



To: Mayor and City Council Members

From: Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer
Ken Snipes, Director, Austin Resource Recovery

Through: Jason Alexander, Chief of Staff
Stephanie Hayden-Howard, LMSW, Assistant City Manager

Subject: Staff Response to Single Use Plastics Resolution No. 20221013-075

Date: December 8, 2022

This memo responds to Resolution No. 20221013-075, which directed the City Manager to implement a strategy, engage with stakeholders, and provide public education campaigns to reduce the use of single-use plastic by restaurants, bars, and other commercial food or beverage establishments; to work with the Austin Restaurant Association and other stakeholders to promote replacing single-use plastics and styrofoam with biodegradable materials; and to explore ways to reduce reliance and use of disposable plastic water bottles by Austin visitors as well as City employees and residents at City-owned facilities.

The City of Austin is committed to reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills and reaching ninety percent landfill diversion by the year 2040. In 2012, Council adopted the Universal Recycling Ordinance to ensure access to recycling at commercial and multifamily properties. It also ensures that food permit holders, such as restaurants and grocery stores, have access to food donation or composting for their employees. Work by staff to reduce waste from single-use plastics at the source is underway and will continue for the foreseeable future.

Incentives and Outreach related to Single-use Plastic Use by Restaurants, Bars, and Commercial Food/Beverage Establishments

Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) offers an existing Zero Waste Business Rebate program to incentivize businesses to improve their waste reduction and diversion practices. Pending availability through the annual budget process, eligible businesses can receive up to \$3,000 for reducing waste beyond the minimum requirements of the Universal Recycling Ordinance. One of the eligible activities includes eliminating or replacing single-use, harmful, or unnecessary plastics and polystyrene foam content with compostable or reusable options.

Additional opportunities exist through ARR's Business Outreach Team, which provides ongoing education on the reduction and reuse of single-use plastic. Targeted education specific to single-use plastics can be considered. ARR hosts an annual ReVerse Pitch competition that frequently includes waste plastics that entrepreneurs turn into new business ideas. There are numerous educational opportunities and resources for businesses and residents alike, including videos and resources for Austinites to avoid single-use carryout bags. Information about easy ways to eliminate single-use plastic or make easy swaps is shared through multiple sources, including blog posts, social and digital media, newsletters, paid advertising, Zero Waste Block leaders, and more.



Austin's Circular Economy program, a partnership between Austin Resource Recovery and the Economic Development Department, works with emerging, new, and existing businesses to incentivize and support circular business practices. Staff from this team will initiate conversations with restaurant delivery services to better understand the feasibility of opting out of single-use items through their platforms.

ARR is currently in the process of updating the Zero Waste Comprehensive Plan. The draft plan identifies increasing participation in circular practices for businesses and restaurants as a near-term priority. The following text has been proposed for inclusion in the draft plan: **"Engage businesses, restaurants, and multifamily properties on the topics of circular economy, economic development, and City code.** Use outreach opportunities to provide an inclusive experience that reflects the full scope of City resources, minimum code standards, economic development opportunities, and recommendations on how to participate in a circular economy."

Local nonprofit Austin Creative Reuse recently focused an initiative on single-use plastics called Restaurant Blitz. This consumer-led audit of Austin area restaurants collected info on single-use plastics use during dining or takeout. Data collected from this effort could be useful for targeting City efforts. The coalition's mission is to support Austin in the transition from single-use disposables to reusable alternatives.

The Office of Sustainability is preparing to launch a regional Food Plan effort. A consultant was recently hired to assist with outreach efforts. A limited focus on restaurant outreach could potentially be appended to outreach activities and data collection.

Disposable Plastic Water Bottle Use by Austin Visitors

The Resolution requested consideration of **"the possibility of providing visitors with a reusable water bottle upon arrival to the Austin airport."** Recent cross-departmental staff brainstorming discussions on this topic reached the following conclusions:

- 1) a large percentage of visitors to AUS already bring their own reusable water bottles,
- 2) the large number of visitors to AUS would make the idea of giving every one of them a reusable water bottle cost-prohibitive,
- 3) giving away unwanted water bottles could result in them being thrown in the trash, counter to the goals of this effort, and
- 4) a better way to address this challenge might be to pursue refillable water bottle stations at prominent visitor locations. AUS already offers a total of 9 water bottle refilling stations to customers.

For the reasons outlined above, staff is unable to support this recommendation.

Disposable Plastic Water Bottle Use and Waste Reduction at City-owned Facilities

The City has direct control over its own waste reduction activities and can undertake initiatives to serve as an example to other commercial and institutional generators of zero waste best practices.



All City of Austin employees have an influence on changing the culture within City government and promotion of zero waste throughout the community.

It is the policy of the City of Austin to avoid the purchase and use of single-use plastics at City facilities, where possible. Existing City Council Resolution number 20080522-024 prohibits "the purchase by the City of disposable plastic water bottles for use within governmental facilities within City Hall." Certain instances of the purchase and use of bottled water are exempted from this, such as for emergency purposes or for use by field personnel where other options are not available.

Austin Resource Recovery and Office of Sustainability staff worked closely together to develop a **Zero Waste at City Facilities** organization-wide policy, which is in final review. The policy ensures that all City employees receive zero waste training and educational materials at least once per year, to be provided by ARR. This policy is intended to ensure:

- City employees are aware of the City's policy related to avoidance of the purchase of bottled water,
- City employees are provided access to methods of landfill diversion,
- City employees make good faith efforts to participate in landfill diversion activities,
- City employees are provided with education on zero waste best practices,
- City facility zero waste data collection and studies are supported,
- City employees with job duties directly related to the collection of landfill trash, recyclable, or compostable materials discard them appropriately.

In addition, the Office of Sustainability recently launched an employee training entitled "**How To Have a Healthy Zero Waste City Event.**" Three training sessions were offered in 2022, which were attended by 161 staff from 10 departments. Plans are underway to repeat the training annually. In addition to suggesting healthy food choices, a large segment of the training focuses on composting and alternatives to disposable utensils and service ware. In addition to continuing to offer the training in 2023, City staff from the Office of Sustainability and Austin Resource Recovery are currently working to develop and maintain a tool that could be used by City employees to help identify catering and food vendor options with sustainable and equitable practices and menu options. The database will ask about vendor service ware options and single-use plastic practices.

Staff will continue to reflect and develop strategies to achieve our broader zero waste goals. For questions or further information, please contact: Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer at (512) 974-7902 or Ken Snipes, ARR Director at (512) 974-1926.

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