



Single Use Strategy on Afternoons with Rob Breakenridge

October 11, 2022

Rob: One of the dissenting voices on Council, in a vote of 11-4 with the Motion passing, Councillor Wyness was one of the 4 “no” votes. We call this the Waste Reduction Strategy and it has different components, including these fees – what's your understanding of what the point of the intent of this is?

Cllr Wyness: Redundancy. The biggest challenge is when Council asked Administration on whether Calgarians already doing this, by our own metrics, more than 50% of Calgarians are doing this – with Admin confirming a success rate would be 50%. Why are we adding the minimum fee? It is also limited to brick & mortar stores in Calgary. If you do any online shopping, your single use plastics will be allowed to show up at your front door, but if you go into a store, you are actually being charged a minimum fee (which will increase to \$0.25) on plastic alternatives. We've banned plastics, the Feds have said no more plastics, and now these single use items are all compostable, such as a paper bag.

Rob: Right, and it seems that we want people using paper/reusable bags as an alternative to plastic, so why the fee then?

Cllr Wyness: One of the arguments was small businesses were struggling on the price of bags, but then by setting the minimum fee, we've actually increased the price of wholesale bags because now you know what businesses can charge. The other thing is when you're able to pocket the difference and you can ship bags from China to try to find a cheaper rate, we've only added an inflationary pressure on businesses and on Calgarians purchasing.

Rob: What were your concerns about this approach and why did you vote against this?

Cllr Wyness: My biggest concern is we've just created a regressive tax, so those with the least means to pay for it are going to pay a higher percentage of their income if they forget to bring their own bag. Those that have higher incomes, \$0.25 is not going to be that big of an issue if they forget their bags. I'm more about making sure that Calgarians can afford going into the challenges that we're facing.

Rob: Going to the grocery stores already got more expensive, and now we're going to ask people to pay more for some unclear reason. That doesn't seem right.

Cllr Wyness: Yeah, and it's not equitable so if we're trying to address single use plastics, why are we not addressing what's coming to people's front doors? It's not a holistic solution and it's a copy and paste of what the City of Vancouver did. When you have major cities in Canada looking at Vancouver having started this, we need to ask, what was the success of it? How much did it reduce consumption of single use plastics?

As an example, when you go through the McDonald's drive-thru, you're now having to pay extra for single use items with your order. It just lacks logic and I think when we can't go back and evaluate how well this is actually going to work, it's not a good policy to pass. And the federal government again has already banned plastics. The whole reason we started putting a price on plastic bags was we wanted to reduce the consumption, and petroleum products were seen as not a good product to use (even though they became a defacto garbage bags). And you can now go buy a pack of single use plastics garbage bags on the shelf, and the Municipal government cannot put a fee on that, but for some reason on the checkout we can – and they're both single use plastics.

If you go and buy your vegetables, that single use plastic, which will still remain the plastic bag, has no charge, but the compostable bags at the checkout are now having a fee. Are we actually trying to reduce single use plastics? Are we trying to reduce single use? It's not a holistic consistent policy and that's why I take issue with it.

Rob: So it's not just the paper bags that your groceries are going to go into, you go to the fast-food restaurant, where you can put your burger and fries into a paper bag. That's still a paper bag under this.

Cllr Wyness: And don't forget to ask for your forks, because under this bylaw, you will be having to ask for any single use item at the drive thru. And if you forget and drive away, please don't get mad at the drive-thru staff. It is part of this policy that is coming forward, so remember that you're going to have to be asking for more single-use products if you need it.

Rob: At the end of incorporating more compostable alternatives into this, and I think it's Federal rules that are preventing stores like Co-op from offering these compostable grocery bags at the checkout, and that weird situation where they can sell them in bulk, but they can't give them out at the checkout – why can't this be more of a part of the solution?

Cllr Wyness: I think it should have been, and I think we had time to do our homework on this policy to advocate for changes that we see are actually going to help Calgarians and meet our climate goals. And we didn't do that, and I think the Feds still have an opportunity to address some of the compostable plastic alternatives, and that research needs to be done. How are we incentivizing innovation as we move forward, trying to address climate change? And I think when we start making policies such as this that's that mandatory minimum, we're not opening the markets for alternatives. And the customers have already started to adapt to this. It seems like a weird redundancy to have happen when the conversation was plastics, we need to do bio-degradable, we then send it to our compost facility, the compost facility then sells our compost, Calgarians get compost, then that goes and grows a plant, which is also a carbon capture. How are we ensuring that each decision we make truly has that climate impact? I'm just not seeing it in this policy.

Rob: When does the bylaw come back?

Cllr Wyness: We're going to have a year feedback, which is great. I hope Calgarians help shape this bylaw and let us know what they would like to see. Do businesses want us to set the minimum charge? I think it's a great opportunity for Calgarians to let the City know how we should actually address our climate change goals and make great policy that incentivizes innovation.