

Accessibility Working Group (AWG) Consultation Report
Re: City of Victoria Draft Bylaw Checkout Bag Regulation

Nov. 16, 2017

Introduction:

The concerns raised in this report were provided to Engagement during the public consultation and to Fraser Work at the November 6 AWG meeting.

Firstly, it is important to state that most initiatives of the City, not just infrastructure projects, have the potential to negatively impact people with disabilities. The very nature of disability means that there is impairment in one of life's major functions, and as a result, people with disabilities often find it necessary to do things differently. Thus, anyone seeking to understand how a change in policy may potentially affect people with disabilities, must consider those differences. Gaining such an understanding requires structured analysis, concerted effort and consultation.

1) Transporting Purchases

People with mobility and vision impairments often have to carry their purchases for several blocks and/or rely on public transportation. This has three important implications.

1. If they buy **large items**, they may find it more difficult than other people to transport them, if not provided with a large bag with handles they can hang from a wheelchair or walker, or put in one hand so they can use a cane. If this is not included as an exception to the plastic checkout bag prohibition or if there is not a limit put on the upper cost of outsized bags, the policy will have an adverse impact on this population.

Recommendation:

Consider an additional category in the exceptions, for items too large to fit in standard re-usable bags and which are at risk of being dropped or damaged in transit without a carry-bag (for instance: bulky bedding, small appliances whose packaging does not have handles, décor items).

2. Paper bags, particularly those from grocery stores, **do not have handles and often require two hands to carry them safely**. Some persons with disabilities are unable to carry such a paper bag due to physical challenges or the need to have one or both hands free to manage their mobility device (wheelchair, walker, white cane, guide dog).

Recommendation:

Encourage retailers to offer the option of paper bags with handles at no additional cost.

3. Because of the need for some persons with disabilities to spend more time outdoors, using public transportation, they and their purchases are more subject to the weather than those who drive. Plastic bags protect purchases from the rain in ways that reusable cloth bags do not.

Recommendation:

Encourage retailers to produce/sell reusable water-proof bags which are as effective as plastic bags and which can be carried easily in a pocket or purse.

2) Protection from Allergens

Persons with allergies, sensitivities and auto-immune disorders rely on plastic bags not merely for convenience, but for protection from harmful substances purchased by others. Many of these substances pose no risk to others but can be extremely harmful to persons with allergic disabilities.

There is a concern that the emphasis on reducing plastic will encourage more people not to use film bags for their allergenic and pathogenic items. It can take only miniscule amounts to cause serious reactions.

Recommendation:

That the City encourage the public to continue using plastic film bags for potential pathogens and allergens and the regular washing of reusable bags in its educational materials
That the City confirm that it is not considering a ban on plastic film bags in the future.

3) Plastic Bags Required by the City for Garbage Disposal

Sanitation informs homeowners that they should put messy waste in plastic bags in trash bins. Many citizens, and those with allergies caused by fragrances in particular, use plastic grocery bags as trash bags, as these are unscented. Those sold as garbage bags are scented even if they claim otherwise as the term "unscented" is unregulated. Without the ability to use plastic checkout bags for trash, homeowners will have to buy them. Truly unscented trash bags are not readily available for purchase. Some have been found on-line which cost \$3 each, totaling over \$300 a year (at 2 per week) which is untenable.

Recommendation:

That retailers be encouraged to sell truly unscented bags for garbage purposes. The suppliers of the current plastic grocery bags could be encouraged to use the same method and materials to produce unscented garbage bags to be sold to the public in grocery stores.