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Ban the Bag: Narragansett

By: Emma Meyer

Introduction

Plastic bags are extremely detrimental to the environmental and financial wellbeing of the town of Narragansett, Rhode Island, for the following reasons:

- single-use item by nature
- not easily recyclable and often instead end up cluttering local landfills or ecosystems
- take approximately 1,000 years to degrade

In the beachside community of Narragansett, the elimination of plastic bags is especially important in order to:

- preserve the local wildlife, as plastic bags directly kill over 100,000 aquatic animals annually
- eliminate the growing litter within our oceans, of which plastics constitute 80%
- enhance Narragansett's financial prosperity, for it is highly reliant upon its summer tourism to its beaches which must remain without debris

As such, the final goal of this project was to *pass an ordinance within Narragansett banning plastic bags from retail stores throughout the town*. Local support from residents, businesses, and environmental groups will need to have been mobilized, and a 'champion of the proposal' on the Town Council will need to have been solicited, in order for the ordinance to have ultimately been passed by the Narragansett Town Council.



Results

The conclusion of this project is yet to be determined. While the plastic bag ban ordinance in the town has not yet been presented on the agenda for the Narragansett Town Council, the possibility of its presentation remains in question. It is possible either that the Narragansett Town Council will decide to either hear the issue in June/July after budget hearings have ceased, or not hear the issue at all in the near future.

Discussion

The objective of this project was to ultimately pass a plastic bag ban in the town of Narragansett in order to preserve both its financial and environmental wellbeing. As of now, the conclusion of this project is yet to be determined as the council is still considering hearing the issue later this year. I did not anticipate the timing of the proposal to be one of the biggest factors of their considerations, but the members of the council were unwilling to present a contentious issue in the midst of budget hearings, as they are currently confronting a \$5 million dollar deficit. As such, future efforts to pass a town ordinance for a plastic bag ban should be presented in the summer or winter months. Additionally, it became evident throughout the completion of the project that my not being a Narragansett resident put me at a serious disadvantage when presenting this issue to the council. In order to remedy this in the future, a Narragansett resident willing to advocate for the issue, or the Conservation Committee of Narragansett, should be the one presenting the ordinance to the council. While the council's decision to put off discussions of the ordinance until after the budget season has completed may be a maneuver to avoid the issue entirely, the residents of Narragansett and its local businesses have exhibited genuine support. With further backing from the community, and perhaps better timing, a Narragansett plastic bag ban could become a reality.

Approach

The first step of this project was extensive research of the issues accompanying plastic bags and remedies that have been taken in other areas throughout the United States in order to alleviate the problem. After becoming familiar with the issue, the next step of the project was outreach to local advocates of similar bans, such as Maria Cimini, state representative who has introduced a proposal for a statewide plastic bag ban the in 2013 and 2014, and Channing Jones, head of Environmental RI, an environmental advocacy organization based in Providence working closely with the proposed legislation to ban plastic bags statewide. Next, local outreach in Narragansett was conducted, resulting in over 700 individual signatures of support of the measurement, and 25 letters of support from local businesses. The next step was meeting with James Callaghan, President of the Narragansett Town Council, and Susan Cicilline-Buonanno, Vice-President of the council. Further steps were taken after the meeting with the council members in attempts to secure Mrs. Cicilline-Buonanno as the champion of the proposal, such as outreach to Kate Weymouth, Vice-President of the Barrington Town Council who has recently passed a similar ordinance, further community outreach, and contact with other members of the Narragansett Town Council in order to learn of their positions.

Members of the Narragansett Town Council



James Callaghan
(President)



Susan Cicilline-Buonanno
(Vice-President)



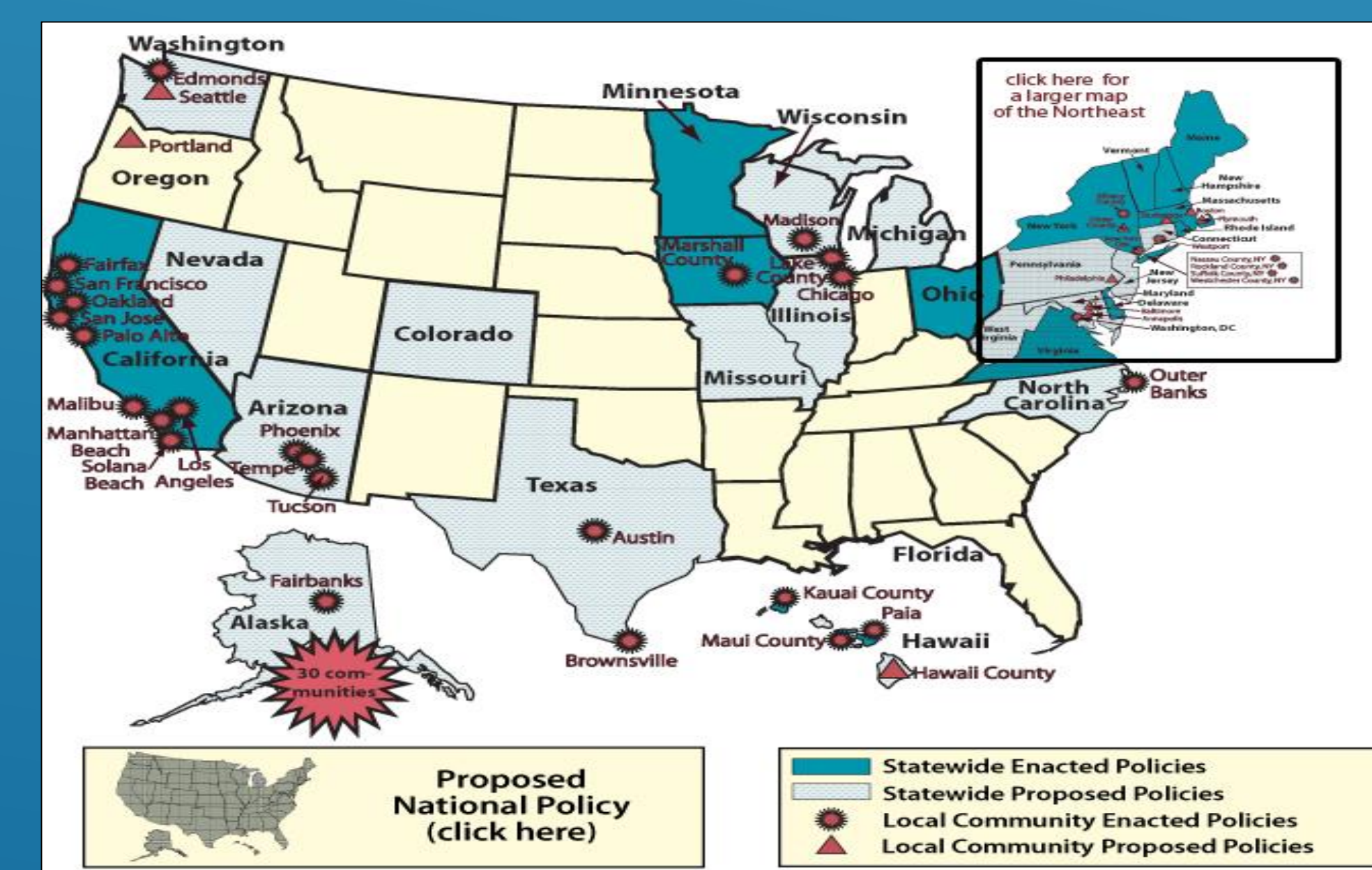
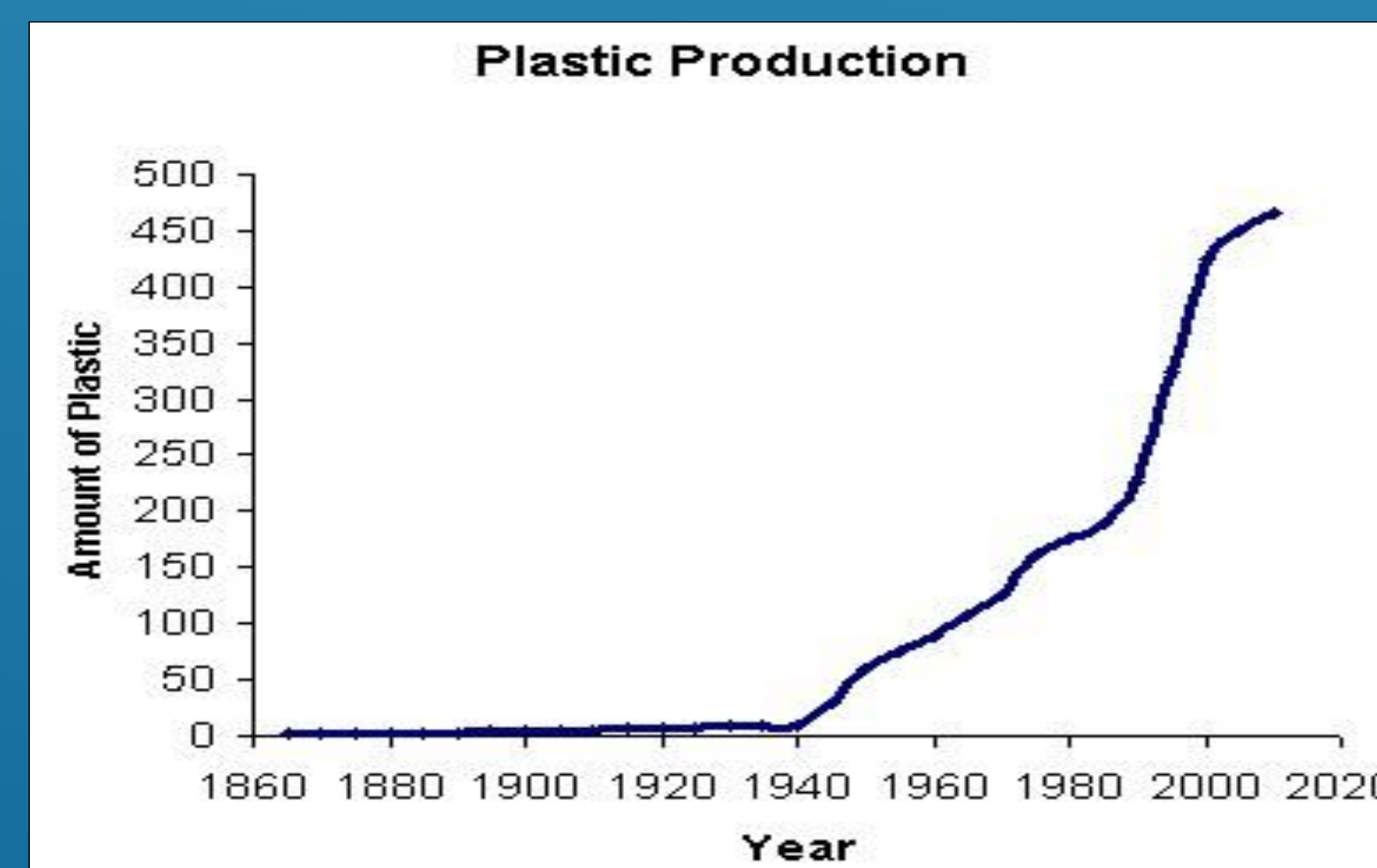
Glenna Hagopian



Matthew Mannix



Douglas McLaughlin



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