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Honourable George Heyman
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy
Recycling Regulation Amendments
PO Box 9341 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9M1

Dear Honourable George Heyman:

Re: Plastics Action Plan Policy Consultation Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Province's Plastics Action Plan. City of Victoria staff commend the Province of British Columbia on moving forward with this important consultation phase as part of the Plastics Action Plan. We are willing and eager to work in close partnership with provincial staff from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and other relevant ministries to establish actions that will guide the transition to a waste free and sustainable future.

The Province of British Columbia has established itself as a leader in sustainable waste management and recycling by being one of the first North American jurisdictions to implement Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), where the responsibility for the collection and recycling of materials is placed on the producers who introduce those products into our communities. The British Columbia Environmental Management Act and associated Recycling Regulation also commits to using the pollution prevention hierarchy to prioritize waste management efforts, whereby prevention, reduction and reuse are prioritized over recycling and recovery. A robust EPR program embedded within requirements to follow the pollution prevention hierarchy provides a solid foundation for the Province to take the next steps towards zero plastic waste.

Plastics

As reported by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, every year global plastics pollution causes over \$13 billion in environmental damages while an additional \$100 to \$150 billion worth of material value in plastic packaging is lost to the global economy¹. Globally, only 14% of plastics are collected for recycling and of those recovered plastics only a portion are recycled in a closed-loop system where the products are recycled into a product with equivalent properties of the original. British Columbia's residential plastics recycling performs better than the global average with a recovery rate of 42%², in large part to the existing EPR program. Nonetheless, over 36,000 tonnes of plastic continue to be landfilled or escape to the environment each year in British Columbia.

¹ Strategy on Zero Plastic Waste, PN 1583, Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, 2018.

² Recycle BC 2018 Annual Report. Recycle BC, 2019.

Plastics recycling is faced with numerous challenges that severely restrict the ability to fully capture and recover materials including a volatile market for recycled materials, contamination, processing technology limitations, designs that prohibit disassembly, unfavorable economics and inexpensive disposal alternatives such as landfilling and incineration³. These issues have led to a recognition amongst leading governments and businesses for the need to eliminate several types of problematic plastic packaging and to focus on reusable alternatives. The New Plastics Economy Initiative led by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation explicitly acknowledges “while improving recycling is crucial, we cannot recycle our way out of the plastics issues we currently face. Elimination of problematic or unnecessary plastic packaging through redesign, innovation, and new delivery models is a priority. Reuse models need to be applied where relevant, reducing the need for single-use packaging”⁴.

Plastics in our Community

In the City of Victoria, plastics are the primary material littered in our streets, parks and beaches and comprise approximately 15% of the material mass in our regional landfill. A recent audit of the City’s public realm waste and recycling bins indicates that plastics make up 13% of the total materials collected by weight and 40% of the single use items by count. Moreover, the City’s stormwater and sanitary infrastructure is susceptible to fouling and contamination from plastics, which carries with it an inherent maintenance cost. In addition to City operations, community and businesses contribute substantial time and costs towards the collection of plastic waste including event cleanups, beach cleanups and business-sponsored litter collection programs. The plastic material littered across our environment and collected from the public realm is placing an increasing cost and resource burden on our community.

Government Roles and Responsibilities

There is no “silver bullet” regulatory tool for eliminating plastic pollution. Complementary actions need to be taken at all levels of government. The National Zero Waste Council (NZWC), whose membership includes the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and the City of Victoria, have recommended methods for the management of priority plastics types⁵. The NZWC identifies that senior governments have a role across all priority plastics types. At the same time, NZWC explicitly acknowledge the role that local governments ought to play in regulating single use items using the following tools:

- Controlled usage such as bans or restrictions
- Economic incentives or disincentives such as mandatory fees at point-of-sale
- Increased littering fines
- Supports for reusable packaging

³ Improving Plastics Management: Trends, Policy Responses, and the Role of International Co-operation and Trade. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2018.

⁴ New Plastics Economy Global Commitment - June 2019 Report, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2019.

⁵ Regulatory Approaches for Priority Plastic Wastes. National Zero Waste Council, Plastics Advisory Panel, 2019.

City of Victoria Plastics Action

The current overuse of plastic items in our community has been identified by many in the public to be inconsistent with the values of Victorians. In response, the City of Victoria has taken early action to mitigate plastic waste through the introduction of the Checkout Bag Regulation Bylaw. This City initiative, despite being struck down by the Court of Appeal, has been embraced by the community and businesses, and led to normalizing the shift to reusable bags. The majority of businesses transitioned to full compliance with the bylaw by the time it came into effect, while staff education and site visits brought the compliance rate to 97% within six months of its implementation. The City of Victoria is also currently in the process of developing a Zero Waste Strategy that will guide the community towards a future where nothing is wasted. Options will be developed as part of the strategy to use the City's authority and influence to accelerate the local transition to zero waste.

Recommendations

City of Victoria staff reiterate that the Province of British Columbia has established a strong foundation for taking meaningful action on plastic waste through its legislative provision to follow the pollution prevention hierarchy and by having established a robust extended producer responsibility program. Building on this firm foundation, we identify the following three actions as necessary to achieving zero plastic waste in our community:

- 1. Provide clear authority for local governments to introduce bans and fees to regulate problematic and unnecessary packaging and single use items.**

The social values and the systems required to meet local waste management issues vary from community to community. As a result, local governments need the ability to regulate plastics and to shift towards sustainable alternatives at their own pace and catered to the needs of their individual communities. The Province can take meaningful action in this area by providing clear authority to local governments to employ regulatory tools to eliminate problematic and unnecessary plastic waste.

- 2. Expand the scope of the Recycling Regulation for the packaging and paper product category to include collection from industrial, commercial and institutional property and establish clear timelines for requiring full recovery.**

The packaging and paper product category currently only applies to collection from residential premises and municipal property. Furthermore, the province has set the minimum recovery rate for producers at 75%. As an outcome of this current model of EPR, the producers collect and recycle those materials that are most cost-effective, while the remaining materials are landfilled or enter the environment, both of which incur a high social cost to manage. The Province can ensure the full responsibility of plastics recovery is placed on the producers by enhancing the current EPR program.

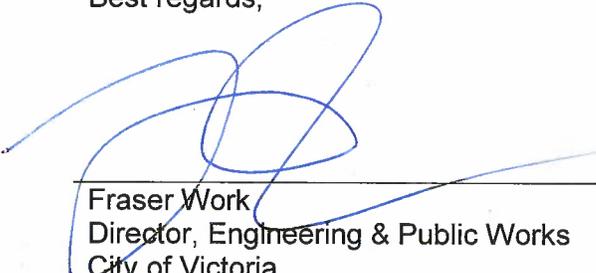
3. Develop and support programs that shift to reusable packaging systems.

The Plastics Action Plan consultation paper fails to mention the critical role of reusable packaging to avoid plastic waste. Reusable packaging and single-use item alternatives already exist for many products. Furthermore, the Environmental Management Act and Recycling Regulation explicitly acknowledge the relative priority of reuse over recycling. The Province can lead a shift away from unnecessary plastics packaging and single use items by developing and supporting new systems to encourage reuse.

The comments and issues raised in this letter highlight what staff consider to be priority actions to eliminate plastic waste in our community. Our comments touch directly and indirectly on many of the questions raised in the consultation paper with the underlying emphasis that the Province ought to prioritize actions according to the pollution prevention hierarchy. We also understand that municipal and regional governments across British Columbia are providing thoughtful submissions that will touch on a range of local waste impacts and issues. Through this process we encourage the Province to consider and acknowledge both the common and unique challenges that local governments face with respect to local waste management.

Thank you for considering our input.

Best regards,



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