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City Council

Plastic Bag Briefing and Recommendation to County Commissioners

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Issue:

Single-use plastic bags promote disposable behavior, clog recycle sorting machinery, are made from fossil fuels and easily become airborne litter where they impact our natural and marine environments. As a result, a ban on single-use plastic shopping bags is being considered for Thurston County.

Committee Recommendation:

The Thurston County Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC), on which Mayor Pro Tem Jones represents Olympia, recommends that a regionally coordinated ban on single-use plastic bags is the best solution.

City Manager's Recommendation:

Move to approve a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners in support of a regionally coordinated ban on single-use plastic shopping bags that includes a small fee on paper bags and provides adequate lead time for implementation.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Ron Jones, Senior Program Specialist, Public Works Waste ReSources, 753-8509
Terri Thomas, Thurston County Solid Waste

Background and Analysis:

On August 14, 2012, City Council heard a briefing about efforts to reduce plastic shopping bag use in Thurston County. At that time, Thurston County was in the process of completing a 6-month education, outreach and research effort, which included gathering community survey data on plastic bag use. Over 3,700 residents county-wide responded to the survey, including 1,152 from Olympia. The majority of those who responded to the survey were in favor of banning bags. The Olympia survey data are attached with the staff report.

Thurston County also scheduled seven community meetings in September/October 2012 to engage the public in a discussion about plastic bags. One of those meetings was hosted at Olympia City Hall on September 19. Those in attendance were generally supportive of banning plastic bags as a means to

reducing their use.

The culmination of the outreach and research effort is summarized in the attached report - *Plastic Bags: Reducing Their Use*. Based on staff analysis in the report, the Thurston County Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) recommended to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) that a regionally coordinated bag ban was the best solution to reduce plastic bag consumption. In response, the BoCC approved the report and directed County staff to meet with each of the cities in Thurston County to obtain their recommendation on the best way to reduce plastic bag use. (see County staff report to Cities, attached.)

Staff believes that a ban on plastic bags is consistent with Goals No. 1 and 3 in the Toward Zero Waste: Olympia's Waste ReSources Plan 2008-2013 (Summary pages 1 and 2 attached).

On January 3, 2013, staff briefed the City's Utility Advisory Committee (UAC) on the plastic bag issue. The UAC unanimously supported a regionally coordinated plastic bag ban and a small fee on paper bags. The UAC also agreed that adequate lead time was necessary to develop a model ordinance and for implementation. In addition, the UAC expressed interest in education and outreach on about the most preferable types of reusable bags from an environmental perspective. The UAC's letter of support is currently being written and will be available for Council at the January 15 Council meeting.

Based on the recommendations from the regions cities, the Thurston County BoCC will consider whether to convene a stakeholder group to assist in the creation of a model ordinance on a plastic bag ban. This model ordinance would then be subsequently considered by the individual cities.

Seven cities in Washington State have already banned single-use plastic shopping bags. Five of those cities include a small fee on paper bags and two do not.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

In 2011, the City received over 100 pledge cards in favor of banning plastic bags. On September 19, 2012, 22 citizens attended a plastic bag community meeting and screening of the film, Bag It. A handful of comments have been received asking the City to consider the needs of the food bank, homeless community and persons with disabilities if proposing or supporting a ban on plastic bags.

Options:

- Option 1. Regionally consistent ban on single-use plastic bags and impose a small fee on paper bags (recommended option).
- Option 2. Voluntary reduction through education and outreach only.
- Option 3. Extended producer responsibility (product stewardship enacted by state legislature)
- Option 4. Ban plastic and paper bags.
- Option 5. Impose taxes or fees on plastic and/or paper bags.

Financial Impact:

None known at this time.