



---

**TO:** T.C. Broadnax, City Manager  
**FROM:** Michael P. Slevin III, P.E., Director, Environmental Services  
James Parvey, LEED AP, Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability  
**COPY:** City Council and City Clerk  
**SUBJECT:** Ordinance amending Title 5 of the Tacoma Municipal Code to add a new Chapter 5.55  
"Bring Your Own Bag" – June 28, 2016  
**DATE:** June 2, 2016

---

**SUMMARY:**

An Ordinance amending Title 5 of the Tacoma Municipal Code, by adding a new Chapter 5.55, entitled "Bring Your Own Bag", prohibiting the use of carryout bags except for reusable or recycled paper carryout bags, requiring retail establishments to collect a pass-through charge with a minimum fee of \$0.05 from customers requesting recycled paper and reusable carryout bags, establishing penalties, providing outreach, and providing for a study of the impacts of the requirement effective one-year after passage of this ordinance.

**COUNCIL SPONSORS:**

Deputy Mayor Mello and Council Members Blocker and Ibsen.

**STRATEGIC POLICY PRIORITY:**

- Assure outstanding stewardship of the natural and built environment.
- Encourage and promote an efficient and effective government, which is fiscally sustainable and guided by engaged residents.

This ordinance supports environmental stewardship by reducing litter and waste disposed of in the landfill. It also promotes citizen engagement by giving individuals a personal opportunity to reduce costs to the City's Solid Waste Management System.

**BACKGROUND:**

Since March of 2012, the Sustainable Tacoma Commission has been interested in reducing disposable shopping bags in Tacoma. In May 2014, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 38907, reaffirming the goal of diverting 70 percent of the City's waste by 2028, and calling for strategies to reduce consumption of single-use carryout bags, bottles, and other products. The Environmental Action Plan identifies reducing disposable bag use by shoppers as item M9 in the Material Management section.

The Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability (OEPS) staff has given multiple presentations to the City Council's Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability (IPS) Committee to update them on the program progress and recommendations. IPS formally requested that staff prepare a draft ordinance based on the "Bellingham Model" and gather public input on the draft ordinance elements. The "Bellingham Model" is essentially a ban on plastic and a fee on paper, with the fee retained by the retailer. This ordinance is based on that model and is the dominant model in the state.

The proposed ordinance differs from the "Bellingham Model" by requiring retailers to provide either paper or reusable bags upon request for no less than \$0.05. This is based on the experience where some retailers in communities with restrictions replaced disposable plastic bags with ones just slightly thicker and continued to charge no fee.



A draft of the ordinance was presented at study session on April 27, 2016; comments received included:

- Ensure there is follow up and outreach with community groups that were engaged in the Tacoma 2025 Plan.
- Provide training to the retailers on the ordinance requirements and effective bagging of products.
- During the implementation period organize reusable bag exchanges within the community such as Tacoma School District, Tacoma Housing Authority, and at local food banks

#### **ISSUE:**

Fourteen communities in Washington State and countless others around the United States and world have placed restrictions on disposable plastic and paper bags. Restricting these bags is intended to encourage the use of reusable shopping bags and thereby reduce resource use, litter, and waste, as well as protect the environment and wildlife.

Widespread use of disposable plastic bags took hold in the late 1970's and early 1980's when they became extremely price competitive with paper bags. Since then their use has become widespread; an estimated two billion bags are used in Washington State each year according to the Environment Washington Research and Policy Center. Plastic grocery bags were the eighth most common item collected in the 2015 International Coastal Cleanup and are considered the second most impactful item to wildlife, due to the tendency of animals to mistake them as food according to the Ocean Conservancy 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary International Coastal Cleanup Annual Report, 2016.

Some items specific to Tacoma citizens are:

1. *Clean* shopping/dry cleaning bags make up 534 tons/0.3 percent of the City's solid waste stream.
2. The City pays roughly \$30,000/year in disposal costs to the landfill for just these *clean* bags.
3. Plastic bags cause significant additional sorting, disruption and down time at recycling centers, costing an estimated \$700-\$1000/ton. This is reflected in recycling rates.
4. Shoppers pay indirectly for all "free" bags. One study estimated these hidden costs to be \$37.50 per person per year according to the Metropolitan Washington D.C. Council of Governments.
5. Plastic grocery bags were the sixth most common item picked up during the 2013 International Coastal Cleanup in Washington State according to the Ocean Conservancy.

#### **ALTERNATIVES:**

Several strategies to limit the use of disposable bags have been utilized around the world. Some of the most common or viable options are listed below in order of effectiveness in reducing the use of plastic bags.

1. Ban plastic, fee on paper;
2. Ban plastic, fee on paper and reusable bags;
3. Fee on both paper and plastic bags;
4. Ban plastic, paper unrestricted; and
5. Maintain status quo.

Option five would not reduce the volume of plastic bags being disposed of in the landfill or ending up as litter.



**RECOMMENDATION:**

An Ordinance amending Title 5 of the Tacoma Municipal Code, by adding a new Chapter 5.55, entitled "Bring Your Own Bag", prohibiting the use of carryout bags except for reusable or recycled paper carryout bags, requiring retail establishments to collect a pass-through charge with a minimum fee of \$0.05 from customers requesting recycled paper and reusable carryout bags, establishing penalties, providing outreach, and providing for a study of the impacts of the requirement effective one-year after passage of this ordinance.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

**EXPENDITURES**

FUND NUMBER & FUND NAME *	COST OBJECT (CC/WBS/ORDER)	COST ELEMENT	TOTAL AMOUNT
ES Solid Waste Fund 4200	512005	5412000	\$50,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$50,000</b>

\* General Fund: Include Department

**REVENUES:**

FUNDING SOURCE	COST OBJECT (CC/WBS/ORDER)	COST ELEMENT	TOTAL AMOUNT
ES Solid Waste Fund 4200	512000	various	\$50,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$50,000</b>

**FISCAL IMPACT TO CURRENT BIENNIAL BUDGET: \$50,000**

**ARE THE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES PLANNED AND BUDGETED? No.**

**IF EXPENSE IS NOT BUDGETED, PLEASE EXPLAIN HOW THEY ARE TO BE COVERED.**

Monies have not yet been budgeted but would come from the ES Solid Waste Fund 4200 in the 2017-18 biennium.

