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BILL 32-20, WASTE REDUCTION / SOURCE REDUCTION AND SINGLE USE STRAWS

SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

PUBLIC HEARING

The Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce supports the underlying goal of this Bill to ultimately eliminate the distribution of single-use plastic straws. However, now is not the time.

In talking with our restaurant members, we know that prior to the covid19 pandemic, restaurants were voluntarily reducing the use of straws in their establishments. Many had begun asking customers if they wanted a straw versus automatically bringing one to the table. As a society people were becoming more conscious of not asking for a straw. The market-place also stepped in and there was an increase of the sale and use of reusable straws. The pandemic hit and things changed overnight. Our restaurants report that many more people have reverted back to using straws to avoid contact with drinking glasses. The pandemic is a terrible time to impose a new requirement on restaurants and customers.

In addition to the imposed cultural shift, we all know that most restaurants are struggling. While straws are certainly not the most expensive item that restaurants need to purchase, it is a cost. The Bill will increase that cost. Quality biodegradable straws are significantly more expensive than plastic straws. They also fall apart, so instead of one plastic straw, 2 or 3 biodegradable straws may be necessary. That doesn't mean we shouldn't ultimately eliminate plastic straws, it just means that now is not the time.

I would also like to recommend that if this Bill does move forward, there be a comprehensive consumer education campaign to first ask customers to "skip the straw" and second to let them know that biodegradable straws are now required by law. Some customers do not like the biodegradable straws. They often fall apart depending on the size of the drink and the time it takes to drink it. It's unfair for restaurant staff to take the brunt of complaints. Similar to the County's MaskOn Montgomery, an educational campaign could go a long way to convincing consumers to forgo the straw altogether.

I encourage you to postpone this legislation until we are somewhat back to a normal existence. It will be much easier to implement when the consumers are on board with the change.