

Plastic Bag Report Follow Up

March 17, 2020

OVERVIEW

Members of the Brookings Sustainability Council researched options on incentivizing reusable bags, recycling plastic bags, and reducing usage of other single-use plastics such as to-go containers and straws.

This report is split into two sections:

1. Research results on each of the options mentioned above.
2. Recommendations from the Brookings Sustainability Council for how to move forward. Cost estimates are included in the recommendations.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Incentivizing Reusable Bags

Below are various initiatives from communities on how to encourage or incentivize plastic bag reduction and increase reusable bag usage.

- Store-based initiatives
 - Provide a \$0.05-0.10 cent refund for customers using reusable bags
 - In many cases this has not been extremely effective
 - A larger amount for the refund could be more effective
 - Some communities have kept the refund value the same but offered customers the chance to donate that amount to a charity instead of receiving it themselves
 - Offer reusable bags at a much lower or no-cost
 - Implement a bag-share program where people could take or drop off extra bags
 - There are some hygiene concerns around this idea
 - Post signage in parking lots, checkout counters, etc. about using reusable bags, and then have bags available at the checkout (see below for signage examples)
- City based initiatives
 - Provide tax credits/breaks to stores that offer higher discounts/refunds or that go bag-free
 - Pass a resolution to monitor bag usage and implement fees if no decrease is found after a period of years
 - Fund educational materials/posters in stores/city-wide to bring attention to problems with single-use plastic and promote reusable bags
 - Provide reusable bags at low or no cost
 - Provide grants/funding to non-profits to provide branded bags for promotional purposes
 - Institute a "special handling fee" on waste accounts for businesses that distribute large quantities of plastic bags
- Misc. initiatives
 - Ad campaign (posters, tabling, social media, TV) that includes how many plastic bags are distributed in Brookings, ways to reuse plastic bags, and encouragement to use reusable bags

- Hand out reusable bags
- Hold DIY reusable bag workshops
- Presentations
- Art displays (i.e. a group from Iowa City collected bags and then strung them between light posts downtown to show how many plastic bags are used.)

Resources:

Store Signage Examples:



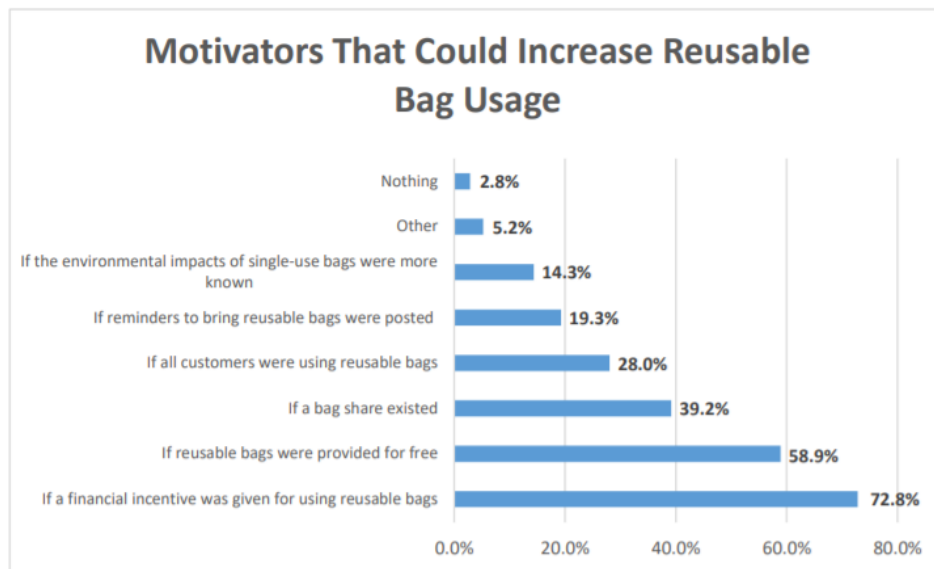
In the cart return area



Inside the front door



In the parking lot



Graph Source: Dalzell, Jessica L. (Aug. 2019). Figure 19. Percentage of survey respondents that answered that a motivator would encourage them to use reusable bags more often. [graph].

Recycling Plastic Bags

- Commercial Recycling Options
 - TREX
 - Trex offers commercial recycling. Trex purchases large volumes of plastic films that are baled in 1,000-pound bales and sold to Trex when the organization has accumulated 40,000-pounds or 40 bales.
 - Trex also has a 6-month challenge where if you collect 500 pounds of bags (~40,500 bags) you would get a recycled park bench. This can be done in a community, school, or university.
- Local Recycling Partnership Options

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- Both Walmart and HyVee offer plastic bag recycling in their facilities. In addition, they are willing to partner with the City to recycle additional plastic bags. In initial conversations, this would involve the City placing plastic bag recycling bins in select locations across town. The City would then bring the collected bags to Walmart or HyVee's plastic bag recycling collection. Further details need to be worked out with Walmart and/or HyVee on when and how the bags should be brought to the store.

Reducing Other Single-Use Plastics

In addition to reducing plastic bag usage, many countries and communities pursue efforts to eliminate or reduce other forms of single-use plastics. Straws are a common item to reduce, but cutlery, plates, stir sticks, take-out containers, Styrofoam, bottles, and cups are also included in some efforts. There are two main ways communities are reducing single-use plastics:

1. Prohibiting the use of material
 - a. This could be across the community or only in specific locations (i.e. restaurants, wilderness areas, City buildings, etc.)
2. Providing material ONLY upon request
 - a. In this scenario, single-use plastics are still available, however consumers must request it for it to be given to them. For example, at a restaurant, the best practice would be to provide drinks to customers without a straw. However, if a customer requested a straw, especially if that customer needed one due to a disability, a straw would be given to them.
 - b. Monetary charges can be implemented for businesses that do not comply or if that business has a reason that single-use plastics are necessary for their operation.
 - c. Some communities allow certain operations (i.e. drive-thru or take-out) to be exempt from the regulation.
 - d. Often another layer is added to this strategy by requiring any single-use plastics that are used to be manufactured from recycled, biodegradable, or compostable material. Or that the material be recycled in the end.

Additional strategies include eliminating the sale of bottled water at events, requiring the use of reusables for on-site dining, and publicly recognizing businesses that are leading the way to reduce single-use plastics in their operation. For plastic bottles specifically, some communities are offering public re-fill stations and reverse vending, where consumers can return their plastic bottle in exchange for cash.

Things to consider:

- What items will the single-use reduction program cover?
- What entities will be covered in these efforts? What will the exceptions be (i.e. hospitals, emergency needs)?
- The Brookings Sustainability Council is sending out a survey to the downtown businesses to gather information on current reduction efforts and to gauge interest in single-use plastic efforts. The Council will consider extending this survey beyond the downtown area as needed.

Policy Resources:

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/77410>
<https://sfenvironment.org/reduceplastic>

RECOMMENDATIONS & COST ESTIMATES

When initiating the recommendations below, it may be helpful for the City to have a measurable goal for plastic reduction efforts.

Incentivizing reusable bags

1. The City and BSC should work together to encourage Walmart and HyVee to display signage about plastic pollution, decreasing single-use plastic and promoting reusable bags.
 - a. Cost Estimate: \$0 - There would be no cost to communicate with HyVee and Walmart about signage. HyVee and Walmart would be responsible for signage at their stores.
2. In addition, The Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce is interested in partnering to distribute reusable bags. The City and BSC should collaborate with the Chamber to provide low cost reusable bags to community members.
 - a. Cost Estimate: \$3,300 to purchase 1,000 recycled, reusable, branded bags.

Recycling Plastic Bags

1. Since reducing plastic bag usage will have a stronger environmental impact in the long run, the Brookings Sustainability Council recommends the City and BSC continue educational efforts to reduce plastic bag usage in Brookings through social media, newspaper ads, radio ads, etc.
 - a. Cost Estimate: \$3,140 for various advertisements [\$240 (40 :30 sec radio ads) + \$1250 (4 color, quarter page Brookings Register Ads) + \$1650 (4 color, quarter page Town & Country Shopper Ads)]
2. Since plastic bags will continue to be present in our community, BSC recommends providing information to the community on how plastic bags can be reused and where they can be recycled. In regards to recycling, the City should decide whether they will promote the HyVee and Walmart drop-off locations or create a partnership with HyVee or Walmart for an additional drop-off location.
 - a. Cost Estimate: Up to \$200 per collection bin plus time to empty plastic bag collection sites (if we decide to create a collection site outside of Walmart and HyVee).

Reducing Other Single-Use Plastics

1. The Brookings Sustainability Council recommends that the City and BSC work together to encourage retailers to only provide single-use plastics, such as straws, cutlery, plates, stir sticks, take-out containers, Styrofoam, bottles, and cups, upon request at all food serving (i.e. restaurants, food-trucks, events) entities in Brookings.
 - a. Cost Estimate: \$0 - There would be no cost minus committee and staff time to plan and execute an initial conversation with businesses. If businesses are interested, we may need to design a standard poster businesses can display in their business (see example from Portland, OR).
2. The Brookings Sustainability Council recently sent a survey to downtown businesses to learn of their efforts in reducing single-use plastics and recycling. This will help us set a baseline for efforts moving forward.
 - a. Cost Estimate: \$0