



**Committee of the Whole Report
For the Meeting of March 23, 2017**

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** March 14, 2016
From: Fraser Work, Director, Engineering and Public Works
Subject: Single-Use Plastic Retail Bag Reduction Project – Proposed 'Roadmap'

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council direct staff to complete the following activities between April and September 2017:

1. Empower stakeholder groups and volunteers to engage the community on the detriments of plastic bag waste and the benefits of reusable bags;
2. Support the civic engagement process with stakeholder-workshops for business, industry, advocate and resident groups to share their unique perspectives related to future bag reduction regulations;
3. Work with business stakeholders to promote a set of voluntary commitments / pledges to reduce retail bag use, such as detailed reporting of bag usage, improved signage and education, retail bag take-back programs, reusable bag donation centres, and voluntary bag fee/ban actions etc.
4. Develop and implement a design competition for a City of Victoria's sustainable reusable retail bag, with a financial reward of \$2,000 to be funded through the solid waste management budget.
5. Report back to Council in October 2017 prior to the final opportunity for public comment on the issue of single-use plastic retail bag reduction regulations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current volume of single-use plastic bag waste remains a concern for many municipalities. The City is assessing a phased-approach for regulatory action to reduce plastic retail bags, and promote the adoption of more sustainable, reusable retail bags.

Staff have completed a series of meetings with several community stakeholders, including students, advocacy groups, business leaders, industry leaders, regional and provincial government representatives, and other municipalities. These discussions highlight that all stakeholders support increased efforts to reduce bag use, and promote reusable bag alternatives to improve sustainability. Some advocacy groups argue strongly for an immediate ban on plastic retail bags to promote a rapid behaviour shift towards reusable bags. Student advocacy groups and businesses have all expressed their interest in an increased education campaign to raise the awareness of plastic bag issues, prior to any City decision on plastic bag regulation. Many business leaders also support an increased dialogue with Council and shorter term pilot projects, before any plastic retail bag regulatory action is taken.

To promote increased awareness and education on the issue, staff recommend completing a six

month stakeholder-led engagement period and formal open-house sessions, prior to any Council decision. The period would provide opportunity for business, advocacy, industry and resident stakeholder groups to independently engage the City and communicate perspectives and suggestions for meaningful change. This period is also proposed to include a competition for a sustainable, reusable bag design, and allow for the trial of business-led bag-reduction programs. The proposed 'roadmap' would culminate in a public hearing on the issue, in October 2017.

PURPOSE

This report aims to provide Council with a proposed way-ahead for a six month stakeholder-led engagement program to reduce single-use plastic retail bags in the City. This program is intended to culminate in a public hearing and decision from Council in October 2017 to define any regulatory action to reduce single-use plastic retail bags.

BACKGROUND

On November 5, 2015 GPC, Council directed staff to investigate and report on the issues and considerations pertaining to a ban on single use plastic bags, and since passed a motion to include 'phase-in' a ban on single-use plastic bags, as part of the Strategic Plan amendment.

On the 26th of May, 2016, Council directed staff to:

1. "Convene initial discussions / meetings with key business and waste management stakeholders before the end of June 2016, to better understand perspectives and issues related to a voluntary bag levy, at a cost of no less than 10 cents per bag, to incentivise the adoption of sustainable reusable bags, with the recommendation to re-invest those funds to improve business packaging and sustainability programs and future packaging reduction initiatives;
2. Develop and report on a preliminary work-plan and resource assessment, by July 2016, for the future analysis, engagement, and communications of any related initiatives to reduce single-use packaging;
3. Based on those findings, continue development of a more detailed, longer term, work-plan and the associated resource implications, needed to:
 - a. Work with local businesses and retailers in order to promote a voluntary fee for both plastic and paper bags;
 - b. To convene or promote a working group with local and regional stakeholders (CRD, MMBC, Province, neighbouring municipalities, waste managers, local retailers and other key stakeholders) to collaboratively develop strategies and initiatives to improve the sustainable management of single-use retail bags, single-use beverage containers, food packaging, and plastic film products, towards an overall goal of zero-waste, and sustainable, circular-economy model."

Council was also briefed that protection of the natural environment is an area of jurisdiction that is shared with the Province, so a bylaw enacted under this authority would require ministerial approval, which potentially limits Council's regulatory power; however, municipalities have the power to regulate undesirable business practice, provided that Council is satisfied that the practice has negative local impacts.

Since June 2016, staff have met with a series of business and key community stakeholders to better understand their perspectives and issues related to plastic bag reduction programs, and which regulatory options they believe will be most successful in the City.

ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

Problem Definition

The volume of single use plastic bags entering the waste stream and escaping collection systems is a growing concern for cities, and should be addressed by improved waste management schemes and more sustainable consumer behaviour. The wholesale adoption of sustainable, re-usable retail bags is considered an ideal outcome, if the bags are fabricated, used and recycled in the manner that minimizes environmental and social impacts. Introducing regulations to promote the reduction of single-use plastics is an effort to change consumer behaviour to reduce single-use packaging and its impacts on landfills and the surrounding environment.

Council has communicated their strategic priority for a phased approach to regulate single-use plastic retail bags. In previous meetings, staff have highlighted that regulating plastic bags should be accompanied with consistent and parallel regulations for all single-use bag types. It should be noted that single use plastic retail bags out-perform paper bags in most life cycle impact areas, except when they are discarded as litter, which can harm the natural land and ocean environments. Plastic bag litter may persist for several decades may result in ecosystem decline and can harm wildlife.

Many cities worldwide have successfully reduced plastic bag use through levies or outright bans. Several cities have banned thin, single-use plastic bags, and introduced ordinances that stipulate thicker plastic retail bags designed for reuse more than 11 times. Cloth bags are usually designed for over 100 uses. All retailers and consumers should shift to reusable bag types that avoid negative social or environmental impacts imposed by their chemical makeup, resource impacts, and recyclability. Increased efforts are necessary to ensure that the overall life cycle impacts of bag alternatives are minimized and that the most sustainable bag alternatives are privileged by any new bag reduction initiatives / policies.

Summary of Impacts and Considerations from the May 2016 COTW Report

Each analysis of bag alternatives highlights that the key to reducing the environmental impacts of ANY bag type is to reuse it as many times as possible. The following important summary points¹ pertain to life cycle impacts of the various bag types:

- There is no ideal carrier bag option. All bag types have advantages and disadvantages, but some bag types pose more significant impacts than others.
- Recycled content in any bag-type greatly improves its environmental performance;
- Overall plastic bag environmental impacts are dominated by the resource-use phase (ie. fossil fuel extraction), production phases and end-of-life scenario.
- Plastic bags pose more of a litter problem, due to their mobility (ie. subjected to wind and water forces, more so than other bags).
- Free, lightweight high density polyethylene (HDPE) bags are more likely to be littered than any reusable bag.
- Even paper bags, made from 100% recycled materials, may pose more environmental impacts than plastic bags, in all categories except litter², due to pulp production energy use, its generation of solid waste, and acid-slurry, water pollution impacts.

Community outreach and engagement

¹ European Commission. (2011). Assessment of impact of options to reduce the use of single use plastic carrier bags. 12 Sep 2011. Bio Intelligence Service.

² This particular Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) assumes a 50% recycling rate of the paper bags.

Since the last presentation on this subject staff have progressed discussions with several stakeholders in the City, including Surfrider Foundation, school children (Glen Lyon Norfolk School, View Royal Elementary), provincial, private, and CRD regional waste management representatives, sustainability consultants (Synergy), business association (DVBA), individual business representatives, City of San Francisco environmental managers, and nearby municipalities. Perspectives and views vary across the spectrum of support for bag levies or ban initiatives, but all stakeholders agree that reusable bags are the preferred alternative, and should be sustainably designed and managed.

The following key themes dominate all the discussions across various stakeholder groups:

- **Wasteful Practices:** The wasteful practices due to single-use packaging and the desire for more sustainable behaviour is a central and shared theme across all stakeholders.
- **Education and Awareness:** The requirement to engage with multiple business and stakeholders on the ill-effects of single use plastic retail bags and litter impacts.
- **Reusable Bags and Convenience:** The preference for reusable bags, and the compromises of each bag alternative, and the convenience offered by single-use bags.
- **Regulatory Authority:** Local governments' power and constraints to regulate unsustainable business practices and/or environmental impact/degradation.
- **'Regionality':** A bag regulation in the City (only) may be difficult to manage for large regional, national or international businesses. The constraints for regional or larger retailers should be better understood and considered prior to any regulation.
- **Voluntary Action, Levy or Ban:** Discussions as to the most effective way to reduce the number of single-use plastic retail bags continue. Advocacy groups would like to move quickly towards regulation that greatly reduces bag waste, while others prefer a phased approach commencing with more targeted engagement.
- **Business Leadership:** Businesses understand their impacts and their position as leaders in corporate social and environmental responsibility, and all groups look to them as one source for positive change and improved sustainability.

Business Managers and Owners

The initial meeting with business representatives was held on 28 June 2016, where staff discussed a potential plastic bag levy and bans with representatives from The Bay Centre, Capital Iron, Canadian Tire, Victoria Chamber of Commerce and DVBA.

The Chamber's 6 July 2016 newsletter summarizes some key views expressed during that meeting, related to any potential bans or levies of plastic retail bags:

"Preliminary feedback includes:

- *Victoria-only ban/levy creates uneven playing field within Greater Victoria,*
- *levy downloads even more costs on businesses, especially during implementation - Victoria does not need more disincentives to do business downtown, and*
- *businesses are already doing much in regards to solid waste management/diversion, incentives and support would accelerate efforts to help reduce overall solid waste - including reduction of single use packaging."*

Several meetings with business leaders have taken place, which has revealed their interest in continued outreach and consideration on the plastic bag issue. They have also expressed their desire to develop pilot projects to determine what actions may be most effective to reduce usage rates, while still balancing other important business needs. Many business agencies are motivated to partner with the City and take action to promote bag reduction programs.

Environmental Advocacy Groups

The local Surfrider Foundation chapter is petitioning strongly for a ban of plastic retail bags, which aligns with their international corporate program to minimize plastic ocean waste. Surfrider remains poised to work with all City stakeholder groups to educate, inform, and collaborate on schemes to minimize ocean plastics.

Glen Lyon Norfolk School continues to reach out to the City and surrounding municipalities in hopes that they consider progressively stringent regulation of plastic bags, primarily to promote ocean health and sustainability. The students have requested support from the City to complete a targeted engagement over several months, to meet with local retailers on the issue, and build awareness in the community to support reduced single use plastic's use. The students continue to gain support for increased efforts to reduce plastic bag waste.

CRD and Provincial Programs

Both the CRD and the Province support efforts to reduce single-use packaging waste and any efforts to reduce wasteful behavior, but have not yet identified any intent to increase regulations associated with single use plastic bags. The Province has approved the Multi-Materials BC (MMBC) Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program for packaging and printed paper (PPP), which requires industry to improve take-back of PPP and minimize waste to landfill. Their program has received some criticism for not achieving more meaningful reduction of plastic film waste, and some would argue that bolder action is required. The Province is committed to long term improvement and will continue to monitor program performance to ensure it meets the pollution prevention objectives in the Recycling Regulation. In correspondence with staff from the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development, the Province's perspective on bag reduction programs has been stated as follows:

“Section 8(3)(j) of the Community Charter allows municipalities to enact bylaws for the protection of the natural environment. Municipalities could potentially enact a bylaw to ban the use of plastic shopping bags through this authority - it would be subject to approval from the Minister of Environment as protection of the natural environment is an area of concurrent provincial and municipal jurisdiction as directed under Section 9(3)(c) of the Community Charter. Alternatively, a regional solid waste management plan may include strategies to encourage businesses to implement incentives (e.g., fee for plastic bags at retail outlets).

Bylaws banning the sale/use of plastic bags should be considered a means of last resort, as most local government recycling programs (through MMBC depots) now include film plastics and have helped reduce the environmental impacts of plastic bag waste. This is also due to society in general becoming more aware and responsive to the negative impacts of plastic bags, and the local end-of-life management options available.”

Voluntary Retail Store Actions to Reduce Single Use Plastic Bags (Greater Victoria)

Save On Foods has recently introduced a bag levy of five cents for all plastic carrier bags, and a 10 cent charge for paper bags. Thrifty Foods offers a three cent rebate for those who bring their own carrier bags. Both Whole Foods (Saanich) and Thrifty Foods currently stock only paper check out bags (note: Thrifty's does not use post-consumer recycled paper). Whole Foods also has a Nickels for Non-Profits program where five cents is donated to charity each time a consumer brings their own bag. In Whistler, BC, the IGA and Nesters Market have voluntarily imposed five cent fees for their checkout plastic bags, as has been the case with Walmart stores across North America. At Hillside Mall, customers are invited to return their single use plastic bags through a “Bank a Bag” program. For each bag returned, they donate five cents to World Fisheries Trust, up to \$1,500 per

year. In addition to this program, Hillside Mall's Sea Rangers Kids Club completes two to three beach clean ups each year to remove plastic bags and other waste from the ocean.

Neighbouring Municipalities

Recent discussions with neighbouring municipalities suggest that many Greater Victoria and island municipalities are reviewing the case of single-use retail bag reduction programs, and remain interested in what actions BC municipalities' are prepared to take on this issue.

Summary

In all cases, stakeholders agree that bag-reduction programs should be supported and that re-usable retail bags are the preferred sustainable alternative. Stakeholders agree that increased education and awareness is required now, and all agree that businesses taking leadership to reduce bag use is a key component of success. Most stakeholders expressed their desire to be part of ongoing discussions and programs related to any City decision on regulatory action. In all cases, stakeholder groups are prepared to act in support of these initiatives and have requested some direction and timelines to help shape any actions and next-steps. Parties have expressed their interest in pilot programs to reduce bag use, information sharing, and the opportunity to be engaged by Council prior to any upcoming City decision.

OPTIONS AND IMPACTS

All stakeholders agree that more education, awareness and collaboration is required on this issue. While some advocacy groups would like a decision to ban immediately, a number of groups have expressed cautions for rushing any ban, and instead proposed additional engagement before any regulatory action is taken. Council has also previously suggested that the City draw on the expertise and resources of local advocacy groups to raise awareness in the community about the benefits of increased regulation of plastic retail bags. Additional engagement could provide an important opportunity for generating more positive support for bag reduction initiatives and support for an overall reduction in single-use packaging.

Staff have developed a proposed strategy that relies on citizen resources to promote awareness and education, and support the discussion through a series of open-house events to generate discussion and promote an understanding of all perspectives, before any Council decision.

Option 1: Proposed Stakeholder Led Engagement and Awareness Campaign (recommended). A proposed program to address the requirements for additional engagement with and between stakeholder groups, relying on stakeholder resources, is outlined as follows:

1. **Timeline:**
 - a. Citizen Led Engagement Period: April – September 2017
 - b. Final Open House: October 2017.
2. **Planning Elements:**
 - a. City Website and Ongoing Communications Plan: Plastic Bag FAQs, summary of activity, progress, and important process/event information.
 - b. Education and Awareness Campaign: Support the Glen Lyon Norfolk School students and other volunteer groups to develop and implement an education campaign throughout the community.
 - c. Stakeholder Workshops: Dedicated workshops for key stakeholder groups to engage with Council, staff and the public on their particular perspectives on this issue. Stakeholder groups include business leaders; advocacy groups, residents (including youth groups); and industry representatives.

- d. City Support to Stakeholder Events: provide communications support to any stakeholder-organized event on this subject.
- e. Business Pledges: Cooperate with and support key businesses who would like to participate in one or more of the following bag reduction program elements, or other strategies to reduce retail bag use:
 - i. Voluntary reporting on bag use volumes;
 - ii. Implementing increased signage / notices regarding retail bag usage;
 - iii. Plastic bag take-back programs;
 - iv. Voluntary bag-fee or 'bag-free' pledges;
 - v. Reusable bag donation centre for clean, free bags for shoppers.
- f. Reusable Bag Design Competition - \$2000 Award: Develop a competition across all City stakeholders to promote the design and production of the most sustainable and inspiring reusable bag for the City of Victoria, to be awarded by Mayor and Council on the evening of the final open-house, and funded through the solid waste management budget.
- g. Staff Report with considerations, summary and recommendations.
- h. Final Open House: Final public engagement prior to any decision related to plastic-bag regulatory action.

Option 2: Take No Further Action: This option does not comply with expressed Council direction.

Option 3: Immediate Ban (a) or Levy (b): An immediate ban or levy would result in a reduction of single-use retail bags, but may be viewed as premature, prior to adequate communication with many stakeholders. The administrative design of a ban or levy has not yet been defined, and would have to be progressed. The City could contract services to expedite the necessary administrative vehicles, but funding for such initiatives has not yet been identified. The costs and time to execute the necessary administration would depend on the regulatory direction (ban, levy or tax details), which has yet to be defined.

Option 4: Staff Led Engagement Program: Staff do not currently have the resources to lead a comprehensive engagement and education/awareness program on this topic, without delaying other work committed as part of the 2017 financial plan. With further direction from Council, staff could assess the various projects that would have to be delayed in order to progress a more comprehensive bag-reduction program in 2017.

CONSISTENCY WITH CITY STRATEGIES

Official Community Plan

Reduction of waste, litter and marine debris are consistent with the OCP and the development of vibrant, healthy communities.

2015-2018 Strategic Plan

This initiative is a pathway to achieve Objective 11 of the Strategic Plan.

This program supports the reduction of consumer waste and actions to incentivise improved sustainable behaviours, working with businesses to safeguard economic vitality, and builds community wellness, while stewarding the City's waterways.

2017-2021 Financial Plan


Resources required to support the recommended program can be completed within the current financial plan. Resource implications for any alternative way ahead would have to be assessed across departments and reported back to Council.

The proposed \$2,000 financial reward for the reusable bag competition would be funded through the solid waste management budget, or augmented by any external contributions by any partnering agency.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will convene an initial planning/coordination meeting with key stakeholder representatives to review and discuss the program, and how to best complete engagement, activities and support over the coming months. Staff will keep Council advised as to program plans, schedule, event information, progress updates, engagement and media information.

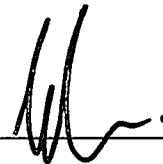
Respectfully submitted,



Fraser Work, Director
Engineering and Public Works

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager: _____

Date: _____



March 16, 2017

Attachments:

Previous COTW Report (May 26, 2016): Single-Use Plastic Retail Bags – Waste Management Review