlington/>**

**Email [zerowastearlington@gmail.com](mailto:zerowastearlington@gmail.com) to be added to the ZWA Google Group**