

SAULT STE. MARIE

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## Shopping cart bylaw takes effect Sept. 7

*Sault Ste. Marie's city council is taking a hybrid approach in its new bylaw to clean up the abandoned shopping carts found around town.*

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Sault Ste. Marie's city council is taking a tougher stance on abandoned shopping carts. A new bylaw will come into effect Sept. 7, designed to see less buggies strewn around the city. POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Grocery store owners who let their shopping carts go off site could soon be dishing out money to get them back.

City council has passed a bylaw that requires retailers who use shopping carts to develop their own management plan for the retrieval and return of abandoned carts.

Those carts, often found on street corners, at the edge of a road, or on other people's private properties have been deemed a nuisance by city council.

In fact, the new bylaw approved by city council earlier this week, is similar to the city's dirty yard bylaw.

The bylaw is somewhat of a hybrid attempt to solve the problem.

First, retailers with shopping carts will be required to file a plan with the city's public works department identifying what measures it will take to keep the carts on their property, or in the alternative, to retrieve them. Each store is also required to provide names and telephone numbers of management who will be called if carts are found off site, giving them ample time to retrieve them.

If the proactive measures don't occur within a reasonable timeline, the bylaw also includes enforcement mechanisms to kick in for non compliance that could see the store owners paying fines of up to \$5,000 for inaction.

It's the second draft – now approved – of the bylaw that the city's legal team has prepared. It will come into effect in early September, allowing retail owners time to develop their own plan to keep the carts on site, or retrieve them quickly, if needed.

This version addresses council's concern about an earlier draft, that could have seen private property owners charged if the carts were left on their property.

"I'm happy to see this is here. It's been a long time coming," said Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker, who initiated the motion to have the bylaw drafted.

Shoemaker said the problem is an ongoing one in his ward – as well as elsewhere – and he believes the bylaw is a good step towards solving the problem.

Shoemaker is pleased with the hybrid bylaw. The key now, he said, is to get those plans right.

"I think that will take a little bit longer to do and I think there will be some trial and error, but that's ok because the plans need to be approved by public works and I'm sure staff will work with the owners of the shopping carts," he told The Sault Star.

Some retailers have already taken a proactive approach, knowing that the bylaw was on the horizon.

Food Basics have implemented a wheel-lock system on their shopping buggies. If a user attempts to leave the property, a lock system kicks in preventing the wheels from moving, making it difficult to take the cart.

“I’m glad they’ve taken some proactive action and I truly believe that in the long run this will save them some money and they won’t have to pay others to pick up and return the carts,” he said.

Shoemaker said he hopes that the plans work and that fines for non-compliance won’t have to be issued.

“But if there are shopping cart owners that are flouting the law, then that option is there,” he said.

The abandoned shopping cart issue is not a new one. The same issue was raised by city council in 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2014, Shoemaker said.

At that time, the only option appeared to be fining owners, something council’s of the day were hesitant to do.

But Shoemaker said when he completed his research into the issues he found that other municipalities in Ontario had development cart management systems, similar to what will be implemented in Sault Ste. Marie.

“I think this is a win-win. We will have a positive onus with cart management systems in place, a warning mechanism to let the offenders know they’re on the clock to pick up some abandoned carts and a fine mechanism for those who don’t follow the rules,” he said.

Shoemaker said he’ll be watching to see how the bylaw goes for the first year of implementation and if it doesn’t work well, it can be tweaked.

Currently, PWT will have the discretion to implement compliance timelines with store owners but if that turnaround isn’t quick enough, Shoemaker said he’ll have no problem requesting an amendment and stricter timelines stating when owners have to remove the abandoned carts.