

Restaurant & Grocery Store Community Engagement on 2014 Proposed Recycling Initiatives

June 27, 2014

Per Mayor Murray's direction, SPU gathered community input on two proposed ordinances that will affect minority-owned restaurants and grocery stores in Seattle. The purpose of the project was to learn about potential impacts on their businesses and any concerns they have, and get a sense of how SPU can provide support to help them adjust to the changes if the ordinances are passed into law.

- Effective January 2015, food scraps, pizza boxes, and food soiled paper towels and napkins would be banned from commercial garbage.
- Effective July 2015, all food service businesses would be required to use compostable food service ware for single-use containers (clamshells, boxes, soup cups, etc.), with the exception of drinking cups and lids.

Engagement Strategies

1. Door-to-door interviews with 43 restaurants and 11 grocery stores spread across 9 neighborhoods. Interpretation provided in Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Somali, Amharic, and Tigrinya. See Appendix A for a complete list of businesses interviewed.
2. Interviews with representatives from 7 community-based organizations serving the target populations. See Appendix B for a complete list of organizations interviewed.

Overall Reaction

For the most part, businesses are not opposed to the idea of composting or using compostable food packaging. Many interviewed are already composting and using some types of compostable packaging. However, they have serious concerns about the practicality of each ban, as outlined in the tables below.

Cost is the biggest concern for most businesses. This is a really significant issue right now because businesses are already upset over the additional costs they're facing due to recent City regulations, such as the \$15 minimum wage, paid sick leave, plastic bag ban, and the proposed head tax. Businesses in some neighborhoods also feel they've lost customers because of the City's choices around eliminating the free ride zone, street car construction, and extending paid parking hours. Businesses are opposed to any regulations that will hurt their bottom line even further. Some expect to be driven out of business by City regulations. Others are putting a hold on their expansion plans in Seattle and looking to other cities.

Ban on Food Scraps in Commercial Garbage

Community Concerns	SPU Recommendations
<p>1. Increased Costs: Compost collection, compostable bags, and staff time to sort waste may increase costs. Businesses would like the City to subsidize compost collection and/or reduce overall garbage and recycling costs.</p> <p>Some businesses also have the perception that Cedar Grove has a monopoly and is able to keep the cost of collection high due to lack of competition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a strong focus in outreach on providing assistance to help businesses optimize their waste systems. • Continue providing free bins and translated signage for kitchens and customer areas, potentially expanding beyond restaurants. • Educate businesses about the City’s role in regulating compost collection rates, and provide a list of haulers approved for compost collection.
<p>2. Contamination from Customer & Public Use of Waste Bins: Businesses don’t want to be held responsible and fined if customers, event attendees and the public dispose of waste incorrectly in their bins.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ordinance language currently specifies that businesses will not be fined if the food waste is from “public place” bins. • Educate businesses about what is considered “public place” waste, and provide instructions on how to contest warnings and fines. • Include a focus in public education on how to properly dispose of waste in restaurants. • Facilitate peer-to-peer learning opportunities in partnership with businesses from different communities that are already doing a great job.
<p>3. Lack of Enforcement: Businesses that comply with the law are at a competitive disadvantage if neighboring businesses don’t. They stress the need for more enforcement through increased inspections and fines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase SPU resources allocated to inspections. • Incorporate the ban requirements into food service handling permit classes and tests.
<p>4. Lack of Space for Compost Bins: Some businesses have small kitchens, small customers eating areas, and/or limited outdoor space and don’t feel they can accommodate a third bin.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the selection of free kitchen and customer bins to include compact systems. • Encourage businesses with limited outdoor space to share a bin with a neighboring business.
<p>5. Resistance from Property Owners/Managers: Property owners/managers may refuse to add compost collection. Some businesses don’t feel confident communicating with their property owners/managers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer to contact property owners/managers on behalf of businesses that request help. • Include an educational component into the outreach plan focused on property owners/managers.
<p>6. Communication with Haulers: Businesses are reluctant to compost due to poor customer service from waste haulers. Particularly business owners who are limited-English speaking have a difficult time communicating with the haulers to address concerns or to set up collection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer to help businesses communicate with haulers to establish collection service. • Encourage haulers to increase their language capacity to assist limited-English speaking customers.
<p>7. Support for Staff Training: Businesses would like in-language training for staff on how to sort waste.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide in-language onsite staff training through SPU’s Green Business Program.
<p>8. Increased Odors and Lack of Cleanliness: Businesses are concerned about compost not being picked up frequently enough, resulting in odors and a lack of cleanliness in and around their businesses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of the education, include information on frequency of pickup options and pricing.

Ban on Food Scraps in Residential Garbage

Although the primary focus of the engagement project was the impacts on businesses, two community organizations also offered comments on the impacts of the proposed ban on food scraps in residential garbage.

- Some older multifamily buildings don't have a shared garbage room and some are on the Clear Alleys Program. This will make it very difficult to monitor resident compliance.
- Landlords should not be held accountable for tenant behavior. They can't be expected to hire staff to monitor the waste receptacles at their multifamily rental properties. There is also no practical way for a rental owner to enforce such a rule for single-family rentals.
- If this law passes, SPU should revisit its policy of not allowing tenants to have accounts in their names. There will be more compliance if the tenants are responsible for their own waste bills.
- SPU should put a lot of effort into educating tenants about proper waste disposal.

Organizations recommend that SPU extend its community engagement process to rental and multifamily property owners and managers before making a decision on the ban. The Rental Housing Association in particular would like a more collaborative relationship with SPU on these types of issues.

Transition to Compostable Food Service Ware

Community Concerns	SPU Recommendations
<p>1. Increased Costs: The cost of compostable food service ware is significantly higher than recyclable equivalents. It will be a serious cost increase for many businesses, which they'll have to pass on to customers through higher prices. Businesses would like the City to subsidize the cost of compostable food packaging.</p> <p>Some businesses feel that Cedar Grove's testing process hinders competition and is keeping prices high.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a thorough cost analysis of compostable versus recyclable food service packaging, including performance as part of the assessment. • Prepare a cost comparison sheet to share with businesses.
<p>2. Lack of High Performing Compostable Products: Compostable food service packaging isn't strong enough to contain some foods, particularly hot and liquid foods. If there are high performing products, they're not available in stores.</p> <p>Businesses don't have time to search for and test new products.</p> <p>Some businesses purchase custom containers and will need information on how to test their containers to make sure they're compostable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local businesses to test the performance of compostable products in a variety of real restaurant settings. • Include exemptions in the Director's Rule for packaging that doesn't have high performing compostable options. • Work with restaurant supply stores to ensure restaurants have access to high performing compostable products locally. • Provide businesses with a list of compostable options and information on how to submit custom products for testing.
<p>3. Lack of Enforcement: Businesses that comply with the law are at a competitive disadvantage if neighboring businesses don't. They stress the need for more enforcement through increased inspections and fines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase SPU resources allocated to inspections. • Incorporate the food packaging requirements into food service handling permit classes and tests.

Proposed Ethnic Businesses & Underserved Communities Outreach Plan

Based on input from community organizations and businesses, SPU proposes the following outreach activities to educate ethnic businesses and the community about the changes in regulations, if passed:

1. Promote City Council hearing dates to businesses and community organizations. (summer 2014)

2. Research & Planning (summer & fall 2014)

- Conduct an analysis of the cost and performance of compostable versus recyclable food service packaging options.
- Determine what food packaging products to exempt in the Director’s Rule.
- Explore the possibility of incorporating the food waste ban and compostable packaging requirements into food service handling permit classes and tests.
- Identify businesses in ethnic communities to serve as models and peer-to-peer mentors for other businesses.
- Reach out to community organizations to get additional input on strategies that should be taken to reach ethnic businesses and communities.
- Work with local restaurant supply stores to increase their stock of high performing compostable products.

3. Outreach Implementation (fall 2014 through 2015/2016)

- Accompany the mass media campaign with in-language ethnic media outreach, including television, radio, newspapers and social media.
- Focus the SPU Green Business Program’s solid waste outreach on educating businesses about the new regulations and providing technical assistance to help them adjust to the changes. This outreach would include in-language site visits and trainings for businesses.
- Contract with community-based and faith-based organizations to focus specific outreach on ethnic businesses and communities.
- Continue providing free bins and translated signage to restaurants, and consider expanding to nonprofits and other small businesses.
- Conduct outreach to property owners/managers.
- Educate the broader public about not only the residential and multifamily ban on food waste, but also how to sort waste properly at restaurants. Focus education on not just *how* to sort waste, but also *why* it's important to the environment and the community.
- Work with the Seattle School District to develop a method of educating students about how and why to sort their waste.

Appendix A

Restaurants & Grocery Stores Interviewed

Neighborhood	Ethnicity	# Interviewed	Businesses Interviewed
Little Saigon	Vietnamese	5	ChuMinh Tofu & Veggie Deli, Seattle Deli, Saigon Bakery & Bubble Tea, I Love Wasabi, Pho So 1
International District	Vietnamese	1	Fu Lin, House of Kong, Szechawan Noodle Bowl, Tai Tung,
	Chinese	6	Fuji Bakery, Fuji Sushi, Kename, Maekawa, Anonymous
	Japanese	5	<i>Grocery Stores:</i> Lam's Seafood Market, Rising Produce, Ping's Dumpling House
Pioneer Square	Unknown (phone and email)	4	Gaba Sushi, Delicatus, Little Uncle, Sprout
Capitol Hill	Asian & Pacific Islander	1	Marination Station
Central Area	Ethiopian	6	Saba Ethiopian Cuisine, Lalibela Ethiopian Restaurant, Chef Bar & Restaurant <i>Grocery Stores:</i> Goha Grocery, Tana Market, East African Imports & Restaurant
Southeast Seattle	Somali	6	Hilal Coffee, Juba Café, Emerald City Fish & Chips, The
	African American	3	Original Philly's, Willie's Taste of Soul <i>Grocery Stores:</i> Al-Noor Grocery Halal Meat, Ayan Grocery, Haramain Mini Market, Hamdiwayne Mini Market
South Park	Hispanic/Latino	3	Jalisco, Muy Macho, El Naranjo (taco truck)
Greenwood	Hispanic/Latino	2	Malena's Taco Shop <i>Grocery Stores:</i> Mendoza's Mexican Mercado
University District	Korean	6	EJ's Burger, A Burger Place, Orange King, Greenhouse
	Southeast Asian	3	Korean, Best of Bento, Haagen Daas, Shalimar Restaurant,
	Arab/Middle Eastern	2	Bombay Grill, Cedars Restaurant, Cedars of Lebanon,
	Hispanic/Latino	1	Shwarma King, Guanacos Tacos
TOTAL		54	43 restaurants; 11 grocery stores

Appendix B

Community-Based Organizations Interviewed

Organization	Communities Served
1. Friends of Little Saigon	Little Saigon businesses
2. Chinatown-International District BIA	International District businesses
3. Seattle Chinatown-International District PDA	International District residents and businesses
4. Raja for Africa	Somali community
5. Rainier Beach Merchants Association	Rainier Beach businesses
6. Casa Latina	Hispanic/Latino community
7. El Centro de la Raza	Hispanic/Latino community
8. Rental Housing Association of WA (RHA)	Rental property owners and managers

The following organizations and individuals did not respond to requests for interviews:

1. African Chamber of Commerce of the Pacific NW
2. Arab Alliance Chamber of Commerce of WA
3. Black Dollar Days Task Force
4. Central Area Chamber of Commerce
5. Columbia City Business Association
6. Ethiopian Community Mutual Association
7. Greater Seattle Chinese Chamber of Commerce
8. Greater Seattle Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce
9. Japanese American Chamber of Commerce
10. Korean Chamber of Commerce
11. Shen Consulting, Inc. (Albert Shen)
12. Somali Community Services of Seattle
13. The U District Partnership
14. Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
15. Vietnamese Friendship Association
16. WA State Commission on Hispanic Affairs

Appendix C

Questionnaire: *Restaurant & Grocery Store* Input on Proposed Recycling Initiatives

Business Name:	
Business Type:	<input type="checkbox"/> Restaurant <input type="checkbox"/> Grocery Store
Zip Code:	
Ethnicity:	
Language:	

1. What's your position at the business?

- Owner
- Manager
- Onsite Shift Manager
- Other: _____

2. How many employees work at this location?

3. How does your business dispose of garbage?

- Have it picked up at your business
- Take it to the dump/transfer station
- Take it home
- Other: _____

4. Who pays the garbage bill at your business?

- Restaurant/Store
- Property Manager
- Building Owner
- Other: _____

5. Does your business currently have compost collection service, or access to a compost container already set up at your building?

6. How do you currently dispose of food scraps from your kitchen? How about the food scraps left by customers?

7. If the City passes a new law banning food scraps, pizza boxes, and food soiled paper towels and napkins from the garbage, would this affect your business? If yes, how?

Prompts (if needed):

- Increased cost to the business due to collection service, containers, bags, etc.
- Saving money due to lower cost of compost collection compared to garbage
- Lack of space for food scrap containers in disposal, kitchen and/or customer areas
- Incorporating into staff training
- Time needed for sorting

8. What could the City do to make it easier for your business to begin separating out food scraps, pizza boxes, and paper towels and napkins?

Prompts (if needed):

- Free food waste bins
- Free translated signage
- On-site staff training
- Customer education
- Help getting the building owner/property manager to provide collection
- Help setting up food waste collection

9. If the City passes a new law requiring use of 100% compostable food service ware for single-use containers (except drinking cups and lids), would this affect your business? If yes, how?

Prompts (if needed):

- Cost of equivalent products
- Availability of equivalent products
- Time needed for finding and testing new products
- Branding/recognition associated with current food service materials
- Increased cost to customers

10. What could the City do to make it easier for your business to change to all compostable products?

Prompts (if needed):

- On-site education to help restaurants understand the requirements and options
- Providing information about available compostable products
- Working with restaurant supply stores to stock compostable products

11. What's the best way for the City of Seattle to inform your business about current and future recycling and composting requirements?

Mail

Email

City website

City-sponsored meetings or events

In-person site visits

Information at trade shows

Information at restaurant supply stores (Restaurant Depot, Cash & Carry, Other?)

Business organizations (Chambers, Community Organizations, BIAs, etc.)

Other: _____

12. In what language(s) does your business prefer to receive information from the City?

13. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions to share?

14. Please provide your contact information if you would like to receive notices about future hearing dates, where you could provide feedback on these proposed laws directly to the Seattle City Council.

Appendix D

Questionnaire: *Community Organization* Input on Proposed Recycling Initiatives

Organization Name:	
Type:	<input type="checkbox"/> Business organization <input type="checkbox"/> Other community organization
Address or Zip Code:	

1. What's your position at the organization?
__ Executive Director
__ Other: _____
2. What audiences does your organization serve?
3. How does your organization support the business community?
4. If the City passes a new law banning food scraps, pizza boxes, and food soiled paper towels and napkins from the garbage, would this affect the communities you serve? If yes, how?
Prompts (if needed):
 - Increased cost to the business due to collection service, containers, bags, etc.
 - Saving money due to lower cost of compost collection compared to garbage
 - Lack of space for food scrap containers in disposal, kitchen and/or customer areas
 - Incorporating into staff training
 - Time needed for sorting
5. What could the City do to make it easier for the communities you serve to begin separating out food scraps, pizza boxes, and paper towels and napkins?
Prompts (if needed):
 - Free food waste bins
 - Free translated signage
 - On-site staff training
 - Customer education
 - Help getting the building owner/property manager to provide collection
 - Help setting up food waste collection
6. If the City passes a new law requiring use of 100% compostable food service ware for single-use containers (except drinking cups and lids), would this affect the communities your serve? If yes, how?
Prompts (if needed):
 - Cost of equivalent products
 - Availability of equivalent products
 - Time needed for finding and testing new products
 - Branding/recognition associated with current food service materials
 - Increased cost to customers
7. What could the City do to make it easier for businesses to change to all compostable products?
Prompts (if needed):
 - On-site education to help restaurants understand the requirements and options
 - Providing information about available compostable products
 - Working with restaurant supply stores to stock compostable products

8. Can you recommend some specific things the City can do to make sure the communities you serve understand these rule changes?

Prompts (if needed):

- At Your Service newsletter
- CurbWaste & Conserve
- Direct mail
- In-person site visits
- City-sponsored stakeholder meetings
- City website
- Translation and interpretation (how has it been used in the past and why was it successful?)
- Flyers/Brochures (recommendations on how to distribute?)
- Community organizations (specific examples?)
- Local media (specific examples?)

9. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions to share?

10. Please provide your contact information if you would like to receive notices about future hearing dates, where you could provide feedback on these proposed laws directly to the Seattle City Council.