



Extended producer responsibility can reduce Amherst taxes

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In 2017, the Chinese National Sword Policy banned the import of waste from across the world. Recycling in the Town of Amherst is still feeling the aftershock from that decision made thousands of miles away.

A common misconception is that recycling is automatically a cost savings for the town. The reality is that there is a cost for collection and sorting of the items that go into the recycling totes. The savings is dependent on how much our collector, Modern Recycling, can sell the collected materials to the next step in the recycling chain. Without the artificial market that China provided, those revenues have been depressed from their pre-2017 levels.

Recycling programs are, in essence, a government subsidy to the business world. Businesses take responsibility for the costs of production, packaging, distribution and sales. In other words, all other portions of the product's life span except for the disposal of the product.

This may be changing with pending legislation on the state and federal levels which have components focusing on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). EPR requires product producers to develop and implement strategies to focus on the total life span of a product, including the end-of use, to increase the amount of product recovery and minimize the environmental impact of waste materials. New York State's legislation (S1185A) is focused on EPR with the purpose to "create a circular economy for recycling." On the federal level, EPR is a key component of the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act.

One key finding from EPR legislation in Europe is that it was effective in making manufacturers review their packaging, redesigning it to have a lower environmental and waste footprint. The town should consider a resolution in support of the state's efforts of the EPR legislation to help relieve the costs of waste management.

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