

MARBLEHEAD REPORTER

SUSTAINABLE MARBLEHEAD: Let's talk trash

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Many of us probably began the year with passion and enthusiasm for what we believed we could achieve in 2020. In March our world dramatically changed, when COVID-19 forced us inward and gave us more time for reflection and an appreciation for the natural world around us. What we're beginning to see now is a major shift in consciousness around the climate crisis and social injustice from one driven largely by fear and anger to one propelled by the unity of deep caring for one another and the planet on which we live.

New carry in/carry out rules

We hope to see that caring reflected in the stewardship of Marblehead's streets, parks, beaches and trails. In response to the public health crisis and out of concern for the health of town employees, the town has temporarily removed trash receptacles at many of our beaches and parks and has posted new signs requesting visitors to take their trash with them and dispose of it at home. This new carry in/carry out policy has generated significant discussion on social media, and unfortunately has also led to increased trash being left in public places — often where trash receptacles used to be.

This policy is not limited to Marblehead. In an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19, all of the state's park properties have instituted carry in/carry out policies. After being indoors for months, everyone is understandably eager to return to our beautiful outdoor spaces. Even as trash receptacles begin to be replaced, please plan ahead and bring an extra bag for your trash!

Addressing plastic pollution

Plastics continue to be a huge contributor to our global waste problem. According to National Geographic, single-use items like plastic straws, water bottles and plastic bags account for more than 40% of plastic waste, and each year approximately 8.8 million tons of plastic trash

flow into our oceans. According to Frontline's recent documentary on PBS, "Plastic Wars," recycling was created by the plastics industry to alleviate growing concerns about the accumulation of discarded plastic waste. But, shockingly, only 9% of all the plastic that has ever been produced has been recycled!

The Plastic Free Foundation launched Plastic Free July (<http://plasticfreejuly.org>) in 2011 as a global initiative to rid the world of plastic waste. The organization reminds us that we're all part of the solution, and even during a pandemic, there are ways we can reduce our plastic consumption. Prior to the pandemic, Sustainable Marblehead had been looking forward to engaging our community in the Plastic Free July Challenge. Unfortunately, the pandemic has created new challenges as some of us have become ill, and many have experienced a loss of income. We have also had to adapt to working and schooling from home and to new ways of shopping. As we adjust to this new normal, many factors are beyond our control, but there are still things we can do every day to reduce our use of single-use plastics.

Plastic Awareness July

In the spirit of the Plastic Free July Challenge, Sustainable Marblehead has launched Plastic Awareness July with a calendar of 31 daily tips for reducing or reusing single-use plastics. These include actions like swapping disposable razors for reusables and carrying reusable eating utensils and straws for snacks and meals outside your home. We have also included creative activities you can do as a family, such as turning a water bottle into a piggy bank.

Please visit <http://sustainablemarblehead.org> to see our Plastic Awareness Month calendar and sign up to participate in our weekly, socially distanced, beach cleanups. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram to learn more about our Plastic Awareness July daily tips and how you can receive a reusable Sustainable Marblehead water bottle and win a picnic backpack and set of reusable straws.

We hope you will join us in raising awareness about trash in our town by following and promoting the town's new carry in/carry out policy and by thinking about how your household can reduce its use of plastics. Remember to reduce, reuse and then recycle! Summer in Marblehead is very special, and as a community that cares, we can honor the beauty that surrounds us by keeping our public spaces, harbor and beaches clean.

Lynn Bryant is the executive director of Sustainable Marblehead.