



A Greener City for All

May 25, 2021

Infrastructure and Environment Committee
City of Toronto
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2
By email: iec@toronto.ca

Re: [IEC 22.6 Single-Use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy - Stage 1](#)

To Councillors and Committee members,

The Toronto Environmental Alliance is an environmental non-profit organization that has been advocating for zero waste policies and programs for over thirty years.

We are here today to urge you to take swift action to reduce single-use waste and move Toronto towards a circular economy. The upcoming reopening and recovery period presents a unique opportunity for the City to support local businesses to reduce waste and shift to safe and sustainable practices.

We are encouraged by the proposed Single-Use and Takeaway Items Reduction Strategy, and have key recommendations on how to ensure this Strategy achieves the desired waste reduction outcomes and benefits our city. If done well, this first stage of voluntary measures will provide crucial support for businesses and communities, but we also urge you to keep Council's commitment for bold action and commit to mandatory measures in 2022.

Single-use plastics and takeaway products are a serious and growing problem - from plastic pollution in our greenspaces and waterways, to growing problems and complexities in recycling, to the impact of fossil fuel extraction and plastic production on our health and environment. Dealing with unnecessary single-use products and packaging is not just about litter, or improving recycling and waste management, but about sustainability, climate action, human health and transitioning to a regenerative and circular economy.

Toronto City Council voted to take action on this growing waste crisis more than two years ago. The extensive public and stakeholder consultation confirmed that the strong majority of Torontonians

support local regulations for the worst materials. In the last year, many things have changed, but public opinion polls show that the majority - nearly 80% of Canadians - still want governments to take action to regulate harmful and unnecessary single-use plastics.¹

The Federal government has heard this, and is moving ahead with a plastics reduction strategy, including regulations for six single-use plastic products. While the Federal regulations on plastics are welcome, all levels of government have a role to play in supporting the transition away from single-use items. Toronto is in a unique position to understand and directly respond to the needs and interests of our local communities and businesses in making this transition to reusables.

We urge you to use this moment as an opportunity to look ahead and imagine a city that uses materials efficiently and has local reuse and refill systems that provide good, green, local jobs.

Below are four key recommendations to Council:

1. Move quickly with the Voluntary Measures Program to provide guidance and support for businesses to make reuse and waste reduction a part of their reopening strategy this summer.

Over the next 6-8 months, the City can provide support and resources to help Toronto businesses and communities make the shift towards less waste as part of the reopening process. This can include: information on purchasing less wasteful alternatives, training for staff on waste reduction, and information and guidance on safe use of reusable and refillable containers.

It's important to remember this information will also be valuable to other groups: schools, institutions, event venues, and community centres are just some of the spaces that also serve food and would benefit from guidance on how to reduce single-use items and encourage alternatives.

The report outlines a broad strategy, but does not provide timelines. We urge you to move quickly so that businesses can reopen safely and sustainably *this summer*.

2. Provide clear public health information to let the public and businesses know that reusables are safe.

Public health experts around the world - including Toronto Public Health - have confirmed that when it comes to takeaway items, reusable options and refillable containers can be used completely safely and that disposable, single-use options are not inherently safer.

Many Toronto residents have continued to bring their own containers and bags when they go shopping and many local businesses are safely allowing refillable containers and following best practices for health and safety. Most exciting, in the last year, half a dozen new businesses have launched programs to provide reusable takeaway containers for local restaurants, and have created green jobs in the process.

¹ <https://www.dal.ca/sites/agri-food/research/plastic-food-packaging--before-and-after-covid-19.html>

By providing clear and consistent messaging and guidelines to businesses and the public, the City can help more Torontonians choose reusable options over single-use products.

3. The City should lead by example in publicly-funded facilities and at events.

The City has an important leadership role to play in helping to promote and demonstrate waste reduction activities through actions. Council should commit to fully implementing all of the promoted voluntary measures in City facilities and City-operated programs as soon as they are launched, and to go further when possible.

The staff report notes that efforts to reduce waste within City operations and facilities were started, but have been paused. We urge you to restart those initiatives. City facilities or publicly funded spaces - like the zoo, city museums and event spaces - can fully adopt and demonstrate what is possible and inspire action.

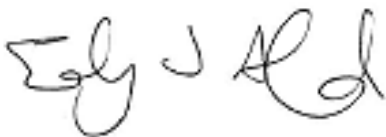
4. Don't stop with voluntary measures - mandatory measures must follow in 2022.

The proposed Voluntary Measures Program is a great first step for Toronto. It will set up local businesses for sustainable and safe reopening and prepare them for new regulations from other levels of government.

But voluntary measures are not enough. We need to follow this voluntary stage with meaningful and effective regulations for all single-use items in Toronto that will reduce and eventually eliminate unnecessary waste and shift Toronto towards reusable alternatives.

We know from the two years of public consultations in Toronto, from national public opinion polls, and from the new businesses popping up around our city, that a strong majority of Torontonians want bold municipal action to reduce and regulate single-use items. Now with the imminent reopening of our local economy, Toronto has an opportunity to support local businesses and communities to reopen safely and sustainably and move our city towards a resilient circular economy.

Sincerely,



Emily Alfred
Waste Campaigner, Toronto Environmental Alliance