

Staff Report



To	Committee of the Whole
Service Area	Infrastructure, Development and Environment
Date	Tuesday, March 4, 2025
Subject	Single Use Items Strategy Phase 2 Reusable Containers

Recommendation

1. That the additional phase 2 recommendation for the Single-Use Items Reduction Strategy, as included in report 2025-84, dated March 4, 2025, be approved.
 2. That the Single-Use Items By-law (2025) – 21033, as amended, be approved.
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Executive Summary

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to respond to Council’s resolution to conduct further engagement on the Single-Use Items Strategy Phase 2 with respect to reusable containers and seek approval of the resulting proposed amendments to the Single-Use Items By-law.

Key Findings

Council directed staff to explore viable options to reduce and/or eliminate single use plastics in Guelph as part of the scope of the Solid Waste Management Master Plan (SWMMP) review. The SWMMP recommended a phased approach to reduce single-use items. In [Phase 2](#), Council approved the [Single-Use Items By-law](#) requiring as of March 1, 2025; that businesses must accept a customer’s clean reusable cup, only offer single-use accessory food ware items by request and/or at self-serve stations, and use take out paper shopping bags containing 40 per cent post-consumer recycled content.

At the [June 25, 2024](#) meeting, Council directed staff to engage further with the community about accepting reusable containers. Based on the feedback from Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH), Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee and local food-service businesses, City staff are recommending that Council approve the following recommendation as part of the Single-Use Items Reduction Strategy, which is proposed to come into effect September 1, 2025:

Businesses must provide a reusable container or accept a customer’s clean reusable container for food orders made in-store for food consumed on or off a Business’ premises unless served through a window to a customer at a drive-through or purchased for delivery.

Staff have engaged with WDGPH and developed resources to support businesses in complying with the Single-Use Items By-law and the Food Premises Regulation.

Upon Council approval, staff will communicate these changes to businesses' staff and customers.

Strategic Plan Alignment

Future Guelph Theme

Environment

People and Economy

Future Guelph Objectives

Environment: Empower the community to help create a sustainable city

- The single-use items reduction strategy encourages community participation in Race to Zero by reducing waste generated in the community as it contributes to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions from manufacturing, collection, and disposal.

People and Economy: Grow Guelph's economy

- The single-use items reduction strategy helps conserve natural resources, supports waste reduction, and encourages the expansion of circular businesses that support reuse initiatives in our community by limiting single-use items and promoting reusable ones.

Financial Implications

There are minor costs associated with the implementation of the proposed single-use items reduction strategy for communications and outreach which can be accommodated within the confirmed 2025 Solid Waste Resources budget.

Report

Additional recommendation to Phase 2 of the Single-Use Items Reduction Strategy

Council directed staff to explore viable options to reduce and/or eliminate single use plastics in Guelph as part of the scope of the Solid Waste Management Master Plan (SWMMP) review. Council approved the [single-use items \(SUI\) reduction strategy](#) on April 25, 2022.

The Strategy recommended a phased approach. In Phase 1, Council approved the Single-Use Items By-law on September 14, 2022, banning plastic shopping bags and polystyrene foam cups and takeout containers as of January 1, 2023. In Phase 2, Council approved the [Single-Use Items By-law \(2024\) - 20938](#) approving the following recommendations, which will come into effect on March 1, 2025:

1. Businesses must accept a customer's clean reusable drink cup for beverage orders made in-store,
2. Businesses must only offer single-use accessory food ware items by request and/or at self-serve stations (e.g., beverage cup sleeves and trays, condiments, utensils and stir sticks; straws are exempt), and
3. Paper shopping bags must contain 40 per cent post-consumer recycled content.

At the [June 25, 2024 meeting](#), Council also directed staff to engage further with the community about accepting reusable containers.

Based on the feedback from Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) and local food-service businesses, City staff are recommending that Council approve the following additional recommendation as part of Phase 2 of the Single-Use Items Reduction Strategy, which is proposed to come into effect September 1, 2025:

Businesses must provide a reusable container or accept a customer's clean reusable container for food orders made in-store for food consumed on or off a Business' premises unless served through a window to a customer at a drive-through or purchased for delivery.

Financial Implications

There are minor costs associated with the implementation of the proposed single-use items reduction strategy for communications and outreach which can be accommodated within the confirmed 2025 Solid Waste Resources budget.

Consultations and Engagement

Community and Business Surveys

City staff engaged with the Guelph Economic Development Advisory Committee and food-service businesses in Guelph about accepting reusable food containers and providing education on the upcoming Phase 2 of the SUI reduction strategy.

In addition to the 87 food-service businesses that responded to the survey in early 2024, City staff spoke to over 200 businesses in December 2024 and January 2025 about the Phase 2 requirements and received an additional 47 responses to an online survey requesting additional feedback on reusable containers.

Based on the survey results, 47% of Guelph businesses already accept a customer's clean reusable food container. When asked about their positive and negative experiences with accepting reusable food containers, 88% of respondents said their experience has been positive. Some issues the businesses identified were cleanliness, health and safety concerns, lack of sanitizing equipment, procedural interruptions, process and speed of service, and staff and storage capacity. Potential mitigations include those recommendations highlighted by Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health below, in addition to promoting contactless procedures, such as setting the reusable containers on a tray.

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health

City staff engaged with Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) to discuss the safety of reusable food containers and their recommendations regarding offering reusable containers at food-service businesses. Staff have developed resources in collaboration with WDGPH to support businesses in complying with the Single-Use Items By-law and the Food Premises Regulation. WDGPH's [recommendations](#) posted on the City's website included: requirements for accepting reusable containers, protecting other foods and equipment from cross contamination and hand hygiene tips.

Upon Council approval, staff will communicate the additional Phase 2 recommendation on reusable containers to food-service businesses' staff and customers.

Attachments

Attachment-1 Proposed Single Use Items By-law Amendment

Departmental Approval

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