

# 'Skip the Straw Law' back before Ulster County legislators



Ulster County lawmakers to revisit plastic straws proposal



The Ulster County Legislature will determine whether or not to approve the "Skip the Straw Law" at its May 21 meeting.

KINGSTON, N.Y. — A controversial proposal to make plastic drinking straws an on-demand-only commodity in restaurants and fast-food establishments in Ulster County will be back before legislators later this month.

The county Legislature's Energy and Environment Committee voted Thursday to approve the local law, known as the "Skip the Straw Law." The full Legislature will take up the measure at its May 21 meeting.

If the law is approved, straws would be provided only if requested by patrons. Eateries would have to post a sign informing customers that "single-use plastic straws are available upon request."

Reaction to the measure has been split among legislators and the public.

Speakers were divided during a public hearing on the proposal in September 2018, with five favoring the measure and three, including the owner of a convenience store and the head of the New York Association of Convenience Stores, opposing it.

Supporters say the law will give food-service establishments a "push" to reduce the amount of waste they generate and encourage people to think about what they are using.

Opponents have expressed concern about the impact on businesses, particularly those that operate drive-up windows and those that offer straws to customers on a self-serve basis.

During the committee meeting Thursday, Legislator Mary Wawro, R-Saugerties, questioned whether the county would achieve its goal of reducing the proliferation of plastic straws through a local law and said the county would be able to move the issue ahead faster if it partnered with businesses rather than forced the change on them.

Some Democratic legislators, meanwhile, questioned whether the law went far enough, suggesting it also include plastic stirrers and cutlery. Others though, said amending the law to include those items would trigger another public hearing, would delay the implementation of the straw law and could create confusion.

"This is no means to an end, but it is a step forward," said Legislature Majority Leader Jonathan Heppner, D-Woodstock. He said adding plastic cutlery to the law would be taking the law to a "higher level."

In the end, the committee voted to pass the law as proposed, although it is possible it could be amended when it goes before the full Legislature. If that were

to happen, lawmakers would have to hold another public hearing before voting on a final measure.

Market research suggests people in the United States use between 170 million and 390 million plastic straws every day, or between 63 billion and 142 billion per year, [according to The New York Times](#).

Those straws — which don't biodegrade and find their way by the millions into water bodies around the globe — each year end up costing the lives of about 100,000 marine animals and more than a million sea birds that ingest the harmful plastic, according to the National Wildlife Federation, a not-for-profit conservation group.

The Plastic Pollution Coalition, a project of the non-for-profit advocacy group Earth Island Institute, predicts the Earth's oceans will contain more plastic than fish, by weight, by 2050.