

October 26, 2020

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Dear Petersburg Borough Assembly and residents-

We are a group of residents keenly interested in the way our community consumes and disposes of waste, particularly plastics. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this discussion.

The Petersburg plastics group started 3 years ago in response to concern about the impacts of marine plastics and with the goal of reducing the amount of single-use plastics our community generates. Through our research, we've learned that the market for recycled plastics is, in some ways, a fiction created by the petroleum industry in response to environmental concerns about their product, which never truly degrades and can only be repurposed into a lower-value product, at best. As our community begins to address our garbage problem, we need to, first and foremost, decrease our consumption of plastics. When shopping, we ask Petersburg residents to consider not only about the value of the product itself, but also the packaging it comes in, and how it will be disposed of. Can you purchase a larger volume at one time to minimize packaging? Is there another product in more sustainable packaging that you can substitute? Is it possible to bring your own bag or container?

While reducing the amount of plastic we consume could make a significant impact on not only the environment, but also the volume of waste our community needs to dispose of, the challenge of reducing the impact of what we throw away goes beyond that important step. We need to recycle the plastics we must consume as best as we can, and to help cover those costs until the market improves, we need to reduce overall waste disposal costs by reducing the total weight of our trash. Our ideas for reducing our total trash weight include increasing participation in the glass recycling program, getting the maximum value from recyclables we do collect, and encouraging composting.

We believe we need to continue the recycling program that we began with considerable investment of time and money. We already have the blue bins distributed around the community and the trucks needed to collect them, and our residents are happy to know that their waste is being put to the best possible use. It does not make sense to undo all of that work because of a temporary change in market prices. That said, we fully support changing the residential pick-up schedule to bi-weekly if that will help reduce costs.

All of this must be combined with outreach and education, efforts this group would be happy to collaborate on. The sooner we all realize we are a part of our community's waste rates and that less trash equals lower rates, the better. Want to lower your trash rates? Consume less, recycle glass and compost your food waste! By reducing our total waste stream through careful shopping and recycling, we can offset the costs of responsibly disposing of the things we must use. We look forward to examining the costs and benefits of these ideas with you.

Sincerely,

The Petersburg Plastics Group