

## Single Use Plastic Retail Bags – Reduction Strategy Update

Committee of the Whole meeting – Thursday 22 Mar, 2017



## Purpose

- 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 meeting 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
- On February 4, 2016, Council passed a motion to include introducing a ban on single-use plastic bags, as part of the 2016 Strategic Plan amendment.
- On the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, 2016, Council directed staff to:
  - Convene initial discussions / meetings with key business and waste management
  - Develop and report on a preliminary work-plan and resource assessment
  - Continue development of a more detailed, longer term, work-plan and the associated resource implications



## Single Use Plastic Bags – Review

- **Problem:** The need to reduce the volume of single use plastic retail bags
  - Improve wasteful consumer habits
  - reduce landfill and persistent plastic bag litter
- **Single-Use Plastic Retail Bags:**
  - Seen as a symbol of unchecked, wasteful consumer habits
  - Estimated 1-2% of the total landfill waste stream,
  - Per-capita usage rates estimated at 200 bags,
- **Reusable bags are the ideal solution if used a “sufficient” number of times**
  - Any reusable bag should be made from recycled materials, with minimal environmental impact, and then recycled after many re-uses.
    - Reusable bags should be designed for >100 uses



## Life Cycle Assessments

### Overall Conclusions

- Environmental impacts depend on production process/energy, materials, numbers of re-uses and end-of-life scenario
- Some bag types pose more significant impacts than others
  - Ex. Paper vs HDPE = 14x water pollution, 3x solid waste, 3x GHG
- Plastic bags pose more of a litter problem
- Free, lightweight HDPE bags are more likely to be littered than any reusable bag.
- Paper bags may pose more environmental impacts than plastic bags, in all categories except litter,
  - Due to pulp process energy use, generation of solid waste, and acid-slurry, water pollution impacts.
- **A reusable bag, used a "sufficient" number of times, poses the least environmental impact.**



## Stakeholder Engagement

- Several meetings with business, advocacy, resident, government and industry reps
- **Key / Shared Themes:**
  - **Wasteful Practices:** the desire for more sustainable behaviour
  - **Education and Awareness:** Outstanding requirement to continue the engagement on the ill-effects of single-use plastic retail bags and litter impacts
  - **Reusable Bags and Convenience:** The preference for reusable bags and providing convenience
  - **Regulatory Authority:** Local governments' power and constraints to regulate unsustainable business practices and/or environmental impact/degradation.
  - **'Regionality'**
  - **Voluntary Action, Levy or Ban:** 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:** all groups look to them as one source for positive change and improved sustainability.
- **Key Local Activity in this Space**
  - Save-On moved to bag levy
  - Thrifty's paper-only with 3cent incentive
  - Whole Foods (regional player)
  - Hillside Mall – Bank a Bag (5 cents to World Fisheries Trust)
  - The Bay Centre – Bag-less program in Food Court in 2009 (avoiding 49,000 bags annually)



## Recommendations

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

- Empower stakeholder groups and volunteers to engage the community on the detriments of plastic bag waste and the benefits of reusable bags;
- 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;
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

