



Report to: General Committee

Meeting Date: May 4, 2020

SUBJECT: Single Use Plastic Reduction Strategy – Phase 1
PREPARED BY: Claudia Marsales, Senior Manager, Waste & Environmental Management

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the report entitled “Single Use Plastic Reduction Strategy – Phase 1” be received; and,
- 2) That the presentation entitled “Single Use Plastic Reduction Strategy - Phase 1 - Presentation” be received; and,
- 3) That the Waste and Environmental Management Department undertake a review of all municipal facilities for opportunities to eliminate or reduce non-essential single use plastic (“SUP”) products and collaborate with the appropriate staff to source alternative products; and,
- 4) That a community-wide education program be implemented to raise awareness of the SUP issue and provide options for SUP reduction; and,
- 5) That effective October 20, 2020 (Waste Reduction Week) packaging Styrofoam be banned from curbside collection; and,
- 6) That staff report back on the results of Phase 1 actions and outline Phase 2 recommendations regarding the implementation of a potential municipal by-law or other methods to reduce plastic retail shopping bags and polystyrene convenience food containers from distribution in Markham including the estimated financial impact and legal implications associated with the implementation and enforcement of a by-law; and,
- 7) That a copy of this report be forwarded to York Region and the local municipalities for their information; and further,
- 8) That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

N/A

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the SUP issue, review how other governments are addressing the problem, and to provide options and recommendations

for a phased approach that demonstrates leadership in the reduction of SUPs at the local level.

BACKGROUND:

At the November 2019 meeting of General Committee the following motion was approved:

That staff be directed to report back to General Committee relative to the proposed motion for Single Use Plastics (SUPs) Declaration.

Environmental Impact of SUPs

SUPs are plastic items that are typically used only once before being discarded. SUP products are commonly defined as the following types of plastic material:

- Beverage and party cups and lids
- Coffee/hot beverage stoppers
- Straws and stir sticks
- Cutlery
- Styrofoam packaging and take-out food containers
- Grocery/produce bags

The commonly targeted list of SUPs does not include dog waste bags or water/pop bottles. Dog waste bags are compostable in Markham's Green Bin and water/pop bottles are recyclable in all municipal Blue Box systems. In 2008, Council endorsed a Zero Waste policy, which encourages refillables and restricts the use of single use bottled water when potable water is available.

The above list of SUPs are particularly problematic from an environmental sustainability perspective because they are inherently designed to be discarded immediately after use, and have limited reuse, recyclability or compost options. Additionally, many SUPs end up as litter on roads, parks and trails and in creeks. SUPs placed at the curb for recycling can become litter when blown from open Blue Boxes, or while the containers are being emptied into the collection vehicle.

Once in the natural environment, SUPs are unsightly, expensive to remove and pose a physical and chemical threat to wildlife and our own food chain.

Further, as plastics in the environment age, they disintegrate into smaller and smaller pieces, making them ingestible by smaller and smaller organisms, which allows plastic to infiltrate further into the food chain and pollute our food sources. Eventually, plastics are broken into such small fragments that they become virtually impossible to remove from the environment and continue to accumulate in the ecosystem.

The carbon footprint of an SUP item can be reduced over its useful lifespan by switching to paper/fiber-based or compostable items, or with more durable materials that can be reused over and over.

Federal Government Approach to SUP

In 2018, Canada became one of five G7 signatories to the Ocean Plastics Charter. The Federal Government has also announced more specialized actions including working with industry to prevent and retrieve abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear, which is a major contributor to plastic debris in the ocean. They also committed to reduce SUPs by 75% by 2030 within its own federal operations.

More recently, the Federal Government announced a ban on harmful single-use plastics as early as 2021 under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*. This ban would also ensure companies, which manufacture plastic products or sell items with SUP packaging are responsible for managing the collection and recycling of this material.

Provincial Government Approach to SUPs

In March 2019, the Provincial Government released a discussion paper on reducing litter and waste, which included recognition of the need to reduce plastic waste. The discussion paper proposed action in the following four areas:

- Reducing and diverting food and organic waste from households and businesses
- Reducing plastic waste
- Reducing litter in our neighborhoods
- Increasing opportunities for the people of Ontario to participate in waste reduction efforts – possibility invoking measures that include deposit return systems for plastic beverage containers – and bans or other restrictions on specific types of SUPs

Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland & Labrador have enacted province-wide bans on the free distribution of plastic shopping bags and require retailers to charge a minimum fee per bag.

Municipal Approach to SUPs

Municipalities across Canada have implemented or are in the process of implementing programs to reduce the prevalence of SUPs in their communities. Many municipalities in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec have addressed SUP's with a variety of approaches.

Controls on plastic bags and other forms of SUP's are currently being considered by Toronto and Edmonton.

Vancouver is putting in place strong controls on many forms of SUPs including straws, take-out food containers, cups, cutlery and bags. Most municipal controls that have been introduced are in the form of bans on the free distribution of plastic shopping bags. They typically specify a film thickness below which low-grade bags are subject to the ban, and most require a minimum fee to be charged for shopping bags. Many provide exceptions for specialty uses where alternatives are more difficult for consumers and retailers to use.

Options for Markham to Reduce SUPs

Staff have examined options available for SUP reduction as well as the trajectories of potential regulation at the federal and provincial levels and recommend an approach that focuses on the following areas of activity and action:

1. Demonstrate Municipal Leadership in SUPs with Reduction at City Facilities

The significant reduction or complete elimination of SUPs from Markham facilities would publicly demonstrate the importance the City places on environmental stewardship and leadership, which will contribute to the success of the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan: Building Markham's Future Together in protection of the natural environment.

Staff recommends a review of all municipal processes and policies that are recognized to generate the use of non-essential SUP products on municipal property and identify opportunities to work with the appropriate departments to reduce, remove or eliminate SUP products. SUP items that could be replaced with viable fibre options include plastic cups, stir sticks, straws, cutlery, food plates and plastic bags.

The City also hosts numerous public events and provides facilities where others host events and provide services on behalf of the City. While staff are confident that most SUPs can be reduced or eliminated from municipal facilities, it will be an ongoing challenge to discourage facility users from bringing SUPs on-site. Ongoing education will be needed.

2. Public Education to Reduce SUPs

Staff recommend that the City undertake a public education program to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of SUP reduction in our community. This program would also be used to prepare residents for the potential regulations being brought forward at the federal level and provincial levels.

SUP education is critical to generating the kind of individual action that the community will need to make significant reductions in the procurement and use of these materials. Information would be provided about the financial impacts associated with SUPs in the natural environment and include details concerning the Keep Markham Beautiful program and other community clean-up initiatives. Additionally, education would provide recognition of other programs, businesses and organizations that have taken measures to reduce SUP use.

Public education would be conveyed via the City's website and through social media channels. Additionally, information would be provided to City employees via online training, incentives and other means to raise awareness of the SUP reduction objectives of the City and how employees can reduce SUPs during their workday.

3. Implementing a Curbside Ban for packaging Styrofoam

In 2013, Markham successfully banned electronic materials (e.g. TVs, computers, etc.) from curbside garbage collection. The ban resulted in increased electronic waste diversion and contributed directly to collection cost savings.

In 2017, a ban of household textiles from curbside collection was implemented by Council and resulted in over 17 million pounds of textile material diverted for re-wear, re-use and recycling in support of local charities.

Packaging Styrofoam refers to the large pieces that encase electronic equipment, furniture, and appliances; not food packaging such as meat trays or take-out containers. Currently residents are encouraged to take this material to Markham's Recycling Depots; however, residents can place this material in clear bags for collection in the garbage stream. Styrofoam is not accepted in the blue box system in York Region.

If approved, staff recommends the packaging Styrofoam ban become effective Tuesday October 19, 2020. This is the first collection day during Ontario's annual Waste Reduction Week.

An extensive education and promotion program would be launched over the summer of 2020 to educate residents on all available opportunities to recycle packaging Styrofoam at any of Markham's four Recycling Depots and at the Region of York's Community Environmental Centers.

A ban on the curbside collection of packaging Styrofoam is a bold step that would help raise awareness on the recyclability of this material.

Packaging Styrofoam is currently processed at Markham's Styrofoam densification facility at 8100 Warden Avenue and recycled into plastic building material such as crown mouldings and baseboards.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

While senior levels of government have announced their intention to implement measures to reduce SUP material, Ontario municipalities are actively considering how best to proceed with local level programs and initiatives.

It is important to recognize that many local businesses and organizations are already leading by example. Early adopters of plastic reduction initiatives like A&W Restaurants, Whole Foods, the LCBO, Sobeys and many others have either taken steps to substitute SUPs with other types of materials or provide products that can be reused.

Through these recommended actions, Markham has an opportunity to not only become part of this movement, but to be recognized as a leader in community action to reduce SUPs in the environment.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

SUP elimination and outlined education initiatives in 2020 will be borne by existing budgets and, if required, would be added to future operating and capital budget for consideration.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

Accessibility Considerations: SUP products may be required for those with disabilities. While most SUPs are items of convenience, consideration must be included to not restrict access to products that may be required for those who require them for daily living.

Potential impacts to those with disabilities will be considered.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Building Markham's Future Together: 2020-2023 Strategic Plan: This initiative furthers the Safe, Sustainable & Complete Community goal by enhancing the natural environment through sustainable integrated planning, public awareness, and municipal leadership.

Aligns with goals of greenMarkham.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Finance, Recreation Services, Culture, Sustainability & Asset Management, Corporate Communications.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Phoebe Fu,
Director Environmental Services

Brenda Librecz
Commissioner of Community and
Fire Services

ATTACHMENTS:

N/A