

Carlisle Borough interview with Tamela Trussell

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History

Tamela Trussell introduced a single use plastic bag ban initiative in 2022 in Carlisle Borough. The ban was introduced after [Pennsylvania's statewide preemption](#) banning state municipalities from implementing and enforcing local plastic ordinances was lifted December 8th, 2021. To leverage support for the ban, Tamela reached out to students and helped make a survey for the Climate Action Commission to measure interest in the bag ban.

The borough faced resistance to the ban, slowing and eventually halting progress. In the interview, Tamela identified the following challenges.

- The borough wanted to focus on fighting climate change through reducing greenhouse gas emissions by planting trees and developing more bike lane infrastructure. Tamela noted that the reduced interest in a bag ban as a way to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions could be attributed to the lack of education surrounding the harm of single use plastic which historically has been categorized as solely a litter problem.
- employees of the municipality claimed that the bag ban would become a financial burden for small businesses. From talking to businesses and carrying out the survey, the Climate Action Commission found no evidence for this claim. In fact, Tamela said that many small businesses supported the bag bans as an effort to become more sustainable. Third, the Carlisle borough did not want to be the first borough to pass a bag ban. Now that other municipalities have set a precedent for what a successful plastic bag ban ordinance can look like, boroughs and townships like Carlisle can generate more local buy-in and have clear examples to follow. Tamela raised up the importance of documenting the impact of SUP bans in municipalities that have passed bans on the impact of both plastic and paper bag fee implementation, how small businesses are being fiscally impacted, what are businesses using as substitutes.

Learnings

With more education surrounding the repercussions of single use plastic and an increase in local interest, Carlisle borough can refocus on pursuing a bag ban again. From her experience working on the ban, Tamela observed that SUP education works effectively in creating opportunities to resurface bag ban efforts when connected to conversations about PFAS reduction, land pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. To get municipal leaders to take action, the Climate Action Commission must prove that the community supports the ban, especially small businesses. To make sure small businesses are not fiscally harmed, the municipality should implement a 15 cent minimum fee on paper bags and put that money back towards resisting SUP contamination in the community. Because residents already support a plastic bag ban, to increase motivation surrounding ban efforts, the ban should be expanded to include plastic straws and utensils.

Final Notes

By interviewing Tamela's experience with the Carlisle plastic bag ban efforts, Reduce Plastic PA can document municipalities' stories. These interviews act as a way for municipalities to share challenges and advice so that other communities can build on previous bag ban initiatives rather than re-invent the wheel. Creating a database of SUP resistance efforts will allow municipalities across Pennsylvania to learn from, be inspired by, and connect with each other.

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