

July 23, 2019

MEMORANDUM

To: Civil Rights, Utilities, Economic Development, and Arts Committee
From: Brian Goodnight, Council Central Staff
Subject: 2019 Report on Seattle Bag Ban Compliance

At its July 23 meeting, the Civil Rights, Utilities, Economic Development, and Arts Committee will receive a presentation from Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) on the [2019 Report on Seattle Bag Ban Compliance](#). This memorandum provides background information on the City's bag ban, a high-level summary of key takeaways from the report, and a description of related councilmember interests.

Background

In 2011, the Council passed [Ordinance 123775](#) banning the use of single-use plastic and biodegradable carryout bags at retail establishments. The ordinance also required retail establishments to collect a pass-through charge of at least five cents for each recyclable paper carryout bag provided to customers. In 2016, the Council revised the bag regulations via [Ordinance 125165](#). Ordinance 125165 removed a sunset date on the pass-through charge for recyclable paper bags, prohibited the use of green- or brown-tinted non-compostable plastic bags, required that compostable bags be tinted green or brown and clearly labeled as compostable, and requested an annual evaluation of the bag ban program by SPU.

In compliance with Ordinance 125165, SPU has submitted bag ban compliance reports in [2017](#) and [2018](#), and recently submitted the [2019 Report on Seattle Bag Ban Compliance](#) on July 1.

Key Takeaways from 2019 Report

The 2019 report provides updates on a number of topics related to the bag ban regulations, including the compliance rate of businesses, strategies to improve compliance and address impacts on the recycling system, and statewide efforts to address plastic bags. Some of the key takeaways from the report are:

- Nine additional cities have adopted plastic bag ban policies since the beginning of 2018, resulting in a total of 28 jurisdictions with plastic bag bans in Washington State.
- SPU documented an overall compliance rate of 85 percent (193 out of 227 businesses surveyed) in 2018. This is an increase over the 2017 compliance rate of 82 percent (146 out of 177 businesses surveyed).

- The top-three barriers to compliance cited by non-compliant businesses were:
 - Unaware of ordinance or ordinance specifics,
 - Language barriers, and
 - Added cost to operations.
- Stemming from the recommendations of the [Responsible Recycling Task Force](#) (January 2019), and consistent with the position of the Seattle Solid Waste Advisory Committee (March 2019), SPU is phasing out allowing plastic bags in curbside recycling by early 2020.

The report also includes a list of recommendations for improving the bag ban regulations. The following recommendations are excerpted from page 14 of the report:

- “Extending requirements, including pass-through charges, to include bags used for take-out food and by meal delivery services.
- Allowing compostable bags for take-out food if they include messaging about using the bag for food scraps to go into the compost container.
- Increasing the pass-through fee to \$0.10.
- If ‘reusable’ plastic bags continue to be allowed, increasing the mil thickness of these bags to 4 mil, and/or more significantly increase the pass-through fee for these bags to encourage their actual reuse and encourage customers to use more durable reusable bags.”

If there is interest in pursuing any of these recommendations, either independently or in coordination with other changes, Councilmembers may want to provide direction to SPU to begin drafting the relevant changes.

Councilmember Interests

There are a number of issues related to the City’s bag ban and other solid waste topics that Councilmember Herbold is investigating or pursuing, including the following:

- A. Plastic Reduction Measures
 - Increasing the pass-through charge for carryout bags provided to customers;
 - Requiring compostable take-out or to-go containers for food service;
 - Requiring on-site food service products to be durable, with exceptions;
 - Creating a pass-through charge for to-go cups;
 - Prohibiting travel-sized plastic containers at lodging establishments for amenities such as shampoo and conditioner.

- B. Every-Other-Week Garbage Collection – Exploring a transition to an every-other-week garbage collection model to encourage waste reduction and diversion among residents and to reduce emissions associated with collection trucks. This model was piloted by the City in 2012 through the [One Less Truck Pilot Project](#) that involved approximately 800 single-family residential households.
- C. Composting and Recycling Access for Multifamily Residents – Updating the land use code to require that solid waste collection areas for multifamily residents include containers for all three solid waste streams: compost, recycling, and garbage. Additionally, multifamily buildings with three or more floors would be required to provide collection areas on each floor.
- D. Deconstruction and Salvage – Consider adopting requirements related to deconstruction and salvage to ensure that valuable materials from demolished homes are reused instead of ending up in a landfill.

cc: Kirstan Arestad, Central Staff Director
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