



August 12, 2021

Dear Mr. Mayor, Madam Vice Mayor and City Council Members,

The Environmental Policy Commission strongly supports an Alexandria ordinance to tax single-use plastic retail bags.

It is estimated that 100 billion plastic bags are used annually in the U.S. However, they are not accepted in curbside recycling and the vast majority are not compostable (and compostable versions are not widely accepted by composters). Most single-use plastic retail bag are used for mere minutes; yet they can last in the environment for years or end up in a landfill or incinerator. They are one of the most commonly littered items and are often found stuck in trees, floating across highways, and entangled in plants along our waterways. Plastic bags also clog storm-water drainage systems, exacerbating flooding. Hundreds of thousands are collected every year by volunteers engaged in the International Coastal Cleanup. Plastic bags can make their way (especially from Alexandria, a coastal city) into the Chesapeake Bay and eventually into the ocean, where they can be ingested by marine life and prove deadly.

The City and its residents have strongly supported this tax through the years of stakeholder engagement for WasteSmart and in the Environmental Action Plan. At least eight states, and countless cities across the U.S. have enacted plastic bag bans or taxes and we believe it is overdue in Alexandria.

The benefits of a tax have been demonstrated by the D.C. Department of Energy and Environment that saw a 72 percent decrease in the presence of plastic bags in their clean-ups within just a few years of passing their law to impose a 5-cent tax on plastic bags in 2010.

Taxing plastic bags does not impose a significant burden on consumers since avoiding the tax is easy. Reusable bags are widely available and many consumers already have them. To encourage their use, however, the City should use a portion of the funds collected to subsidize the purchase of reusable bags by SNAP and WIC users during the initial implementation of the tax as suggested by the law.

We strongly urge you to support this bag tax and to use the funds collected to invest in providing education programs designed to reduce environmental waste, mitigate pollution and litter, supplement our recycling infrastructure, and/or for more frequent cleanups of Alexandria's waterways.

Sincerely,

Kathie Hoekstra

Kathie Hoekstra
Chair, on behalf of the Environmental Policy Commission
CC: Helen Lee, Khoa Tran

[EXTERNAL]Plastic bag tax

Paul Kaplowitz <pkaplowi@gmail.com>

Thu 9/2/2021 12:10 PM

To: wastesmart <wastesmart@alexandriava.gov>

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Dear Mr. Mayor, Madam Vice Mayor and City Council Members,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Sierra Club's Alexandrians for the Environmental Action Plan (Alex4EAP) to express our strong support for the proposed 5 cent tax on single use retail plastic bags. The scope of the problem is widely known, and anyone who walks along our streets, streams and the waterfront can spot large numbers of discarded bags which will never be recycled and will never break down. We are pleased that the city is planning to do something about it.

In our region, DC was the first jurisdiction to take action on this, and their 2010 5 cent tax has resulted in an over 70% reduction in plastic bags collected in their clean-ups. As you are aware, the last session of the VA general assembly gave localities the authority to impose a similar tax, and Fairfax and Arlington are currently considering passing such a tax, which consumers can easily avoid by using reusable shopping bags. Some of the money collected from the tax can fund purchase of reusable bags by low-income families, as well as provide funding for a variety of environmental programs allowed by the state statute.

While a bag tax will only address a small part of our plastic waste problem, it will have the additional benefit of making our citizens more aware that small local actions can help mitigate a growing environmental problem.

Paul Kaplowitz, Sasha Impastato, Mike Olex, and Steve Banashek
Sierra Club Potomac River Group and Alex4EAP

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