March 8, 2011

Farmingville, NY - Councilwoman Kepert has announced a program to transition from the use of plastic bags to paper bags for the Town of Brookhaven yard waste pickup. "This initiative is a win-win for the environment and the economy. Moving away from plastic bags to paper bags is a proven simple strategy which will save taxpayers thousands of dollars annually, and which will help to protect wildlife while conserving precious resources," stated Councilwoman Kepert.

Every year, 12 million barrels of oil are used to make over 100 billion single-use plastic bags to be used in the United States, costing America $4 billion annually. Plastic bags are non-biodegradable and decompose slowly, releasing toxins into the soil and contaminating groundwater and waterways. Plastic bags make up 90% of the floating litter in the world's oceans and are the cause of death of marine animals and birds that consume pieces of the bags they've mistaken for food. Paper bags, on the other hand, are 100% biodegradable and environmentally friendly. The material decomposes completely and creates cleaner, more marketable compost which will improve the soil of farms and vineyards, resulting in a decrease in the need to use chemical fertilizers.

"Switching to paper leaf bags is a simple action that makes a big difference. This common-sense resolution can be easily implemented by homeowners, save money for the town, and lead to a better, more marketable compost product. A clear win for residents, the town and our environment," stated Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director, Citizens Campaign for the Environment.

The cost of a paper bag is approximately 20 cents per bag greater than a plastic bag and the Town of Brookhaven Department of Waste Management estimates that the net impact of implementing the program to the average homeowner would be approximately $4.50 a year. If the paper bag program is fully implemented prior to the expiration of the Town's current contract with LI Compost in 2014, the Town could, if it opted to, divert up to 3,000 tons of yard waste to another site, potentially realizing an annual savings of $198,000 to $330,000. The savings accrued annually through the implementation of this program could potentially negate the impact of any additional consumer costs related to the purchase of paper bags by way of a decrease in the Brookhaven Refuse and Recycling District Fee. In addition, the towns of Riverhead, North Hempstead, and Southold have already switched to using paper bags for their roadside yard waste pickup, and the transition has saved the towns hundreds of thousands of dollars annually.

The Brookhaven Town Board will spend the next 12 months working toward notifying and educating the public and retail establishments with a set target date for April 1, 2013 for the transition.