

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Committee on the Environment to hold hearings regarding the threat of wasted plastics to the health, safety, and wellbeing of the City and residents of Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, Plastics have transformed society, often for the better, including revolutionizing medicine, enabling space travel, reducing fuel pollution through lighter vehicles, extending the shelf-life of fresh foods, saving lives through airbags, incubators, helmets, and many other uses; and

WHEREAS, Having only been invented in the late 19th century with production not ramping up until around 1950, plastics - semi- or fully synthetic products usually derived from petrochemicals - have not existed for long, limiting the time available to study them or understand how they decompose; and

WHEREAS, Of the 9.2 billion tons of plastic that has been created, more than 6.9 billion tons have become waste - a staggering 6.3 billion of which has never made it to a recycling bin - and there is uncertainty about how long it will take plastic to completely biodegrade into its constituent molecules, with estimates ranging from 450 years to never; and

WHEREAS, Convenience to consumers of ostensibly single-use plastic has led to vast numbers of bags, utensils, wrappers, and other plastics clogging the waste stream, as well as creating problems outside of it, such as plastic bags caught in tree branches; and

WHEREAS, The Philadelphia Water Department removes approximately 10,000 pounds of plastic from our rivers and creeks each year; and

WHEREAS, Recycling of plastic and other materials has long relied on its reuse value, with China serving for the last few decades as the purchaser of significant volumes of discarded plastic products, allowing American waste haulers to divert them from landfills cost-effectively, limiting the costs to municipalities and residents alike; and

WHEREAS, Shifting from its status as the biggest creator of plastic products and importer of waste plastic, China has imposed new rules on the quality of material being brought in from abroad, including from the United States, as it seeks to ameliorate the problems of plastics and microplastics; and

WHEREAS, Microplastics, very small pieces created through the decomposition of disposed plastics, have undermined ocean ecosystems, killing creatures, covering beaches, and polluting the food stream; and

WHEREAS, Microplastics get into the food chain and drinking water, with unknown health consequences for human beings; and

WHEREAS, The confluence of undiscovered dangers to people and our environment, the real costs to governments and of quality of life, and the major shift in ability to reliably recycle waste plastic presents an

opportunity for policies that promote sustainable practices; and

WHEREAS, Cities such as Seattle, New York and New Delhi as well as entire countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Rwanda, Morocco and Zimbabwe have instituted bans on many types of single use plastic within the last two years to widespread public approval and very positive effects on the environment; and

WHEREAS, Although all of the damage caused by wasted plastics cannot be solved by Philadelphia alone, the city can contribute its share to reversing reliance on disposable products to remove unsightly litter, eliminate a costly source of trash, and improve the health of our environments, local and global; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby authorize the Committee on the Environment to hold hearings regarding the threat of wasted plastics to the health, safety, and wellbeing of the City and residents of Philadelphia.

Introduced by:

Councilman Derek S. Green

June 21, 2018