



TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Melanie Harding, Chief Policy Analyst to the Mayor, City Manager's Office
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: An Ordinance suspending enforcement of Second Substitute Ordinance No. 28367 and Tacoma Municipal Code 12.09.215, entitled "Bring Your Own Bag," during the declared state of emergency due to the novel coronavirus COVID-19 – March 24, 2020
DATE: 3/23/2020

SUMMARY & PURPOSE:

This resolution calls for the temporary suspension of the Second Substitute Ordinance No. 28367 and Tacoma Municipal Code 12.09.215, entitled "Bring Your Own Bag," during the declared state of emergency due to the novel coronavirus COVID-19 in order to protect the health and safety of grocery workers, who are a critical link in the food supply chain, and further limit the spread of COVID-19 throughout the community. In alignment with the declared state of emergency, the Ordinance would become effective upon passage by an affirmative vote of at least six members of the City Council.

COUNCIL SPONSORS:

Mayor Victoria R. Woodards
Councilmember Robert Thoms
Councilmember Chris Beale

BACKGROUND:

The Mayor's recommendation comes at the request of grocers and labor representatives throughout the area and is a measure to preserve public health during the declared state of emergency.

Second Substitute Ordinance No. 28367 and Tacoma Municipal Code 12.09.215, entitled "Bring Your Own Bag," currently prohibits the use of carryout bags except for those made of recycled paper and heavier gauge plastic bags that are considered reusable. It also requires retail establishments to collect a pass-through charge from customers requesting recycled paper and reusable plastic carryout bags. Currently, the reuse of customer-owned bags may increase the possibility of transmitting the novel coronavirus, and first and foremost our grocery workers need to be protected. Current disruptions of supply chains are being compounded by increased consumer demand for groceries and other goods, making it nearly impossible to obtain adequate quantities of paper bags or heavier gauge plastic bags to meet consumer demand. In addition, the reuse of customer-owned bags may increase the possibility of transmitting the novel coronavirus. Many retailers retain supplies of plastic bags used before the "Bring your Own Bag" Ordinance went into effect, yet retailers are currently prohibited from substituting more readily available bags for those required by the ordinance.

Joining other retailers worldwide and grocery worker unions across the country, City of Tacoma grocery stores have requested immediate and temporary suspension of the plastic bag ban as a means to protect the health of their workers and their customers by limiting the spread of COVID-19. The City of Tacoma affirms its long-term objectives to change manufacturing and purchasing practices as well as waste generation behaviors in order to forward the City's environment and sustainability goal. Because of this, the suspension provided by the Ordinance is temporary and would sunset with the declared state of emergency due to novel coronavirus COVID-19.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ (CUSTOMER RESEARCH):

This Ordinance comes at the request of Tacoma grocers. In order to address the immediate health concerns, opportunities for extensive outreach have been limited.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Equity and Accessibility: (Mandatory)

All Tacoma retailers and customers have the potential to be positively affected by the temporary suspension of the Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance during this time of crisis, with measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 disproportionately preserving the health and lives of the seniors and those made vulnerable by underlying health conditions. By increasing availability of bags during this time of high demand and suspending the five cent fee on paper and reusable plastic bags, this legislation will also reduce barriers to consumer’s ability to transport their groceries and other goods to their homes. This is especially important to people reliant on public transportation, bicycles, or walking transportation.

Livability: Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity

Improve health outcomes and reduce disparities, in alignment with the community health needs assessment and CHIP, for all Tacoma residents

Explain how your legislation will affect the selected indicator(s)?

The Ordinance is a measure to protect the health of all Tacoma residents, including grocery workers who are a critical link in the food supply chain.

ALTERNATIVES:

Presumably your recommendation is not the only potential course of action; please discuss other alternatives actions for council or staff to take. Please use table below.

Alternative	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Do not suspend the Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance.	Will continue to support original goals of BYOB Ordinance by reducing the use of single use plastics in Tacoma.	Could contribute to the spread of COVID-19 throughout the community, with increased potential exposure to grocery workers. Retailers and consumers will continue to have challenges relating to the lack of available bags.

EVALUATIONS AND FOLLOW UP:

This is a temporary measure aligned with the current declaration of emergency. The City Manager may direct staff to include feedback from retailers as part of the annual Bring Your Own Bag Report to Council January 2021 if desired.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECOMMENDATION:

While continuing support of statewide “Bring Your Own Bag” legislation as a longterm policy, the sponsors recommend immediate and temporary suspension of the Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance in alignment with the current declaration of emergency.



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

FISCAL IMPACT:

No fiscal impacts are expected from this action.

ATTACHMENTS:

No attachments.