



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Mayor and City Council

**From:** Bob Gedert, Director  
Austin Resource Recovery Department

**CC:** Marc A. Ott, City Manager  
Robert D. Goode, Assistant City Manager

**Date:** February 12, 2013

**Subject:** **Single-Use Carryout Bag Ordinance Update – Education/Outreach**

The purpose of this memo is to provide the City Council with an update on the implementation of the Single-Use Carryout Bag Ordinance and education/outreach efforts leading up to the March 1, 2013 ordinance effective date.

### **Background**

In March 2012, the City Council approved the Single-Use Carryout Bag Ordinance which regulates the types of bags businesses can distribute at checkout. Shortly after ordinance adoption, staff quickly held stakeholder meetings to develop the rules. Staff also engaged in a public education campaign to reverse misinterpretations of the ordinance. Paid advertisements appeared in Community Impact, the Austin-American Statesman (print and online), Austin Chronicle, Austin Business Journal, Austin Times, Austin Woman Magazine, the Daily Texan, and inside CapMetro buses. Staff also passed out approximately 25,000 free reusable bags at various public events, including at CapMetro's busiest bus stops, at Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Clinic events, and in partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank.

On Oct. 18, 2012, the City Council approved a contract to develop and implement a full scale education/outreach campaign targeting the business community and citizens.

### **Implementation and Education**

After the ordinance and rules passed, calls from the public, feedback from stakeholders such as bag distributors and media stories indicated that the community remained unclear regarding the ordinance's details. Staff focused on educating the businesses and initiating the education/outreach campaign.

### **Business Outreach/Training**

On Nov. 8, 2012, the City Council approved the Department's Rules regarding implementation of the Single-Use Carryout Bag Ordinance and on Nov. 14, 2012, the Department held two free business trainings to discuss the rules and answer questions.



- At the end of December, staff mailed letters to more than 17,500 businesses affected by the ordinance, providing details regarding the ordinance and access to resources
- In addition to the two free business training sessions held in November, staff hosted two workshops on February 7, 2013 and will host an additional free business training on February 27, 2013 at 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at City Hall.
- Staff is working to develop free business support material which will be available online at [bringitaustin.com](http://bringitaustin.com). Materials include:
  - Store signage templates
  - Fact Sheets for businesses and shoppers
  - How-to video for businesses

#### Alternative Compliance Requests

The ordinance and rules allow businesses to request approval of alternative compliant bags, hardship (e.g. delay) of implementation, and approval to implement emergency bag access procedures. To date, of the 18 businesses that submitted requests:

- 8 businesses submitted alternative compliance (only) requests
  - 5 received approval
  - 1 was denied because the bag was a thin compostable bag
  - 1 requires more information before a decision can be rendered
  - 2 are still under review
- 7 businesses submitted hardship (only) requests
  - 4 received approval with compliance expected by Sept. 2013
  - 1 requires more information before a decision can be rendered
  - 2 are still under review
- 1 business submitted and received approval for a combination hardship and alternative compliance request. Compliance is expected by Sept. 2013.
- 1 business submitted and received approval for their emergency access plan.

#### Emergency Access Requests

H-E-B submitted the only emergency access request. The request included plans to remove single-use bags from customer view, charge a \$1.00 fee per transaction as a last resort, continue offering reusable bags for purchase between \$0.20 and \$1.00 per bag, and use 100% of transaction fees for monthly reusable bag giveaways. One-year approval was granted contingent upon H-E-B submitting monthly bag usage reports.

To provide transparency, staff will post a list of requests for alternative compliance, hardship variance, and emergency access including conditions of approval or denial at [bringitaustin.com](http://bringitaustin.com).

#### Public Education Campaign

Prior to launching the public education campaign, staff provided an update to and received input from the Zero Waste Advisory Commission on Jan. 9, 2013.

We also included staff from the Corporate Communications & Public Information Office and the Office of Sustainability in planning efforts. Key elements of the education campaign include:



- **Branding and Messaging.** After testing several brand options with informal focus groups and “person-on-the-street” research, we decided to proceed with the “Bring It Austin” brand. The brand is a call to action that immediately expresses the desired behavior – bringing bags while shopping. The logo mark clearly embodies the image of a bag. In Spanish, the brand is even more direct; Agarra Bolsa translates to “Grab a Bag.”
- **Research.** Phone and online surveys are underway to test messages and create a baseline from which to measure the campaign’s success.
- **Website and Social Media.** BringItAustin.com is under development and is scheduled to launch by Feb. 26. Additionally, the Spanish language site, AgarraBolsaAustin.com is also under development and expected to launch April 1. The campaign will leverage existing social media resources, including ARR’s Facebook page, the City’s Twitter and Pinterest.
- **Media Outreach.** Pitched retailer information and February business training sessions to broadcast and print media. The Austin Business Journal online, Oak Hill Gazette, El Mundo, The Villager, Community Impact, KVUE-TV and KEYE-TV are among the media outlets helping promote the Feb. 7 business training sessions.
- **Outreach.** Contacted local chambers of commerce, area business organizations, and commercial property/mall managers to promote the Feb. 7 business training sessions. Many organizations are distributing e-mails to their members, linking to the registration website, distributing e-newsletter articles, and posting to their social media sites and blogs.
- **Paid Media.** Television, radio, print, online and mobile ad placements have been secured. Television and radio commercials are scheduled to air beginning the week of Feb. 18. The media plan includes both English and Spanish language advertisements.
- **Outreach Events (free bag distribution).** Starting at the Bring It Austin kickoff news conference on Feb. 21, pedi-cab riders will distribute bags and information at targeted locations across Austin for three days. In addition, we are in discussion with event organizers to distribute bags at:
  - African American Heritage Festival (Feb. 23, 2013)
  - Hispanic Austin Leadership/Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (Mar. 2013)
  - Keep Austin Beautiful Clean Sweep (Apr. 13, 2013)
  - Austin Earth Day Festival (Apr. 20, 2013)
  - Viva Streets (May 19, 2013)
- **Press Conference.** Scheduled to take place at Willie Nelson statue starting on February 21<sup>st</sup> at 10 a.m. Securing speakers, developing media materials, and pitching to media.

ARR will post upcoming events where reusable bags are being given away on the Bring It Austin website. In addition, ARR plans to coordinate with area food banks, neighborhood centers and other locations to serve as easy locations for Austin residents to pick up bags.

If you have any question, please feel free to contact me at 974-1926.