

Energy and Recycling Committee (ERC) News

Our goal is to increase municipal recycling from our current rate of 29% to 35% by 2017 and 40% by 2019

Buying Local

As thoroughly discussed in the 11/20/15 ERC Sentry article “What is sustainability?” there is much to consider when trying to practice, let alone understand, the term “sustainability”. Breaking the concept down into the three pillars of social, economic and environmental components is a great way to begin to grasp how one chooses to be sustainable. An easy way to start (or complement) your ongoing sustainable lifestyle, in a way that pulls from all three pillars, is by simply buying local.

The (arguably) most important statistic for buying local is that, for out of every \$100 spent in the local community, \$45 is infused back into that local community. This encourages local business growth (jobs), generates entrepreneurship in order to fill local resource opportunities and increases the local tax base. This increase in the tax base (which is *not* a tax increase) ultimately creates more assets that the local government can disperse within the community to help fund things like road repair, park upkeep bike lane striping etc. Your local taxes fund the infrastructure that your local businesses utilize, so why not utilize yourself that which you are spending your tax dollars on?

Conversely, spending \$100 dollars at big-box stores (superstore or megastore, usually part of a chain) only brings back \$14 to the community in which it is located. That \$31 difference is money that is distributed outside of the community to support big-box profits and infrastructure that is needed to send and receive mass-produced goods cheaply. Because that money is not re-circulated within the community, the community suffers and you are not fully utilizing the value of the local tax dollars you spend.

Buying local also encourages more walking and biking within concentrated community business districts which helps to limit driving from big-box location to big-box location. Having small, diverse centers of local businesses in proximities to residents helps to conserve land, encourages walking/biking path infrastructure and lessens automobile traffic. Sprawl has been the byproduct of the freedoms afforded by the automobile and, now that we better understand the climate damages produced by excessive automobile emissions, we should strive to limit driving as much as we (reasonably) can. Our area was the first Maine community to fully adopt the car-based stripmall, Millcreek Plaza, so there is no excuse why we can't be as forward thinking regarding pedestrian based plazas.

Buying local is also a way to develop and understand community identity which is an important aspect of being sustainable. If there is understanding of what the community can do best, what resources can be generated and an idea of where growth is possible than the community has the tools for being self-sustainable. A community identity also fights against the watering down

of character that big-box stores cast onto their locations and become rallying points for residents, businesses and the local-government alike.

By buying local you are literally investing in the local community and personally helping shape your community's identity. Doing this helps to keep the forces that fund your community local, which is how the most authentic communities can prosper.