



*Local governments working together for a better metropolitan region*

## MEMORANDUM

To: COG Board of Directors

From: Cathy Drzyzgula, Chair *CD*  
Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee

Date: October 5, 2009

Subject: Recommendations Supporting Measures to Reduce the  
Occurrence of Plastic Bags in the Region's Rivers and Streams

*District of Columbia*  
*Bladensburg\**  
*Bowie*  
*College Park*  
*Frederick*  
*Frederick County*  
*Gaithersburg*  
*Greenbelt*  
*Montgomery County*  
*Prince George's County*  
*Rockville*  
*Takoma Park*  
*Alexandria*  
*Arlington County*  
*Fairfax*  
*Fairfax County*  
*Falls Church*  
*Loudoun County*  
*Manassas*  
*Manassas Park*  
*Prince William County*

*\*Adjunct member*

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### Recommendation Summary

As Chair of the Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee (CBPC), I recommend that the COG Board adopt Resolution R57-09. The resolution is a follow-up to Resolution R19-09, which expressed support for measures to reduce the occurrence of plastic bags in the region's rivers and streams and directed COG staff to further investigate the potential for regional action. The proposed resolution would, among other things, establish COG's support for state legislative efforts to reduce the incidence of plastic bag pollution.

This memo outlines findings from a COG staff report on the plastic bag issue and documents how the committee arrived at the recommendations of proposed Resolution R57-09.

### Background

The committee initially discussed this issue in March 2009 at a time when the District of Columbia Council was debating a measure proposed by Council Member Tommy Wells to impose a fee on disposable plastic bags and similar legislation was being discussed in the Maryland and Virginia legislatures. The committee relied on discussion from a March 19, 2009, forum on the issue sponsored by COG's Recycling Committee.

The committee presented its preliminary findings at the COG Board meeting of April 8, 2009, at which the Board adopted Resolution R19-09. In addition to expressing general support for efforts to reduce plastic bag pollution, the resolution called for the CBPC, in concert with various technical committees, to (1) survey the effectiveness of measures taken elsewhere to reduce the incidence of such pollution, (2) review data on the incidence of such pollution locally and (3) analyze the effectiveness of any existing local recycling programs that address this issue

It should also be noted that elected officials representing most of COG's member governments have joined with more than 100 others to sign the Potomac River Watershed Trash Treaty pledging to achieve a "trash-free" Potomac by 2013. Among other things, the signatories commit to "supporting and implementing regional strategies aimed at reducing trash and increasing recycling."

### **Committee Findings**

Attached to this memo is a COG staff report on the plastic bag issue that addresses the Board's charge to the committee. The CBPC reviewed the report at its Sept. 18, 2009, meeting. Key findings include:

- Plastic bags account for the largest number of trash items found in tributaries of the Anacostia River according to several recent surveys, although they are not as prevalent in the main stem of the river. No other data on the incidence of litter in area waterways was found.
- Most area supermarkets and other major retail chains offer plastic bag recycling opportunities. Some of COG's member governments offer curbside recycling options for plastic bags.
- The District of Columbia's legislative initiative, which will take effect Jan. 1, 2010, will establish the first bag fee program in the United States. Proceeds from the 5-cent a bag fee, will be used to defray the cost of reusable bags and help pay for water quality restoration efforts in the District's portion of the Anacostia watershed.
- There are a number of plastic bag bans now in place in other communities, but most of these are fairly new and hence there is limited data on their effectiveness. There also are bans and fee programs in place outside of the United States. Ireland's fee program has shown some effectiveness in reducing overall litter levels.

### **Committee Action**

After considering the staff report and its finding that plastic bag litter reduction efforts are still in their infancy, the CBPC recommended the following actions, which are delineated in the proposed resolution:

- that the Board direct the Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee to continue to track the effectiveness of plastic bag initiatives in the United States as well as internationally, and report back to the Board as appropriate.
- that the Board encourage its membership to include the issue of plastic bag pollution in citizen outreach efforts, focused on use of reusable bags and recycling of plastic bags and direct COG's Recycling Committee to facilitate exchange of best practices among the COG membership.
- that the Board include in its state legislative package support for initiatives in Maryland and Virginia designed to reduce the incidence of plastic bag pollution that are consistent with legislation enacted in the District of Columbia.

Accordingly, the CBPC recommends that the COG Board adopt Resolution R57-09