



Supporting businesses to reduce single-use items

Waste and Recycling Services Report Back: What we Heard

May 2023

Project overview

The City of Calgary's Waste & Recycling Services (WRS) developed a Single-Use Items Reduction Strategy that includes both bylaws and voluntary programs focused on reducing single-use items commonly provided by businesses to their customers. The aim of the strategy is to create a shift away from a single-use mindset and encourage waste reduction habits.

The project team wanted to gain a better understanding of the challenges businesses may have in complying with the Single-Use Items Charter Bylaw and what resources they might need from The City. The project team was particularly interested in hearing from retailers and food establishments that use shopping bags and/or foodware accessories for in-store, online, takeout or delivery orders.

Engagement overview

Planned engagement included two components: an online survey hosted on The City's Engage Portal; and a series of workshops for different types of businesses.

Despite advertising efforts both from The City and in partnership with The Calgary Chamber of Commerce, overall interest from the business community was low.

The City advertised four business workshops for this project: two for small businesses, including one hosted in partnership with The Calgary Chamber of Commerce; one for large retailers; and one for restaurant industry businesses. These workshops were cancelled due to low registration numbers. The project team offered to meet individually with everyone who had registered, in addition to adding an option on the Engage Portal for businesses to email the project team directly to set up a meeting. These meetings are ongoing.

The online survey was open from January 25 to February 17, 2023. In total, we received only 19 responses to the survey.

Meetings with businesses included similar questions to the online survey and provided an opportunity for participants to ask clarifying questions about both the City bylaws and Federal measures

What we asked

The online survey and meetings with businesses included the following questions.

Shopping Bags

- What questions and/or concerns do you have about the Bylaw on shopping bags?
- What issues do you anticipate for your organization or staff?
- What issues do you anticipate for your customers?



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Foodware Accessories

- What questions and/or concerns do you have about the Bylaw on foodware accessories?
- What issues do you anticipate for you customers?

Information and Tools for Businesses

- We would like to understand what types of materials you would be most likely to use. Please rate each item on a 7-point scale where 1 means definitely would not use and 7 means definitely would use.
 - Bylaw Guide
 - Suggested alternatives guide
 - Shopping bag fee poster
 - Bring your own bag poster
 - Foodware accessories by request poster
 - Bring your own cup poster
 - Shopping bag FAOs
 - Foodware accessories FAOs
 - Shopping bag fee tent card
 - Bring your own bag tent card
 - Foodware accessories – ask if you need tent card
 - Bring your own cup tent card
- Are there tools not listed above that would be useful for your business?
- Would you use these types of materials if they were available in –
 - English
 - Simplified Chinese
 - Traditional Chinese
 - Punjabi
 - Tagalog
 - Other
- If you wanted to use any of these materials and they were available for download on calgary.ca, would that meet your needs?
- What are the best ways to inform you that these materials are available?
 - City of Calgary website
 - Email / Newsletter
 - Meetings / Conferences
 - Advertisements
 - Other
- From the previous question, which email or newsletter from the City of Calgary?
- From the previous question, which email or newsletter from an industry organization?
- From the previous question, which meetings or questions?



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What we heard

Online survey

Most of the input received pertained to the Federal plastics ban rather than the City bylaw and were not supportive. Comments specific to The City's Single-use Items Charter Bylaw were mixed but did raise a few concerns. The most common issues included the initiative not being seen as a priority for The City or the environment, cost, and difficulties for customer service.

According to respondents, the most useful tools and resources that The City could provide to business were the Bylaw Guide and Suggested Alternatives Guide. Respondents were equally split on whether it would be useful to offer these materials for download on The City website.

Meetings with businesses

The project team met with both a fast-food franchise owner and representative of the Calgary Hotels Association during the engagement period. Both meetings included a number of questions from participants regarding the differences between the Federal ban and City bylaw. In general, participants had positive feedback regarding The City bylaw, especially in comparison to other Canadian jurisdictions.

The fast-food franchise owner had many suggestions for communications regarding the bylaw, including: having education resources for workers and customers available online; providing businesses with QR codes to direct staff and customers to these websites; and including video descriptions to help address literacy concerns and accommodate people with different learning styles. The main issue identified by this participant was with the number of bags required for delivery orders, and that the customer would not have sufficient context to request fewer bags during this type of purchase. In addition, this participant outlined issues with reusable cups, as well as problems encountered with similar bylaws in other jurisdictions.

The Calgary Hotel Association identified foodware used for room service as the main area of impact from The City bylaw; however, many hotels are moving back to reusable items for these purposes.

Further information

For a detailed summary of the online input that was provided, please see the [Summary of Input](#) section.

For a verbatim listing of all the online input that was provided, please see the [Verbatim Responses](#) section.

Next steps

The project team will take the information provided during engagement to help inform the implementation of The City bylaw, as well as follow-up conversations with businesses and business organizations. Future work on education resources will consider the feedback provided during engagement.



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Summary of Input

The following tables provide a summary of themes from the responses to our online survey. In total, we received 19 responses to our survey.

What questions and/or concerns do you have about the Bylaw on shopping bags? (17 responses)

Theme	Description
Related to Federal ban	
Not a priority	Several respondents felt this should not be a priority for The City of Calgary, either stating that single-use items are a Federal issue, or that the justifications for the bylaw, either environmental or financial, are questionable.
In favor of plastic bags	Some respondents pointed out scenarios in which plastic bags serve a specific purpose, and for which they should not be banned. Note: this ban is a Federal issue, and does not relate to The City's bylaw.
Costs too high	Some respondents shared concerns regarding costs, both to their business from this project, as well as to customers, with the latter impacting the ability to make a sale. Note: these comments relate to the Federal plastics ban.

What issues do you anticipate for your organization or staff? (14 responses)

Theme	Description
Related to Federal ban	
Cost	Respondents had several concerns regarding cost, including the cost of businesses sourcing the right types of bags, general costs to businesses, and customers assuming businesses would be responsible for paying fees related to reusable bags.
Dissatisfaction	Some respondents anticipated negative interactions between their staff and customers, particularly regarding products that they feel are better protected by a plastic bag, such as meat products. Note: All comments related to plastic bags pertain to the Federal plastics ban, especially those related to plastic bags for meat products.
Not useful	Some respondents expressed that banning plastic bags was not useful financially or environmentally and that the uniform size of disposable bags helps with efficient business operations. Note: Any comments related to plastic bags pertained to the Federal plastics ban.

What issues do you anticipate for your customers? (16 responses)

Theme	Description
Related to City bylaw	
Cost	Some respondents had general concerns regarding costs associated with the bylaw.



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What questions and/or concerns do you have about the Bylaw on foodware accessories? (12 responses)

Theme	Description
Related to City bylaw	
Reduced service	One respondent said that this will slow down customer service, sharing that people expect these materials as part of their food order. They foresee customers needing to return or cut in line to request them.
Dissatisfaction	One respondent pointed out that the convenience of foodware accessories with food orders is what fuels the takeout industry.
Not a priority	Some respondents said that this bylaw should not be a priority for The City, either related to reducing waste or generally amongst other challenges faced by Calgarians.

What issues do you anticipate for you customers? (10 responses)

Theme	Description
Related to City bylaw	
Reduced service	Some respondents anticipated that customers will experience slower service, inconvenience, or anger because of the bylaw on foodware accessories.
Reduced business	One respondent felt the measures will lower their sales of takeout food.

Are there tools not listed above that would be useful for your business? (11 responses)

Theme	Description
No suggestions	No respondents suggested other specific tools that would be useful.

What other options for accessing these materials would better meet your needs? (4 responses)

Theme	Description
Simple guide	One respondent felt a simple guide for businesses would be most appropriate.
City to print	One respondent felt that The City should print any materials for businesses.



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Resources / Tools - responses

Respondents were asked to rate each of the following items on a 7-point scale where 1 means definitely would not use and 7 means definitely would use.

Resource / Tool	Rating							Total responses
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bylaw Guide	2	1	0	2	1	0	5	7
Suggested Alternative Guide	3	1	0	0	2	0	5	11
Shopping bag fee poster	3	2	0	1	0	1	5	12
Bring your own bag poster	5	1	1	1	0	0	3	11
Foodware accessories by request poster	5	1	1	1	0	1	2	11
Bring your own cup poster	9	1	0	0	0	0	0	10
Shopping bags FAQs	5	0	1	1	0	1	2	10
Foodware accessories FAQs	5	0	1	1	0	1	2	10
Bring your own bag tent card	5	1	1	1	0	0	1	9
Foodware accessories – ask if you need tent card	5	1	0	1	0	0	3	10
Bring your own cup tent card	5	2	0	1	0	0	1	10

If you wanted to use any of these materials and they were available for download on calgary.ca, would that meet your needs? (16 respondents)

Options	Count
Yes	8
No	8



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What are the best ways to inform you that these materials are available? (10 respondents)

Options	Count
Calgary.ca	7
Email / Newsletter	2
Industry / Organization Newsletter	1
Meetings / Conferences	0
Advertisements	3
Other	2

Verbatim Comments

Verbatim comments presented here include all feedback, suggestions, comments and messages that were collected online and in-person through the engagement described in this report. All input has been reviewed and provided to Project Teams to be considered in decision making for the project.

Any personal identifying information has been removed from the verbatim comments presented here. Comments or portions of comments that contain profanity, or that are not in compliance with the [City's Respectful Workplace Policy](#) or [Online Tool Moderation Practice](#), have also been removed from participant submissions.

Wherever possible the remainder of the submissions remains. No other edits to the feedback have been made, and the verbatim comments are as received. As a result, some of the content in this verbatim record may still be considered offensive or distasteful to some readers.

What questions and/or concerns do you have about the Bylaw on shopping bags?

"the minimum fee charged is not high enough.

Why are pharmacist + loose bulk items exempted? paper bag work well for them

Paper shopping bags should contain a higher recycled content AND be recyclable /biodegradable in Calgary facilities or the City should have proper compost / recycling facilities"

It will bring more cost to my business

The benefits of this initiative, from a scientific perspective, are questionable. Plastics used and disposed of in Calgary do not affect oceans, which is where most of the concerns around plastic waste relate to. Do we really understand how much less landfill space will be taken up by this measure?

Plastic bags are useful.



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There are times when plastic bags protect against contamination. An example would be meat from the grocery store. It is not okay to have cross contamination with other grocery items.

What about pet products made of animal products that are best carried in plastic bags? Items like bull sticks & beef tendons that are greasy.

I am concerned that you refer to paper bags as single use. Single use bags would be glad bags you buy at grocery. I have surveyed my customers and not one uses bag only one. Great as cat toy and composting ...

Dictating a minimum price seems counterintuitive to getting people to buy reusable bags.

Plastic shopping bags aren't single use. The cloth bags equally end up in the garbage.

The City does not have the lawful authority to regulate single use plastics. Really, the courts have already decided this issue against other cities. What a waste of money and resources for a "green" agenda. Go approve more suburbs... and then worry about a bag. Thanks city council.

I'm all for it. Often I'll go into a grocery store for 1 item and come out with 10, but I didn't bring a bag with me, but also, I drove. In the trunk are several bags, so I leave the cart with Customer Service and go get a bag or 2. It's not as convenient as buying another bag, but I don't need one.

With record number of people/family's having to use food banks here in Calgary this mayor and council wastes time and money prioritizing this kind of garbage. If my vote counts of anything they all be kicking dust in the election. City hall is a disgrace.

I don't believe the city should be spending money and effort on this mostly meaningless initiative. We already have a good system of landfill and recycling. This is mostly just costing businesses and benefiting no one.

Why are you forcing us to limit the use of Single Use Plastics, when many cities around the world that have done so in the past, are now reversing their earlier choices???

Having to charge customers for these items reduces the chances of making a sale. Sometimes customers forget their bags, or don't have them available. All of these fees are nickel and diming the customer and all taxpayers.

Why is the city wasting taxpayer money on this Federal government initiative. Are there not larger issues for the city to handle instead of infringing on business and peoples free choices?

The cost is ridiculous. 1.00 is more reasonable

City should stay out of it. Lower my taxes, improve safety and things that impact us more than worry about stupid plastic.



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What issues do you anticipate for your organization or staff?

Some higher cost in sourcing the right type of bags...

Customers won't be happy and won't shop with me

Added cost for little actual environmental benefit.

What a waste of money.

I am a consumer not staff.

People won't want to soil their reusable bags with greasy beef or pork bulk pet treats. Our staff always wrap these items in plastic bags

We have always offered a free bin liner or cat toy when they purchase multiple items

Packing reusable bags is a shower as they are all different shapes and sizes and the items are not as easily protected. The uniformity of disposable bags helps keep the business efficient.

Price and efficiency. People can no longer go for a walk in a popular neighborhood and just pop by a shop. They need to carry their bought items efficiently

Customers thinking the business is responsible for the fees

I am a new start-up company. I'm not at that point yet with my business, to have any concerns. I'm the only staff right now.

We cannot afford to make these changes, time for the city to tell the National Leadership, that they are wrong and forcing people to make changes that are being reversed around the world, is wrong!!

There will be more negative interactions at the till, and reduced sales

Cost

Upset Customers.

What issues do you anticipate for your customers?

Showers service. Added costs. More damaged groceries.

Not encouraging new shoppers, current customer can't carry their items

Customers think that the business is pocketing the high fee

More demand for my product which is a collection system for - Single-use hot/cold plastic and plastic lined beverage cups. It does bring more attention to recycle more and to recycle better.



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As a customer, I find the imposed rules to be bothersome. Our family, like most, already re-uses and then recycles bags, and properly disposes of plastic straws and utensils. This initiative is simply a 'greenwash' with limited real world benefit.

They will go elsewhere to make their purchases where the cost for them to make purchases are not increased to meet the law makers choices that are not in the nations best interest. We cannot change the world from within Canada, we are the laughing stock of the world when it comes to climate change.

Customers will be upset at having to pay YET ANOTHER FEE just to purchase a product. Is the city going to charge Nestle for the cardboard box your cookies come in next? All of these fees are ridiculous

The city enabling this shifts blame from the city to business owners who should not have to spend time and resources on this issue.

Cost

Anger

What questions and/or concerns do you have about the Bylaw on foodware accessories?

Making items by request only is just adding another thing to show down service. Cause more people to return to the windows and cut in line to get a fork. So will upset customers.

Not everyone dines in or at home. Single use utensils and cups fuel the take out industry.

Seems useless. Ok. Now the customer will take it as opposed to being given it.

Everything is so over-packaged right now. I can get a dozen eggs in a rather flimsy cardboard carton, yet my muffins are in a virtually indestructible package. Sugar and flour come in a double walled paper bag, yet Tide Pods needs a container of the hardest non-recyclable containment packaging??

The Laughing stock of the City, is being used for things other than those that should be dealt with, like vagrants and actual live safety issues!!

Customers expect a certain amount of goods to go with an order. If you have a drink you clearly need straws...why does a business need to ask? Customers will forget to ask, then be upset at the business

Why is the city concerned with this. If its for landfill use then start charging black bin by weight vs flat fee.

This is horrible for businesses

Stay out of it. Improve other things.

What issues do you anticipate for your customers?

Inconvenience and slower service.



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Lower takeout

Haslte

More awareness. 10 BILLION single use cups are produced annually and they're not on the list of single-use plastics. Check out a company called Earthware.

They will shop elsewhere, and many are going outside of the city to purchase now!!!

Customers are going to be even more annoyed having to ask specifically for every little thing, or they are going to be angry when they forget and reduce their purchases

The cost

Anger

Are there any tools not listed here that would be useful?

by the time you display poster or tent card, it's too late. customer did NOT bring their own bag, forks...

Cancel ylaw

A clear explanation of the scientifically supported economic benefits. It will be important that is a "do good" initiative and not just a "feel good" initiative.

[language removed]

I am disgusted by bring your own cup. I walked out of a Starbucks after watching a customer request another latte and they made it in his own mug. Even if people bring in what appears to be a clean mug, it very possibly wasn't washed properly

Info on how many plastic glad bin catchers and garbage. Ahs go to your landfill and why you do not see this as a problem but using your paper grocery bag as a bin liner is so much worse for the environment

I will only display corporate made info to the public. I will use full details of laws not condensed info.

You want to give tent cards and use more paper notices?

Not bringing your own cup

What other options for accessing these materials would better meet your needs?

don't really need posters and postcards. a simple guide for business is more appropriate

Leave alone. Get crime off the streets. Start with the NE

City rules. City printshop.



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Not going to follow and force my customers to follow

This is all useless. People will still be asking for them. You need some of this stuff to eat out. I fear I will lose business.