

## **Council Inquiry Response**

### **December 13, 2017 Resident Email on Banning Plastic Bags**

The City's Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) did review the option of a City bylaw to ban single-use plastic bags several years ago and recommended against it at the time for several reasons.

- The City had just embarked on our curbside recycling program and the EAC had hoped that the increase in education and awareness about recycling would encourage residents to reduce or avoid their use of plastic bags in their day to day activities.
- Also at the time, Alberta Environment had just signed a memorandum of understanding for a voluntary strategy to reduce plastic bag distribution with the four major Alberta Retailers Associations by 50% by 2013. The memorandum included specific targets and reporting requirements as well as education and outreach goals. It was hoped that this voluntary provincial initiative would produce the same or better results that various municipal bylaws in the long term.

The final report of this voluntary strategy was only released recently and unfortunately, the voluntary strategy did not meet their initial goal of 50% reduction in plastic bag use. The report indicated the first few years of data from the program showed promise but by the fourth year the reduction levels had stalled at about 20%. The final recommendations of the report indicated that:

*“Overall, we believe that retailers, waste management operators, municipalities and the provincial government need to have a more in-depth discussion reconsidering the management of plastic bags in the waste stream in Alberta.”*

Since the introduction of the City's three stream (garbage, organics, recyclables) curbside collection our residents have significantly reduced their waste generation from 181 kg/capita in 2009 to 121 kg/capita in 2016 and our landfill diversion rate of 67% is the highest in the Edmonton region. Interestingly though, the City just completed an informal audit of our residential curbside blue bag program this summer and found that the number one unrecyclable item put into blue bags was the single use plastic bag.

In the light of this new information, and the time passed since we discussed it previously, the topic of single use plastic bag use will be presented to the Environmental Advisory Committee in 2018 for further discussion.

Staff will also be bringing up the topic of single use plastic bags at the Capital Region Waste Minimization Committee – a committee that includes Council members and staff from most of the major municipalities in the Edmonton region as well as representatives from Alberta Environment and Parks and waste management companies. I would like to find out if this is an issue with other municipalities and if it is, what type of collaborative approaches could we take to address it.