To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmember Kate Harrison
Subject: Removing Plastic Microfibers From The Water Supply: A Referral to the Community Environmental Advisory Commission

RECOMMENDATION
Refer to the Community Environmental Advisory Commission to assess the City’s capacity to participate in an outreach program informing residents of the harmful nature of microfibers.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
Not applicable, due to its status as a Commission referral.

BACKGROUND
The harmful nature of microfibers--tiny plastic bits often emerging from synthetic material--is the subject of a fledgling research movement. In recent years, concerned scientists have noted the prevalence of microfibers in a tap water supply and attempted to determine the impact of their presence. In the US, this issue is particularly urgent; according to a study conducted by Orb Media, 94% of their tap water samples contained plastic fibers. That rate ranked as the highest in the world.

Experts believe the toxic materials present in the microfibers could be of potential harm to human beings.

“We have enough data from looking at wildlife, and the impacts that it’s having on wildlife, to be concerned,” Dr. Sherri Mason, a microplastics expert at the State University of New York in Fredonia, told The Guardian. “If it’s impacting [wildlife], then how do we think that it’s not going to somehow impact us?”

There are certain preventative measures individuals can take to limit their microfiber emissions. Machine washing synthetic clothing allows these fibers to escape from our washing machines and filter out into our water streams. One study indicates each wash of a synthetic jacket produces up to 2 grams of microfibers. By making a concerted effort to avoid washing one’s own synthetic clothing as much as possible, individual steps can be taken to lessen the quantity of microfibers in a local context. Other
potential preventative measures include purchasing industry standard washing bags that filter out microfibers and investing in a top load washing machine.

Unfortunately, the toothpaste is out of the tube, so to speak. With our water stream already irrevocably contaminated, the City ought to look into measures to curb their impact.

From the perspective of this Councilmember, an informational campaign is the City’s best mechanism for addressing this issue.

This item proposes the Community Environmental Advisory Commission compile a list of the most harmful microfiber-related behaviors, consider the most effective methods of distributing this information, and estimate any potential financial cost to the City.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
This item intends to improve the City’s environmental practices.

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