

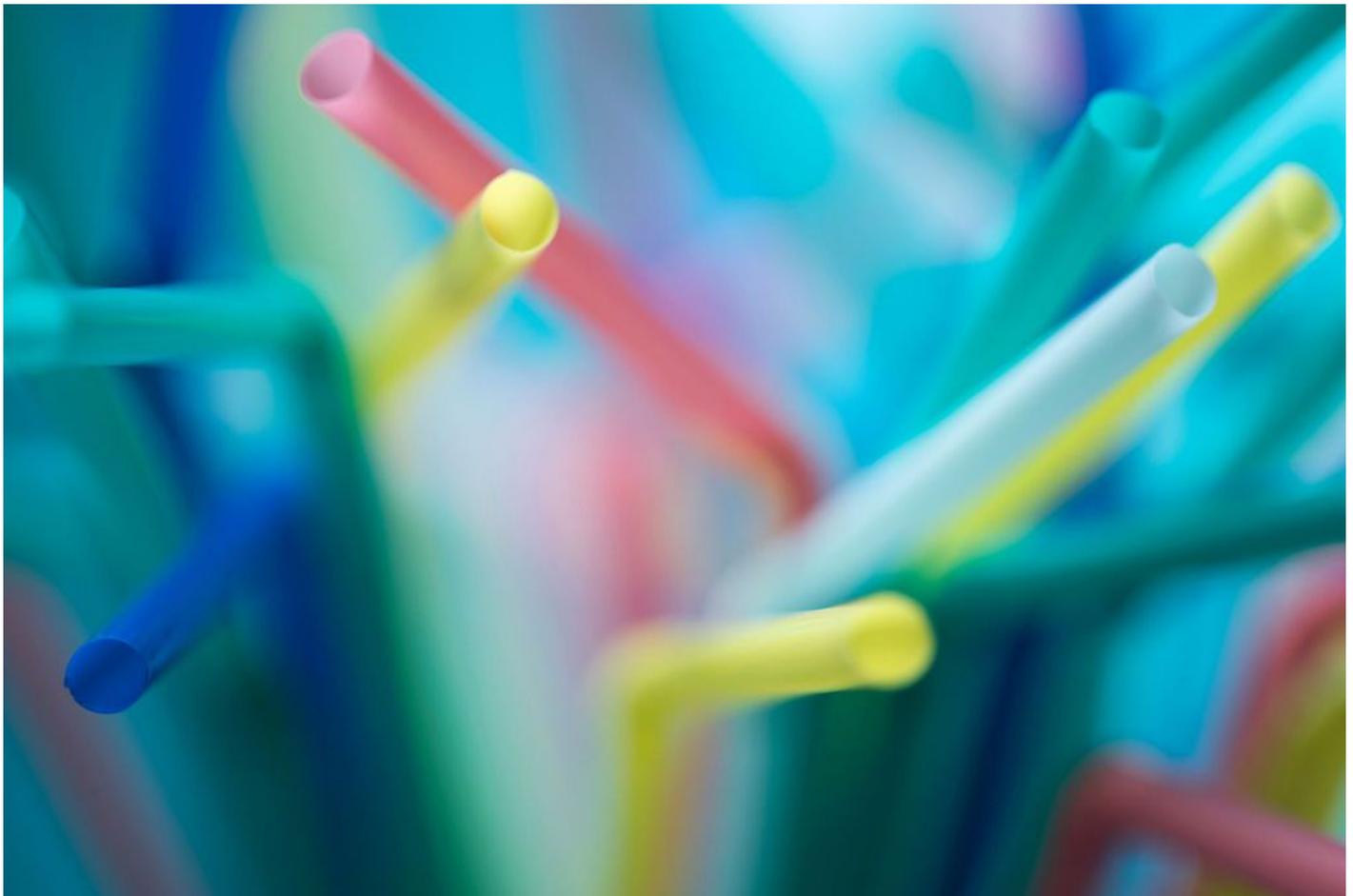
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Somerville's plastic straw ban goes into effect this week

The city is giving businesses six months to adapt to the new law before fines will be doled out.

By [Steve Annear](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 6, 2020, [51 minutes ago](#)



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Get ready to start sipping sodas and health-conscious smoothies through paper or metal straws if you live in — or pay a visit to — Somerville.

Beginning Sunday, the city will start rolling out its [plastic straw and stirrer ordinance](#)

beginning Sunday, the city will start rolling out its [plastic straw and stirrer ordinance](#), a move that will ultimately bar businesses from offering customers either of the single-use disposable products when they make beverage purchases.

City Council members first [passed the ordinance](#) in [May last year](#), as the effect plastic straws can have on the environment became a topic of international interest, [and governments far and wide](#) had [started](#) proposing [or enacting](#) similar [such bans](#).

The change is just one of Somerville's recent attempts at being more conscientious about how certain mass-produced products can adversely affect the community. The city already has both [a plastic bag ban](#) and a [ban on polystyrene foam items](#) in place.

"This ordinance is the latest step that the City of Somerville has taken to protect the marine environment, advance solid waste reduction, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect waterways," officials said in a statement on the city's website.

[Councillor Will Mbah](#), one of two elected officials who proposed the ordinance, said the "whole purpose is for us to make our own little contribution to the environment, and not sacrificing the environment for our comfort."

"This is just another step" toward creating a sustainable future, Mbah said in a telephone interview. "It's as simple as that, and there are other alternatives people can look into."

According to details of the new ordinance, establishments such as restaurants, bars, coffee shops, convenience stores, food and drink vendors, and food trucks will no longer be allowed to distribute plastic, single-use straws or stirrers either at the point-of-purchase or at self-serve food or beverage stations.

However, officials said, because certain disabilities or medical conditions can make it hard to use alternative types of straws, businesses will still be able to hand out plastic ones if asked.

"If a business has a self-serve area for items like straws utensils napkins and lids it

If a business has a self-serve area for items like straws, stirrers, napkins, and lids, it should put up a sign reading ‘plastic straws available upon request’ to let customers know they are available,” [officials said](#).

The rule change also applies to city departments, though both residents and city employees can still use personal plastic stirrers and straws, say, if they bought them with a drink outside of Somerville or in bulk at a supermarket.

“The ordinance does not prohibit any resident from buying and using their own plastic straws or stirrers,” the Frequently Asked Questions section of the city’s website says.

Health care facilities are also not subject to the ordinance.

Businesses are being encouraged to seek alternative types of straws in place of plastic ones. Options, officials said, include those made from paper, hay, glass, metal, bamboo, and pasta. [A list of vendors](#) who sell these types of products was posted online to help offset the burden on business owners.

“Alternatively,” the city’s website says, “consider using lids that customers may drink directly from.”

While the ordinance officially goes into effect this week, the city is giving businesses a bit of wiggle room before they really put teeth into the new law. For the first six months, “only warnings will be issued to give businesses a chance to substitute alternative products,” according to the city’s website. Schools, on the other hand, will get a full year to adapt to the changes.

After the soft roll-out, food establishments can fully expect to see fines doled out by the city’s Inspectional Services Department for not obeying the changes.

“If a retail establishment is found to be non-compliant with this ordinance, the first violation will result in a warning,” officials said. A Second and third violation will carry a fine of \$100 and \$300, respectively, according to the ordinance.

The city has been hosting “office hours” to help business owners and residents better

The city has been hosting [office hours](#) to help business owners and residents better understand the new rules. The next sessions, which are open to the public, [will be held Thursday, Feb. 20, and Thursday, March 16.](#)

A statewide effort to clamp down on the distribution of disposable plastic straws — unless a customer requests one — advanced on Beacon Hill late last year, in a move that drew [criticism from a leading business group](#), [according to the State House News Service](#). The proposal was sent to the Senate Ways and Means Committee in December.

[Swampscott](#), home of Gov. Charlie Baker, and several other communities throughout Massachusetts already have some type of ordinance in place to reduce or eliminate the use of single-use plastic straws and stirrers, [according to reports](#).

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