

Legislative Priority # 10: The City of Norfolk supports legislation to provide a local-option as to whether or not to restrict or curtail the use of plastic bags in their jurisdictions. (Council Priorities: *Economic Vitality and Workforce Development; Environmental Sustainability; Safe, Healthy, and Inclusive Community; and Well-Managed Government*).

Plastic bags that are not buried in landfills are typically littered, windblown or recycled. Recycled plastic bags are valuable, but bulk recycling is difficult as the bags foul the recycling equipment. Generally, plastic bags are not biodegradable. Instead, littered bags break down into smaller toxic bits that contaminate soil and waterways, and enter into the food web when animals accidentally ingest those materials.

Stranded marine mammals including whales, dolphins and sea turtles have been found with plastic debris in their digestive systems, and entangled in the bags. Farmers have voiced major concerns about littered plastic bags because they can get caught in cotton stalks and contaminate cotton crops. In urban areas, they clog storm sewer outfalls, block sunlight from critical shoreline habitat and litter shorelines, parks and other public and private areas.

Using plastic bags provides retailers effectiveness, efficiency and convenience in delivering their products to consumers. However, improper disposal of plastic bags is widespread and they are a significant source of pollution. Local governments nationwide have considered voluntary recycling efforts and other strategies to reduce plastic bag waste and litter. Some are turning to plastic bag bans, taxes and other incentives to reduce the use of these bags and subsequent littering.

In this regard, Virginia local governments should be authorized to decide for themselves which solutions and programs they wish to explore for meaningfully addressing plastic bag litter.