

## **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – SEPTEMBER 21, 2009**

### **REUSABLE BAG PROJECT – UPDATE**

#### **Recommendation**

The City Manager and Director of Economic Development recommend that:

1. The Environment Committee direct staff to proceed with extending the reusable bag program and the suggested modifications to the program for 2010.

#### **Contribution to Sustainability**

This project, initially the result of a Council resolution passed in September 2006 to address excessive packaging, also addresses Green Directions Goal 5, Objective 5.1: To share best practices and ideas between and among municipal staff and the community. The reusable bags function as educational giveaway, opening a dialogue regarding sustainable choices, as well as providing residents with an alternative to disposable plastic shopping bags.

#### **Economic Impact**

There is no additional economic impact resulting for the receipt of this report. Resources have been allocated in the 2009 budget.

#### **Communications Plan**

A communications strategy for this project will be developed in conjunction with the Corporate Communications Department and the Economic Development Department. The reusable bags will be distributed through the existing partnership with Welcome Wagon and at selected events.

#### **Purpose**

To obtain Environment Committee direction to proceed with continuing the environmentally-friendly bag project.

#### **Background - Analysis and Options**

On November 27, 2007 the Environment Committee approved a pilot project to distribute 2500 reusable shopping bags. The shopping bags were purchased in partnership with PowerStream, which provided half of the funding. During the pilot period, Welcome Wagon distributed approximately 60-80 bags per month and staff distributed approximately 1000 at various events. A limited number of bags were also available to members of Council to distribute.

Feedback from the public, staff and other community members on the bags was very positive. The most noticeable constraint of the program, however, was the necessary staff time and space required to include brochures, etc. in each bag. It is recommended that the program be continued, but the bags be provided to Welcome Wagon and the public empty. Environmental information will still be made available to Welcome Wagon to include, as well as be available at any public event where staff is distributing bags.

PowerStream initially agreed to renew funding for the project in 2009, following the distribution of all for the initial stock. However, with the launch of PowerStream's new sustainability program "Go Green With PowerStream", it may not be feasible to partner with PowerStream on this initiative. PowerStream requested the City proceed with an environmentally-friendly (containing recycled or organic content) and North American-manufactured bag. While bags meeting these specifications do exist, they range in price from \$3.00 to \$6.00 per bag making the cost prohibitive. Thus it may not be feasible to continue the partnership with PowerStream on this project. It is recommended that the City proceed with the purchase of a more reasonable priced bag, with recycled content and/or vegetable ink, manufactured

offshore to ensure responsible use of resources and to maximize the number of units available for distribution.

It is recommended the bags be given away free of charge as a tool for environmental education to motivate positive behaviour change. As reusable bags begin to saturate the market, it is highly unlikely that a public appetite will exist to purchase the bags.

Staff have reviewed a number of potential options for a City of Vaughan reusable bag. Of the available options, staff have recommended the city proceed with the following product (based on balancing environmental and economic attributes):

- 85% PET recycled material, made in China, conventional ink - \$2.86 + tax/bag (Note: 1% of the sales of these bags supports the World Wildlife Fund).

It is recommended that the partnership with Welcome Wagon continue as a mechanism for distribution. Additionally, staff will distribute the bags at selected community events and Council will receive a limited number for their own purposes. Councillors wishing to distribute additional bags will be able to purchase them on a cost recovery basis. Based on a budget of \$6000, the City will receive approximately 1800 bags.

#### **Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020**

This initiative supports the City's Vision 20/20 objective to "Lead and Promote Environmental Sustainability".

#### **Regional Implications**

N/A

#### **Conclusion**

In 2007/2008, the City ran a successful pilot project in partnership with PowerSteam and Welcome Wagon to distribute reusable shopping bags to citizens in Vaughan. Given the success of this initial project, It is recommended that the City continue the program in 2009 ordering reusable bags to be distributed through Welcome Wagon and at events. Staff will re-evaluate this program on a year-to-year basis to determine if it should be continued or if there are other educational, or promotional products which may be more relevant as reusable bags become accepted and part of everyday behaviour.

#### **Report prepared by:**

Rebekah McGurran, Economic Developer – Environmental Sector, ext. 8426  
Shirley Kam, Manager of Economic Development, ext. 8874

Respectfully submitted,

Clayton D. Harris  
City Manager

Tim Simmonds  
Director of Economic Development