

# Council adds public consultation, but no staff report for Plastics By-law

By **Dan Gray** - November 17, 2021 @ 4:26 pm



*File photo*

**What did City Council spend the most time on Monday night?**

It wasn't the moving of the Hub Trail which connects a national historic site and the Canal District to the city.

It wasn't the current COVID situation, nor was it answering questions on how two bids for the transit terminal, both late, were both accepted and decided upon.



No, just over 40 minutes of Monday night's 3 hour Council Meeting was spent talking about plastic and how to ban some of it from the city.

At the bequest of City Staff, the timeline to bring the by-law into play was extended to Canada Day 2022, and although public consultation was added, it seemed to be only because it had to.

"What I wanted to say was I/we tried really hard not to say how to do it. But just to say what we wanted to see happen. So you know I would be happy with July 1st if Councillor Shoemaker is happy with July 1st.", said Councillor Hillsinger when the revised motion was headed for a vote.

She continued, "It's clear we have support for this. So if making this decision today says July 1st, we get it done, we do the consultation, we involve people, we make it happen, the way that it is going to work for our community, then I'm perfectly fine with that. If the expeditious method is giving an extra two months to make that happen, and we have a solid date in place for a bylaw to be in place, perfectly fine."

However there was opposition, even at the Council table, to the motion.

Some Councillors had concerns about enforcement, legality and practicality of such a ban and if it would actually, in the end, be better for the environment.

Councillor Matt Scott stated he has done some research on the issue and was concerned. He pointed to a study showing that creating a paper bag took four times more energy than a plastic one.

Scott was quoting from a study he read from [2011 by the Northern Ireland Assembly](#).

The paper states as one of its conclusions.

"It takes more than four times as much energy to manufacture a paper bag as it does to manufacture a plastic bag."

Plastic bags are produced from waste products of oil refining. When you make a paper bag, you require forests to be cut down to make the bags. A higher concentration of toxic chemicals is also used to make paper vs. plastic bags according to the research.

Scott was surprised by that information and it changed his thinking on the matter at hand.

"This is why I'm conflicted, because that is totally counter-intuitive to anything I've thought.", said Scott. "The amount of carbon emissions behind producing paper bags is greater than plastic. Because this is only asking for report back from staff, I'm definitely going to support this this evening."

Mayor Christian Provenzano noted that this is not actually going for a staff report, but actually moving to ban single use plastics, but that the by-law would have to come back to Council before it was passed.

Councillor Luke Dufour, although an avid outdoorsman and supporter of reducing plastic waste, was concerned.

"You know, as everyone around this table is probably well aware, I've made a close habit of following building and bylaw enforcement and the various legal issues that have come out of that.", said Dufour. "It's hard for me to not take that lens and look at things like the

shopping cart bylaw, or the now the plastic ban bylaw, and just see, in my opinion, US adding bylaws to a system that doesn't necessarily have the resources to adequately enforce them."

He continued, "When it addresses things like a single use plastic ban, my concern and my fear that I do feel are well founded. That internal resources are directed away from those core municipal functions of ensuring the enforcement of our building and bylaws, on buildings, and that they're shifted away towards something that, while still is important, I don't think is as critical to to our core municipal function or core municipal tax base as plastic bags are."

City Solicitor Kathy Fields, when asked about the legality, said the City should do some public consultations and if the Federal or Provincial government came up with their own laws, the City's bylaw would become moot.

Other Councillors mentioned exemptions which may need to be made for places like the hospital and food kitchens. One even suggested that styrofoam also be added to the bylaw which is being written.

Council voted to support having this by-law created, but moving the date to Canada Day and holding public consultations before implementing it.

SaultOnline and ONNTV will bring you those consultation dates once we are made aware of them.

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A native of Centre Wellington, Ontario, I have worked as a freelance journalist all over the province of Ontario. Most recently I ran a local news page in my hometown of Fergus, Ontario. I look forward to bringing my experience covering breaking news, municipal matters and general interest stories to the team at Superior Media and communities we serve.

