

May 20, 2021

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To: Chair and Members of Infrastructure and Environment Committee

Re: Response to IE22.6 Single-Use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy - Stage 1

Please use the communications opportunity in the Voluntary Measures Program to focus in part on littering.

In "Attachment 8 - Moving Forward: Stage 1 of the Reduction Strategy – Encourage Voluntary Measures in 2021" I think it was either an oversight or a mistake that 'litter' and 'littering' are not referenced with respect to promotion, outreach and engagement communications.

Along with encouraging consumers and establishments to switch over to reusable alternatives for straws, cups, bags, etc. the city must also encourage responsible disposal of the commonly littered items, such as those identified in:

Attachment 2 - Presentation from September 24, 2019 Public Event "Addressing Single-use and Takeaway Items in Toronto" and

Attachments 3A-3E - Single-use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy - Phase Two Public Consultation Report and Activities.

As well I'd also like to note that chewing gum and cigarette filters are also single-use plastic items prevalent in the litter stream although not identified for the purposes of this report.

As part of the communication plan to businesses, I believe it is imperative that the City recite and underscore the importance of complying with the bylaw applying to keeping storefronts and retail properties free of litter.

I attach several recent photos from one of Scarborough's local supermarkets, which houses an extensive take-away food counter, as an example of single use plastics and irresponsible disposal gone awry. This messy example of a grocery store parking lot is not unique to this one retail establishment. The problem is endemic.

As the focus turns to the Single-Use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy there needs to be a program, preferably multilingual, that deals with enforcing property cleanliness standards on businesses.

Citizens who care about the degraded state of our littered city are long past the point of being fed up over inattention to this and the lack of enforcement and communication. Now there is an opportunity to rectify a shortcoming.

Since resources are being recommended at this juncture to support an outreach and communication plan, it should be simple to stress expectations of site cleanliness to the constituencies, whether residents or businesses.

Appendix 8 did not include the words 'litter' or 'littering' yet they are among the biggest complaints and hazards associated with single use plastic items in land and marine environments. For some reason the subject of litter is often overlooked or downplayed to the point of omission.

Just as with the development of outdoor smoking bylaws where public health policies made no provision for strategies to deal with the increase in cigarette butt littering outdoors, I see this report sidestepping littering when it could be embracing it as part of the behaviour change communications package being suggested.

Since the goal is to target the food and restaurant industry it makes sense to incorporate litter prevention/reduction information into the messaging.

I support a voluntary approach to start and hope it enjoys the same success as water on request in restaurants saw in the 1980s.

I support discouraging products labelled compostable and biodegradable, since some minds will construe that to mean the stuff magically disappears so it's okay to litter it.

If Council approves a Recognition Program for businesses that adopts voluntary measures to reduce single-use and takeaway items, I think this should also include a consideration of and ranking for the tidiness of their outdoor space and their adherence to waste management and litter laws.

I think the city should adopt a holistic approach to this program across all city departments so as to leverage communication channels of other City divisions to impart consistent messaging.

As an example of skirting around the discussion of litter, I refer to a direct quote from the report, which says: "... efforts to support a green recovery Public space and streetscape audits will also be performed to quantify the amount of single-use and takeaway items found in the public realm."

'Items found in the public realm' could easily have been replaced with 'items littered in the public realm' to build on the idea that these items generally aren't landing there by accident but are due to someone's carelessness or disrespect of a bylaw.

It would be my hope that in the design of communications, input from a reputable concern specializing in litter science will be used, and if an outside advertising agency is employed for this project that they will seek the appropriate expertise and information to include for creating the best possible reminder about handling waste and not littering it, and reducing use of and dependency on single use plastics.

The VMP is being recommended to "target materials which are known to contribute to street litter and marine litter" so it only makes sense for the city and Council to use this moment as an opportunity to include an effective anti-litter message in its pending communications.

On that note it would be great to see this committee of Infrastructure and Environment put the topic of Litter Updates on its agenda routinely to give this entire issue the focused attention it deserves.

These are my comments. Thank you.

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