



Staff Report for Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: November 25, 2020

Report Number: SRCS.20.30

Department: Community Services
Division: Public Works Operation

Subject: **SRCS.20.30 – Single-use Plastics Reduction Strategy**

Purpose:

To report back, as directed by Council, on practical and feasible strategies that will reduce the use of single-use plastic items both corporately and community-wide.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That staff be directed to develop and implement a corporate policy to reduce the use of single-use plastics and increase waste diversion at City facilities, functions and events.
- b) That staff be directed to implement a public education campaign, focused on raising awareness about options to reduce single-use plastics.
- c) That staff be directed to develop a program, in partnership with York Region, to recognize local businesses that are taking steps to reduce the use of single-use plastics through voluntary initiatives.
- d) That recommendations A through C be delivered using existing resources.
- e) That a copy of staff report SRCS.20.30 be sent to the Federal Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and the Provincial Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, and York Region.

Contact Person:

Grant Taylor, Director, Public Works Operations, extension 2966

Vlad Gaiu, Manager, Energy and Waste, Public Works Operations, extension 2524

Report Approval:

Submitted by: Darlene Joslin, Commissioner of Community Services

Approved by: Mary-Anne Dempster, City Manager

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All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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Background:

Single-use plastics refer to plastic products and packaging that are designed to be used only once before they are discarded. Examples of single-use plastics include disposable cutlery, straws, stir sticks, shopping bags, single-serve condiment packets and take-out containers. Most of these items are not recyclable and often end up as litter in the community or contamination in the City's blue box program. These products have consequences on our natural environment, harming wildlife through entanglement, direct consumption or by entering the food web in the form of micro plastics upon breaking down. These issues have raised global and local public attention and concern resulting in a growing movement to address the reduction of single-use plastic items.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic increase in the use of single-use plastics. The International Solid Waste Association estimates that the use of single-use plastic has increased by 250 to 300 per cent during the pandemic. Much of this is due to the increased use of disposable masks, gloves and wipes while the other portion is driven by the belief that single-use plastic items are a safer alternative to reusable items during a pandemic. As such, it is now more important than ever to develop a program to reduce the use of single-use plastic items.

On May 28, 2019, Council passed the following motion (Confirmatory By-law 85-19) requesting that:

Staff report back to Council regarding practical and feasible strategies that Richmond Hill may use to reduce single-use plastics within our own corporation and within the municipality as a whole by working in partnership with York Region, and with other interested stakeholders

In response to this motion, staff have completed municipal benchmarking and research on options to reduce the use of single-use plastic items. Staff have also met with internal stakeholders to understand the use of single-use plastic items within the corporation and with York Region to determine potential areas for alignment and partnership.

Benchmarking & Research

Federal and Provincial Initiatives

Recently, both the Federal and Provincial governments have made announcements committing to banning certain single-use plastics in the near future.

The Federal government, through Bill M-151, has identified the need to reduce and regulate consumer and industrial use of single-use plastics and aims to ban the following 6 single use items by the end of 2021: plastic checkout bags, straws, stir sticks, six-pack rings, cutlery, and plastic food takeout containers that are difficult to recycle. The selection of items was chosen based on evidence that these materials continue to have a prolific presence in the environment, are often not recyclable, and have readily available alternatives.

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The Provincial government, through Bill 82, will develop a plan with measurable targets and timelines for reduction and eventual elimination of single-use plastics in Ontario by 2025. Additionally, the bill requires the ban of several single-use plastics within one year of the Act receiving Royal Assent, including plastic straws and stir sticks, plastic bags, polystyrene food and drink containers as well as single-use plastic water bottles.

Municipal Initiatives

Several municipalities outside Ontario, including Vancouver, Jasper and Montreal, have regulated single-use plastics through community-wide bans, by-request by-laws and fees. Most municipalities in Ontario have not regulated single-use plastics in their communities at this time. Instead, they have been focusing on education to raise awareness of the issue, as well as corporate reduction programs and voluntary community measures. Corporate policies to eliminate or ban single-use plastic items have been implemented or will be implemented by the majority of Ontario municipalities surveyed, including York Region, Markham and Aurora, often in combination with community-wide strategies. This includes policies banning the sale and distribution of single-use plastic items, such as straws and bottled water, at municipal facilities, functions and events, as well as implementing sustainable procurement practices.

Ontario municipalities such as Niagara Region and Kawartha Lakes have implemented voluntary bans and business recognition programs that commend businesses for reducing single-use items at their establishments. York Region has recently committed to reducing single-use plastic items through a voluntary “ask-first” business recognition program that will be initiated in 2021 in partnership with local municipalities.

The City of Toronto has completed extensive public consultation on a number of community-wide approaches to restrict single-use items, including both voluntary approaches and mandatory approaches. With the recent announcement from the Federal government regarding the ban on certain single-use plastics by the end of next year, City of Toronto staff are reassessing their draft strategy. The updated Federal plan may affect their proposed timelines and some regulatory efforts may no longer be deemed necessary, as many of the problematic items will soon be banned nationally.

Options and Recommendations to Reduce Single-use Plastics:

The options and recommendations to reduce single-use plastic items described below were developed in accordance with the following principles:

- Accessibility and equity must be considered to ensure that the programs do not impose additional burden on vulnerable people.
- A phased approach is needed to allow residents and businesses to adapt.
- The City can demonstrate leadership by taking actions to reduce single-use plastic items in its operations.

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- The program's goal is to eliminate single-use plastic items by moving to reusable items or by eliminating them all together.

Corporate Initiatives

Under normal operations, the City generates single-use plastic items from City events, staff functions and meetings, concession stands at City facilities and from community programs. As facilities begin to re-open, a corporate waste reduction and diversion policy could be developed to direct staff to reduce or eliminate single-use plastics from corporate operations, where feasible.

City Hosted Events and Food/Drink Vendors

A corporate waste reduction and diversion policy has two components. The first component would address single-use plastics items sold or distributed to the public at City facilities and events. This includes single-use items provided by food and drink vendors such as foam/polystyrene food containers and plastic straws, which could be banned from municipal properties. Vendors could also be required to provide more sustainable alternatives. Further consultation with staff and food/drink vendors is needed to determine which single-use items and which events/activities can be feasibly targeted, to ensure that affordable and sustainable options exist that meet the accessibility needs of residents.

Internal Staff Events, Functions and Daily Activities

The second component of a corporate waste diversion policy would address single-use items generated from internal Council/staff meetings, events, functions and daily activities. A corporate policy would ban non-essential single-use plastic items that can easily be eliminated or substituted with reusable alternatives from internal meetings, events and functions. To assist staff with complying with this policy, a guide would be developed to provide practical and affordable alternatives. An educational campaign would also be required to inform staff of the opportunities available to reduce or eliminate single-use items within the Corporation.

Recommendations for Corporate Initiatives

Staff recommend implementing a corporate waste reduction and diversion policy to reduce or eliminate single-use plastic items from City operations, where feasible. A corporate strategy will demonstrate to the public the importance the City places on sustainability and the environment, while displaying methods available to businesses considering similar steps. Recognizing that it is a complex issue with many financial, operational, public health and accessibility impacts, staff recommend taking a phased approach to reduce the use of single-use items.

City-wide Initiatives

Education Program

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Education is a critical component to Richmond Hill's success in waste diversion. As such, it is important to increase the general awareness and understanding of residents and local businesses regarding the environmental impacts of single-use plastics and the options available to reduce their use, in order to gain community buy-in and to drive lasting behaviour change. The City recognizes that different approaches need to be employed to respond to the unique needs of both residents and businesses, in light of the impacts of COVID-19. Key messaging will inspire residents to remember their reusable options (i.e. reusable shopping bags and masks) and to refuse single-use plastics if offered. The education program can be delivered through existing communication channels such as the waste calendar, City website and the Recycle Coach waste app and would be paired with any other approach that is chosen by Council.

Business Recognition Program

A business recognition program would promote voluntary single-use plastics reduction initiatives for local businesses in Richmond Hill. Many businesses in the community are already making positive, voluntarily changes. For example, Sobeys's no longer offers plastic bags while many restaurants in Richmond Hill no longer offer plastic straws. Under this program, interested businesses who have made proactive commitments to reduce their reliance on single-use plastic items and have other waste reduction and diversion initiatives in place, would be identified and recognized by the City. Initiatives could include only providing single-use plastic items if requested, using recyclable containers for take-out and banning certain single-use plastic items from their establishment. Recognition could involve providing a plaque or decal for the business to display at their location and being featured on the City website. The program would also encourage other businesses who have yet to make changes, to switch to more sustainable options that reduce their use of single-use plastic items.

Regulatory Approaches

Regulatory approaches can include material bans, mandatory fees and ask-first or by-request by-laws. Material bans prohibit the distribution or availability of an item (i.e. foam/polystyrene food containers), therefore requiring retailers and/or consumers to find a suitable alternative. Under a mandatory fee by-law approach, consumers would be charged for single-use items, such as plastic cutlery or cups, upon checkout. This would serve as a deterrent for consumers to use these items and incentivize the use of reusable items. An ask-first or by-request by-law would prohibit restaurants and businesses from automatically providing or having readily available single-use plastic items, like straws. Instead, they would be located behind the counter and employees would be required to ask the customer first if they need a particular item or the customer must ask for the item.

Regulatory approaches can have unintended consequences as some businesses may end up substituting the banned single-use items with other items that have the same or greater negative environmental impacts. In addition, bans can increase costs to

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businesses and consumers and some single-use plastic items are a necessity for residents with certain disabilities.

Recommendations for City-wide Initiatives

Awareness of the associated issues and the options available to reduce single-use items is critical to generating the kind of individual action needed to make significant reductions and to minimize reliance on single-use plastic items. Therefore, staff are recommending an Education Program coupled with a Business Recognition Program as described above. Both programs can be delivered in partnership with York Region to increase the program's efficiency and effectiveness.

In light of the upcoming Federal and Provincial regulations to ban certain single-use plastic items, staff are not recommending a regulatory approach to address the use of single-use plastics. Addressing the issue of single-use plastics items through regulatory measures is more effective if implemented at a provincial or national level. A consistent national or province-wide approach, rather than individual municipalities attempting to implement and enforce a varied patchwork of regulations, would provide businesses and residents with more clear messaging and result in less confusion. In addition, any regulations imposed at the municipal level to reduce single-use plastics, may conflict with upcoming Provincial and Federal regulations.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

Both the corporate and community strategies to reduce single-use plastic items would be funded through existing operating budgets and communicated through existing communication channels such as the waste calendar, waste app, LED boards and website. However, eliminating or reducing single-use plastic items from City facilities and events will need to be further investigated as the sale of these items serve as a revenue source for impacted departments.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan:

Single-use plastic items reduction programs not only reduce both waste and litter, but also bring about other community benefits. Support for these programs aligns with Strategic Plan Goal Four - Wise Management of Resources.

Conclusion:

It has been well documented that single-use plastic items often end up as litter in the community, polluting our parks, rivers and lakes. Their production, use and disposal are harmful to the environment and can have public health implications over the long term. Staff have completed research and benchmarking on the issues and impacts around single-use plastics as well as the options that exist to reduce their use.

Based on this research, staff recommend implementing a corporate single-use plastics reduction policy to demonstrate that the City is leading by example and minimizing its use and reliance on these items at its facilities, functions and events. It is also

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recommended that the City deliver a community-wide Education Program to raise awareness of the environmental impacts of the production, use and disposal of single-use plastics, as well as the available alternatives that are sustainable. Finally, to recognize and promote businesses who currently are taking actions to reduce the use of single-use plastics, staff recommend implementing a business recognition program, in partnership with York Region.

Regulatory measures such, as bans or fees are not recommended at this time given the pending Provincial and Federal regulations and in consideration that regulatory approaches are more effective if implemented nation or province-wide.

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCS.20.30 - Single-use Plastics Reduction Strategy.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Nov 3, 2020

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Vlad Gaiu - Oct 30, 2020 - 10:45 AM

Grant Taylor - Nov 2, 2020 - 12:03 PM

Darlene Joslin - Nov 3, 2020 - 8:53 AM

MaryAnne Dempster - Nov 3, 2020 - 10:43 AM