POSITION STATEMENT FORM

(Completed form to be provided to the Legislative Committee)

GENERAL SUBJECT AREA -- TITLE OF PROPOSAL:

REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINATION FROM PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS

PROPOSAL:

Support legislation to reduce the use of plastic disposable bags. If disposable bags are provided they should be paper with a high recycled content and with a nominal fee/deposit of a nominal amount, such as 5-10 cents. The use of reusable bags should be encouraged.

SOURCE:

Environmental Quality Advisory Council, July, 2012

BACKGROUND:

Plastic bags do not completely degrade in the environment. They present a real threat to wildlife and aquatic organisms. In the open ocean, plastic bags break up into small pieces that resemble food that fish ingest. While plastic bags may be recycled or disposed of so that they are not released to the environment, many plastic bags end up in fields, streams, lakes, rivers and the oceans. Paper bags are disposable and are expected to pose fewer environmental risks. Paper bags in Fairfax County can be recycled or disposed of as trash, where they would be incinerated. Incinerated bags will release some carbon dioxide. Discarding paper bags after one use is also resource intensive in terms of trees and all of the efforts to harvest trees and manufacture the paper.

The goal should be to encourage the use of reusable bags. In order to discourage the use of single use throw away bags, a nominal deposit/fee should be required for each bag. The proposal is broad so that there may be support for legislation for statewide actions, as well as legislation authorizing localities to take certain actions to meet this goal.

In past legislative sessions, legislation aimed at reducing the use of plastic and/or paper bags has been introduced; however, these bills have either been tabled or left in the committees to which they were referred.

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors' 2012 Legislative Program included the following position statement, which updated and reaffirmed a previous position: "Support legislation or other efforts which would encourage the use of reusable shopping bags, consistent with the County's waste reduction goals and environmental stewardship efforts. As in previous sessions, it is anticipated that legislation to ban plastic bags or impose a fee for their use may

be introduced again in 2012. Such legislation would need to be examined by the County for efficacy, cost, and ease of administration." EQAC supports retention of this position statement in the 2013 Legislative Program.

Please note that EQAC has proposed two additional position statements this year, both of which it considers to be higher priority items than this proposal: EQAC's priority proposal supports the retention of the moratorium on uranium mining in Virginia; its second priority proposal addresses third-party power purchase agreements for renewable energy.

RECOMMENDATION:
(*Do not fill out-- This will be indicated by the Legislative Director and County Executive)*

POSSIBLE SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION BY ORGANIZATIONS:
(List any organizations or groups, if any, which might be in favor of or against the proposed position)

Support from environmental and civic organizations is expected for bills that encourage the reuse of bags, ban plastic bags or require deposits for disposable bags. Organizations such as The Alice Ferguson Foundation, Choose Clean Water Coalition, Clean Water Action, Institute for Local Self Reliance, Surfrider Foundation-DC Chapter and other cities and towns have also supported such legislation. We expect at least some retail establishments and consumer groups may oppose such legislation.

STAFF CONTACT PERSON(S):
(Provide name and phone number of County staff person(s) best able to provide any additional research or necessary information)

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