

# Single-Use Checkout Bags Reduction Program – Regulation Strategy

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Committee of the Whole meeting – Thursday October 26 ,2017



# Purpose

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- to provide Council with a **proposed regulatory framework and implementation plan** for single-use checkout bags, which includes a ban on the City's single-use plastic checkout bags.

# Background

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- November 5, 2015 - Council directed staff to investigate and report on the issues and considerations pertaining to a ban on single use plastic bags, and
- 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.
- May 26, 2016, Council directed staff to engage with business, develop work plan
- March 23, 2017, Council passed a series of motions, to support an increased level of engagement and dialogue across the community on the issues and considerations related to any program to regulate and reduce single-use plastic bags. Council motions were as follows:
  - 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.

# The Problem



- **Problem: too many plastic bags in landfills and as litter**
- **Ideal Outcome:**
  - **A wholesale shift to reusable bags**
    - **made and managed sustainably, reused well over 100 times**
- **Challenge:**
  - Avoid unintended consequences
    - ie. rebound to excessive use of paper, reusable bags
- **Options on HOW to get there:**
  - **Education and Awareness** alone, may not deliver the behaviour shift and speed desired
  - **Bag fees** can be very effective
    - for some, do not address the wider implications of plastic waste and throw-away consumerism
  - **Bag bans** can also deliver big reductions
    - but are disruptive and can risk other unintended consequences



# Single-Use Plastic Bags

- **A symbol of unchecked, wasteful habits**
- **Why so popular?**
  - Free, lightweight, high strength-to-weight ratio, inexpensive, convenient, durable and watertight.
- **But....**
  - Durability = persist for more than a century,
    - undesirable aesthetic, environmental, economic and operational impacts.
  - Uses non-renewable resources (normally natural gas)
  - Pose environmental impacts over their lifecycle
- **Engineering Performance Check**
  - = Fail...due to poor design for end-of-life
- **Facts:**
  - Estimated 1-2% of the total landfill waste stream,
  - Per-capita usage rates estimated at 200 bags,
  - Equates to 17 million annual bags by City residents
  - Much more within the City!
- **For many, a ban represents a symbol of change, and transition to a more sustainable future**

Photo: [www.sbs.com.au](http://www.sbs.com.au)

# Bag Types: Different Benefits and Impacts

## SINGLE USE



HDPE  
(conventional  
Bag)



PAPER



Biodegradable/  
Compostable  
etc



## REUSABLE

LDPE  
(glossy, sturdier  
Bag)



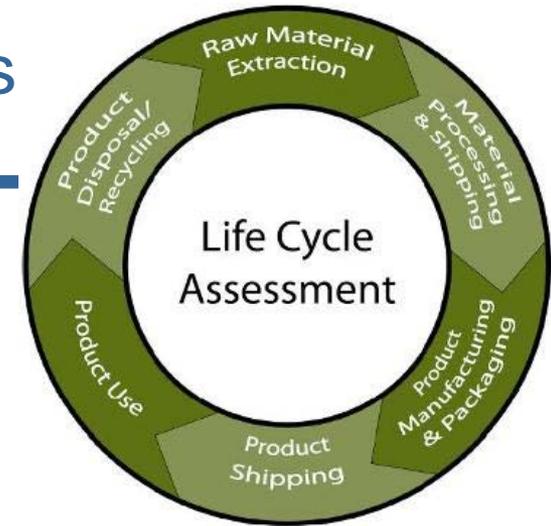
NWPP  
(Synthetic Fabric)



Cotton  
(Natural Fabric)



Other/Various



### • Overall Conclusions from Multiple Studies

- All bag types pose negative impacts
- Recycled content matters!
- Plastic bags pose more of a litter problem
- Biodegradable / compostable bags = trouble
- Even paper bags pose larger environmental impacts than plastic bags, in all categories except litter.

- Break Even Point: 1 HDPE GHG=
  - Paper used 3 times
  - LDPE 4 times
  - NWPP 11 times
  - Cotton Bag 131 times

# Stakeholder Engagement History (2017)

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- Group, individual stakeholder meetings, business meetings, one-on-one, and public meetings
  - Initial kick-off meeting with stakeholder leadership group (retailers, advocates, government, industry and business) – May 15, 2017
  - “Bag it” – Film Screening, July 5, 2017
  - Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce – Retailers Round Table: July 12, 2017
  - Advocate Group Stakeholder Meeting – September 11, 2017
  - Retailer Group Stakeholder Meeting – September 20, 2017
  - Industry / Government Stakeholder Meeting – October 4, 2017
  - City and Region wide Surfrider beach cleanup – October 15, 2017
  - City Public Meeting: October 18, 2017
  - Numerous CRD, Provincial and Recycle BC meetings, and discussions with neighbouring municipalities; and
  - Individual meetings with business owners and other stakeholders.

# Stakeholder Engagement (All Agree)

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Overall, all stakeholders agree on several key points, as follows:

- The current volume of single use plastic checkout bags reaching landfill or being littered is a concern;
- Reusable bags used many times are the best bag alternative;
- A shift to excessive paper or reusable bag consumption would be worse for the environment, unless properly managed;
- A regional regulatory standard for single-use plastic bags is the preferred outcome to avoid confusion and help support the change to reusable bags.
- Communications and awareness building is critical to ensure a successful and smooth transition to a reusable bag standard.



# Stakeholder Engagement (Retailers)

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The following key points summarize the feedback from businesses, much of which is opposed to an outright ban on single-use plastic bags:

- Should be **phased-in**, preferably over a year;
- A **mandatory bag fee is considered preferable** to an outright ban;
- Confusion exists as to the 'green credentials' of bio-based / biodegradable, compostable bags;
- **Impact of charging clients**
- Transition **is disruptive and can be costly**;
- **Surplus bags** represent a cost and burden to the retailer;
- A mandatory **ban disrespects the ongoing, voluntary and meaningful efforts** by many retailers' continuing investment in sustainability programs

# Stakeholder Engagement (Industry/Govt)

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Plastics industry and government program representatives agree with many of the points above, and have the following additional views:

- RecycleBC and industry collaboration continue to deliver exemplary programs, and can help make improvements,
- A ban **erodes the collaboration** and partnering required to make broad sustainability improvements;
- **Industry and business should be given more time** to develop alternative solutions to a ban;
- There are **higher priority waste materials that require attention** and investment, which are more damaging than plastic bags;
- All plastic bags can be diverted **if customers chose to recycle at available depot/stations.**



# Stakeholder Engagement (Advocates)

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Retailers who support a bag ban stated these key views:

- Many **customers were inspired** by the shop's sustainable bag practices, which aligned with the stewardship values of the community;
- **Few customers expressed negative views** when surprised to find no plastic bag options at the checkout counter;
- A voluntary bag ban created **support for more sustainable business** practice.

Advocates from the community and the region offer the following key views:

- A ban on single-use plastic bags **is required now** to help shift community and business quickly to a more sustainable future;
- **Education and awareness are key** requirements to ensure a smooth transition, and they are willing to support City engagement efforts;
- Unintended consequences can be avoided if business and community **work hard to adopt this new habit** of using reusable bags and by placing an adequate fee on paper bags.

# Checkout Bags - Regulation Requirement

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- The free provision of single-use materials represents a systemic business/consumer transaction that privileges short-term convenience over long term sustainability.
- The single-use plastic bag is a powerful example of “throw away consumerism”
- Overuse of plastic checkout bags in our community is unsustainable over the long term and has been identified by many in the public to be inconsistent with the values of Victorians.
  - Causing materials to quickly become waste after only one or few uses.
  - Wasteful and prevalent cultural norms that are consuming scarce resources in a manner that is not economically or socially sustainable.
- Regulatory intervention is needed now to curb this common business/customer transaction that creates avoidable waste and its associated municipal costs.
- **Only a wholesale shift to sustainable, reusable bags will reduce our community’s waste, landfill, pollution and litter risks from checkout bags.**



# Checkout Bag Regulation Bylaw (Draft)

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Bylaw bans businesses from single use plastic checkout bags effective July 1, 2018 and:

- Provides a **list of plastic bags considered exempt** from the ban (eg. meat/veg bulk bags, newspaper, dry cleaning bags etc)
- **Defines reusable** bag performance specification to withstand 125 uses;
- **Avoids policy rebound to excessive paper bags** use
  - escalating price on paper bags commencing with an initial price of no-less than 12 cents in the first year, followed by 25 cents after 1 year (2019)
- **Avoids policy rebound to excessive reusable bags** by setting an appropriate minimum price for reusable bags (\$2 dollars)
- **Avoids Biodegradable** or BioBased Bags through inclusion in the bylaw restrictions;
- **Avoids heavy-weight plastic bags:** by including heavier gauge LDPE bags in the bylaw restrictions;
- Enables free provision of bags only if they are previously used,



# Checkout Bag Regulation Communications / Roll Out Strategy

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## Communications and Management Strategy

- Build consumer and business education and awareness FIRST
  - Via Partnering,
  - Using best-practice and lessons learned from other municipalities;
  - Focus on tourism as well
- Define ideal sustainable reusable bag design specifications to support retailer procurement decisions
- Advocate up and across
- Partner and collaborate to address the City's single-use materials waste issues
- Avoid excessive cotton bag adoption through awareness / education information;
- Avoid retailer bag surplus waste / sunk costs through proper planning, recycling and awareness;
- Review, improve and report.



# Managing the Burden – Engineered Waste Mgmt

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# Managing the Burden – Lay Waste

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# Managing the Burden – Lost Opportunity

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# Managing the Burden – Recover, Steward and Reintroduce as Nutrients



# Recommendations

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## **Council direct staff to:**

1. Engage with stakeholders on the draft Checkout Bag Regulation Bylaw and report back to Committee of the Whole on December 14, 2017 with the following information:
  - a) A summary of bylaw key points/issues from business and community stakeholders,
  - b) Any recommended changes to the bylaw; and
  - c) Communication, engagement and enforcement considerations and plan, including resource implications and recommendations.
2. Measure and report on the performance of the bag regulation program after one year in effect, using waste audits and retailer bag sales data, wherever possible, and analyze and review the complete program with improvement recommendations;
3. Include the development of a Single-Use Materials Management Plan in the ongoing development of the City's Sustainable Waste Management Strategy.
4. Work with the Province, RecycleBC and other institutions to develop a performance specification for the preferred sustainable reusable bag in order to help business and industry choose amongst options, and also influence bag design sustainability standards.

# Recommendations (cont'd)

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## **That Council:**

2. Request the Mayor to write letters to each of the following key stakeholders to support regional consistency and a wide, renewed focus on waste avoidance programs:
  - a) To the CRD, and Provincial governments before December 2017 requesting support for the City's approach to single-use checkout bag regulations and the overall increased investment in innovative strategies with a focus on waste-prevention, and the required stewardship programs to drastically reduce single-use materials, including plastic bags;
  - b) To major food producers before January 2018, requesting increased efforts in the development and implementation of improved use/application of recyclable, sustainable and eco-benign packaging for food and household items; and
  - c) To the CRD and neighbouring municipalities by the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2017 requesting feedback and/or support for the City's single-use checkout bylaw principles and rules.

# Single-Use Checkout Bag Reduction Program

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## Bring Your Own Bag

Eco-Friendly reusable bags are best!

