

## Use of consultants stir cup controversy

City criticized for spending \$50,000 on studies to come up with recycling solution for coffee cups

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CITY HALL BUREAU CHIEF

Toronto's war on take-out coffee cups took a fresh turn yesterday as city officials defended - and critics slammed - the use of consultants before the debate heads to council this summer.

So far, with the support of a 40-member task force of industry and other officials, the city has commissioned \$50,000 in studies to figure out how best to divert 350 million coffee cups a year from landfill.

A decision on an additional study of the economic impact from any city measures is expected in a few days.

With advice from the task force, city officials are set to report back to the public works committee in June on options to recycle paper coffee cups, now barred from the blue box because of their polystyrene lids. The issue heads to council for a decision in July.

"This is \$50,000 of due diligence and proper research to make sure we have the best public policy possible," says Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker (Ward 38, Scarborough Centre), chairman of the public works committee. "It's money spent to make sure the city does the best thing for the environment and for the taxpayer."

Under a grants program from Waste Diversion Ontario to promote blue-box recycling, the city plans to apply for funding to cover half of the consultant fees.

But Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong (Ward 34, Don Valley East), part of council's right-wing minority, questioned the spending.

"We have umpteen numbers of bureaucrats who claim to be experts in this field," he said. "They should be able to work with industry to come up with a solution without having to go to consultants."

Geoff Rathbone, the city's general manager of solid waste, said there are no simple answers on how to handle coffee cups, hence the need for outside specialists.

One study is looking at the potential for paper mills and other end users to accept hot-drink paper cups with polystyrene lids. Currently, the city ships its milk cartons and juice boxes to South Korea for recycling, but would prefer to find a home-based mill that could recycle the coffee cups and lids as well.

"If we find an interest by mills ... it could lead to infrastructure investment and green jobs," Mr. Rathbone said.

Another study is looking at the possible redesign of the city's four recycling plants so they could sort the plastic lid from the cup. A third study is assessing ways to change consumer behaviour so coffee drinkers learn to toss the lid before putting the cup in the recycle bin.

Industry spokespeople remain adamant that their existing cups are recyclable, with no need for tough measures such as a city ban on paper cups with lids or a requirement for fast-food outlets to provide a 20-cent refund to consumers who fill up with a travel mug. Last December, council held off a vote on those measures, giving industry and city staff more time to find a compromise.

"The city recommendations are wrong-headed," said Stephanie Jones, Ontario vice-president of the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association. "It won't move the needle on the environment and will impose additional costs on businesses and consumers."

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