

MEMORANDUM



DATE: July 21, 2026
TO: County Council
THROUGH: Angelica Gurule, Staff Liaison to ESB
FROM: Environmental Sustainability Board
CC: Environmental Sustainability Board
RE: Recommendation on Proposed Single-Use Plastic Bag Ordinance

Environmental Sustainability Board Recommendation

The Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) held a public meeting to consider the proposed Single-Use Plastic Bag Ordinance. The Board reviewed the draft ordinance, historical background, research, and public comments received throughout the public engagement process. Board members held a range of personal perspectives regarding the proposed ordinance; however, following deliberation, the Board reached a unanimous recommendation based on its collective evaluation of the information presented, community feedback, and the policy considerations discussed during the meeting.

Public Engagement Summary

As part of the public engagement process, the County received 213 public comments through email, Cognito Forms, and Facebook. Overall, 66% of comments opposed the proposed ordinance, 28% supported it, 4% provided general feedback, and 3% were neutral.

To better understand comments submitted directly through official County engagement channels, the Board also reviewed responses excluding Facebook comments. Of the 110 comments received through email and Cognito Forms, 49% opposed the proposed ordinance, 43% supported it, 7% provided general feedback, and 1% were neutral.

The Board also considered the historical context of previous public outreach. In 2015, following a citizen petition requesting a plastic bag ban, 80.1% of 251 participants opposed a plastic bag ban and 72.2% of 252 participants opposed reducing the distribution of single-use bags, which resulted in the Environmental Sustainability Board recommending education rather than regulation.

Additionally, the Board received ten public comments at the meeting, 8 of 10 were opposed to a ban.

Board Deliberation

In reaching its recommendation, the Board identified the following considerations:

- Members noted that, based on the information reviewed, they did not identify evidence demonstrating that single-use plastic bag bans have a disproportionate adverse economic impact on small businesses, while acknowledging that businesses may experience implementation-related adjustments.
- Members emphasized that evaluating the environmental impacts of bags requires consideration of the full life cycle of both single-use plastic bags and reusable alternatives, including raw material extraction, manufacturing, transportation, reuse rates, end-of-life management, and impacts associated with microplastic pollution.
- Members supported providing residents with opportunities and resources to voluntarily reduce plastic consumption through education, outreach, and community engagement rather than regulatory measures.
- Members noted that the estimated direct costs associated with plastic bags in the County's recycling system are relatively limited and questioned whether the anticipated environmental benefits of the proposed ordinance would be proportional to the effort and resources required for implementation.
- Members expressed the view that the County has other environmental sustainability priorities that may provide greater measurable environmental benefits and suggested prioritizing initiatives that align more directly with the County's sustainability and climate action goals.
- Members discussed the importance of clearly identifying the primary objective of the ordinance. Whether the intent is litter reduction, greenhouse gas reduction, or another environmental outcome, members suggested prioritizing strategies that most effectively address those specific objectives.
- Members expressed concern that adoption of the ordinance could create division within the community and emphasized the importance of pursuing sustainability initiatives that encourage broad public participation and support.
- Members noted that public engagement, both historically and during the current process, demonstrated considerable interest in education and voluntary behavior change. Members discussed the need to develop a comprehensive education and outreach campaign focused on reducing plastic consumption, preventing litter, promoting waste reduction, and encouraging sustainable consumer practices.
- Members also suggested evaluating opportunities to expand convenient plastic bag collection and recycling options throughout the community.

Board Recommendation

Following deliberation, the Environmental Sustainability Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend against adoption of the proposed Single-Use Plastic Bag Ordinance. Instead, the Board recommends that the County continue to promote reductions in single-use plastic consumption through education, voluntary behavior change, expanded recycling opportunities, and other sustainability initiatives that may achieve broader and more measurable environmental outcomes.

The Board welcomes the opportunity to assist the County in developing and implementing a comprehensive public education and outreach program focused on waste reduction, litter prevention, responsible plastic use, and sustainable consumer practices.