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May 27, 2008

PE17.5

**TO: Councillor Paula Fletcher, Chair
Parks & Environment Committee**

FROM: Councillor Michael Walker

**RE: Submission to Parks & Environment Committee
- Petition from Grade 5 Students Requesting a Ban on Plastic
Bags**

CITY CLERK'S OFFICE
SECRETARIAT SECTION
2008 MAY 31 P 2:11
June 2

Further to our conversation last week, I am writing to respectfully request that you include the attached submission on the agenda for the June 11, 2008 Parks & Environment Committee. The submission is from the Grade Five students of The York School located in the ward I represent.

The students and their teacher, Ms. Sheryl Faith, would like to give a short presentation to our Committee regarding their admirable initiative for action against Climate Change. The students have gathered a large petition requesting that the City ban plastic bags and would like to help Torontonians live up to the part we all must play in the fight for a sustainable planet.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Walker
Councillor – St. Paul's

Attachment

May 2008

TO: Chair & Members, Parks & Environment Committee

**FROM: Grade 5 Class – Teacher: Sheryl Faith
The York School, 1320 Yonge St. (Ward 22, St. Paul's)**

SUBJECT: Petition to Ban Plastic Bags

(Submission of Petition accompanies this presentation to Committee)

To the Parks' Committee,

My name is Sheryl Faith and I'm a grade 5 teacher at The York School in Toronto; with me are some students from who feel very strongly about what we're here for. Our school's mission is to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who are engaged citizens of the world. One of the things that I've done in fulfilling this mission is to set aside time in our class schedule to discuss social justice and environmental issues. As a result of this, we have started two successful environmental initiatives this year.

In the fall, our class began Project Bigfoot. Choosing from a list of changes everyone could do at home or at school, including using reusable shopping bags, each student took steps to lessen their ecological footprint. To show their progress, each change was colour-coded and these colours were used to make scrap paper links in a chain. The initiative spread throughout the Lower School and when the students presented the completed chain to the school last month, it was compiled of around 750 links. In addition, the support from the parents and school community as a whole was incredible and has led us to believe that people genuinely need and want change.

Our class is now tackling the issue of plastic bags. We decided that we wanted to continue the fight that last year's grade 5 class began – to reduce the number of plastic bags used in Toronto. After reading about the measures that other cities and countries have taken to use less plastic, we decided that Toronto should be taking a greater stand on this issue. We created a petition to ban petroleum-based plastic bags in Toronto.

In Ontario alone, 2.5 billion plastic bags are used each year. They will take over 1000 years to break down. Plastic bags have become a ubiquitous reminder of how non-biodegradable plastics can pollute our cities and natural environments. They can also suffocate land animals and sea life. When they eventually biodegrade, the plastic breaks down into tiny, toxic pieces that contaminate the water and soil and can eventually enter the food chain when ingested by an animal.

Oil is a non-renewable resource that is becoming more and more scarce and costly. Therefore, it's surprising that 4% of the world's oil goes toward production and another 4% provides the raw materials to make plastic bags that are used for an average of 20 minutes.

We are not alone in our fight. Many countries and cities have taken on this cause. Ireland has cut its consumption by 90% by implementing a highly successful plastic bag tax, called *PlasTax*, in 2002. Since then, more than 18 000 000 litres of oil have been saved. Plastic bags have also been taxed in countries like Italy and Belgium. Countries like Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland already charge for plastic bags in stores. San Francisco, Bangladesh, China, Taiwan and a few countries in Africa have already banned plastic bags altogether. Even the small town of Leaf Rapids, Manitoba has taken a stand.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Using the success of these countries and cities as inspiration, we are proposing that Toronto:

- **begin the process of banning plastic bags. Like San Francisco, the city can set this in motion by banning non-biodegradable plastic bags from large supermarket and drugstore chains.**
- **also consider taxing plastic bags as an option.**
- **promote alternatives like corn starch plastic and cloth bags. We realize that there are uses for plastic bags but there is growth potential in the industry to provide more biodegradable and reusable alternatives.**

The city council raised this issue some time ago with little outcome. Our class and the many people that have supported us would like to see some action.

Thank you all for your consideration,

The York School grade fives and Sheryl Faith

Resources:

<http://www.cbc.ca>

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com>

<http://www.reusablebags.com>