

# Opinion

## EDITORIAL

### Too much of a good thing

**H**ard lessons learned from an avalanche of solar applications appear to have produced the guidebook that Westport so sorely needs to cope with a growth industry whose appetite for woods and farmland knows no bounds.

Neighbors Tiverton and Little Compton, which are grappling with solar rules of their own, would be wise to take note of the Westport experience. At a rate of what seems like one every week or two, would-be solar farmers are showing up at Town Hall with sketches for solar arrays stretching across 20 acres and much more. Neighbors are appalled.

The appeal of the business model is evident — decent income from land that may not be suited for much else, next to zero cost for labor or maintenance, and, once built, little in the way of actual work required.

It has fallen to Westport's Planning Board, whose meetings stretch to four hours and more, to make sense of it all.

Creating this bylaw has been a challenge for these planners who are rightly torn.

On the one hand, they recognize that solar energy is one vital response to the challenges of a warming world. Every town must do its part.

But they are loathe to stand by and watch as woodlands are leveled, and wildlife and views destroyed.

It will certainly evolve, but the bylaw they have drafted offers a measure of reason and compromise.

Heavy emphasis is placed on protecting views, both those of neighbors and passersby on roads and the water. Those views are what set one place, one town, apart from every other and they must not be ruined lightly. To that end, buffer zones and setbacks are beefed up.

The rules set limits on the clearing allowed. Applicants are already bristling but the town should not bend here.

And they reinforce protections against water runoff. Old drainage routes can go haywire when trees and vegetation are clear-cut, as those living near one Westport solar farm have already discovered.

These rules won't make everyone happy but they are an excellent start.

Solar should be welcomed but within most carefully considered limits.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### School safety: Guns, police not the only way

#### To the editor:

I personally understand the fears parents have of losing their children while attending school in this present era.

But are we frightening children in feeling they cannot be safe

unless they are protected by guns?

Will this spill over into their world outside of school?

I feel perhaps the issue is in the lack of education on how to be safe and making more resources available for mental health issues.

I believe more thought should be put into this before considering adding police presence in our school.

**Barbara Passmore**  
Little Compton

### Plastic bags: Reduce, re-use, recycle, re-think

#### To the editor:

More than 100 billion single-use plastic bags are distributed each year in the United States, the vast majority of which are used once and then discarded rather than re-used or recycled. These non-biodegradable bags can take more than 300 years to break down, during the course of which they leach toxic chemicals that can find their way into our water and oceans, killing nearly 100,000 marine animals and more than one million seabirds per year. They litter our landscape and our beaches, clog our storm drains, and fill our rivers, lakes, and seas, posing an ever-increasing threat to wildlife and the environment.

While plastic bags are convenient to use, their production consumes large amounts of petroleum (4.3 billion gallons of crude oil per year) and requires large amounts of fossil fuel-based energy, indirectly contributing to global warming by streaming excess greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The petroleum used to make 14 plastic bags would be enough to drive a car one mile.

There is no reason why we can't act responsibly to eliminate plastic bags. We have an opportunity and an obligation to do so. Portsmouth, Dartmouth, Bristol, Barrington, Middletown, Newport, and Boston have all banned single-use plastic bags. In June 2008, China implemented a nationwide ban on retailers

distributing plastic bags free of charge. Their aim was to save hundreds of thousands of gallons of fossil fuel and to prevent thousands of tons of global warming gases from polluting the atmosphere. Seven years later, plastic bag use by supermarkets and shopping malls had decreased by 67%, saving 8.4 million tons of oil, 12 million tons of standard coal, and 30 million tons of CO2. In 2015, France issued a ban on plastic bags and in 2016 it became the first country to declare a total ban on plastic cups, plates, and cutlery. A host of other cities and countries have followed suit with similar initiatives.

The younger generation is taking action to insure a habitable planet for their future. "Young Voices for the Planet" (<https://youngvoicesfortheplanet.com>), has been advocating "to limit the magnitude of climate change and its impacts by empowering children and youth, through uplifting and inspiring success stories, to take an essential role in informing their communities, challenging decision-makers, and catalyzing change." Through their efforts, among many other challenges, "Team Marine" high school students successfully campaigned to pass a ban on plastic bags in the city of Santa Monica in 2011 and in 2014 helped to pass a statewide ban on plastic bags in California. One student, 9 year old Milo Cress, launched a "Be Straw Free" cam-

paign last year in an effort to convince restaurants to refrain from automatically providing disposable plastic drinking straws (nearly 500 million of which are used daily in the U.S. alone) unless specifically requested by the customer. He has already had a measurable impact in states such as Colorado and Washington (beginning in July 2108, Seattle became the first U.S. city to enact a total ban on plastic straws), igniting a movement to "skip the straw" nationwide. Visit the website to see these kids in action!

Teachers who wish to help students get involved in civic action like this can use the "Civic Engagement Curriculum Guide" that can be found on the website under the "for teachers" tab.

If these kids can manage to catalyze change to benefit our environment, why can't we join them in their efforts by revisiting the ordinance previously proposed by Sustainable Sakonnet and this time pass a ban on single-use plastic bags in Tiverton once and for all? It's neither hard nor a hardship to bring a few durable re-usable bags to the store with you when you go shopping; and how simple a measure to do our part in preserving the environment! If cities, states, and entire countries can do this, why can't we?

**Harton Smith**  
and **Mary Bandura**  
Tiverton

### New words to describe our strange weather

#### To the editor:

Well I don't know about you, but the weatherman has introduced me to new words about the weather.

Before 2004 I used the word "tidal wave" but after the horrific one in Indonesia tsunami became forever substituted.

Now this winter it is vortex and although we on the East Coast were spared, tragic pictures of the effects in the middle of the country are surely in our

minds.

A cane in my right hand has been a "must" for some time so I will not fall and break something as three friends have recently done. This means I can no longer go out on the deck to fill the bird feeder and must be content with the daily sighting of a red bellied woodpecker as he visits the same tree and circles the same way in front of my computer.

A sometimes flock of Robins

lends interest and late afternoons are livened by a small group of noisy crows as they head for bed. It's a long time until the bird bath, now tipped on its side, brings the excitement and wonder of our warm weather visitors.

Our weather has been amazingly warm but don't count on its lasting!

**Sidney Tynan**  
Little Compton

## SAKONNET TIMES

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