



September 25, 2018

Letter to the Editor of the Advocate / Public Hearing Submission

North Stamford Association opposes bagging of leaves

On behalf of nearly 1000 tax paying resident households in the membership database of the North Stamford Association, I am writing on their behalf to express strong opposition to the plan to require the bagging of leaves.

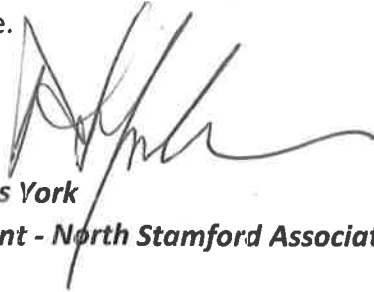
Our opposition to the plan is based on the apparent lack of science, financial analysis, community involvement and overall strategic planning that should have driven such a process. Municipalities that have moved to the bagging of leaves have done so after a thoughtful process that weighed the needs of taxpayers, environmental factors, and the creation of timetables for testing, evaluation, and phased implementation. Even after such a process, many municipalities have not realized the savings expected, or in fact incurred new costs as a result of such a change. Some have reverted to bulk pickup.

Members of the North Stamford Association were polled via email and over 98% of respondents objected to the proposal for the following reasons:

- 1) **Inability of homeowners to bag leaves due to homeowner age or lack of financial resources to do so.** Members already using landscapers were asked to obtain estimates on the additional cost of bagging leaves. Estimates ranged from \$250 - \$1500 per household, per week or as required, during peak leaf season. These additional expenses equate to an additional tax on homeowners now covered within the current tax structure. Many homeowners do not have landscaping services and are physically unable to perform leaf bagging and/or cannot afford to pay for professional services. According to the last U.S. Census (2010), 44% of North Stamford Residents are over 45 and nearly 33% of all residents are over 65 years of age. Many planned to age and retire in North Stamford based on a perceived contract with the city that certain services would continue to be provided. Bulk leaf pick-up is one such service. Proposals that make it more difficult for seniors to retain their homes in North Stamford thereby accelerating the out migration of residents must be avoided.
- 2) **Risk of injury or illness to both homeowners and city employees as a result of bagging leaves and/or now coming in contact with Lyme carrying Ticks.** More than 28,000 people are medically treated each year for back, neck, and shoulder injuries directly related to the raking and disposal of leaves. (Source; Consumer Product Safety Commission). The National Safety Council reports per back injury claims in excess of \$35,000 each. Any perceived savings by the City could conceivably be lost in worker's

compensation claims and lost workdays. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control ranks Connecticut 6th overall in the incidence rate for Lyme Disease. We must question the wisdom of putting residents and municipal and contract employees in direct contact with leaf waste. Lyme Disease is directly linked to costly, chronic short and long-term illnesses.

Leaf bagging programs have certainly been implemented in select cities around the country. Those programs that have proven to be sustainable and cost effective were done following extensive study by neighborhood and engagement with community leaders. We must recognize that a one-size fits all approach for cities with varying topography and diverse age and income demographics require a modified approach for each neighborhood, and not implemented as a reaction to a budget battle. The citizens of Stamford deserve better. They deserve process, respect, and to be heard. Longtime residents of North Stamford might recall a time a generation ago when leaf removal was proposed to be canceled as a city service. North Stamford residents realized that the city was disconnected from their values, with discussions ensuing about establishing the Village of North Stamford. Is history destined to repeat itself or can we retrench as one city with a process that understands and appreciates the uniqueness of each neighborhood with dialog of what the residents of those neighborhoods need, want and deserve.



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