



Memorandum

TO: RULES AND OPEN
GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: Councilmember Cohen

SUBJECT: Support the California Plastic Waste
Reduction Regulations Ballot Initiative

DATE: 6/8/22

Approved

Date 5/31/22

RECOMMENDATION

1. Adopt a position of support for the California Plastic Waste Reduction Regulations Ballot Initiative, an eligible ballot measure which would help reduce waste from single-use plastics, expand access to recycling, and generate billions of dollars each year for climate programs, wildlife protection, and environmental justice.
2. Direct the City Manager to draft a letter that conveys the City's support for the initiative and distribute the letter to stakeholders.
3. Place this item on the 6/14/2022 City Council agenda for consideration.

BACKGROUND

Each year, nearly 40 million tons of plastic end up rotting in landfills around the world or decomposing in our oceans— half of which are single-use plastics that are used for just a few minutes before being thrown away. These plastics never fully break down; instead, over the years, they pose a threat to wildlife on land and sea, they find their way into our food and water, and—perhaps worst of all—they continue to emit dangerous greenhouse gases as they degrade. The Center for International Environmental Law estimates that in less than ten years, greenhouse gas emissions from plastics could reach nearly one and a half billion tons per year. That's roughly the equivalent of all the coal power plants in North America burning fossil fuels for an entire year.

It's clear that any effort to make our state more sustainable and fight climate change must address the harmful impacts of plastics on our environment. We have an opportunity today to support an initiative that will help us achieve that goal. The California Plastic Waste Reduction Regulations Initiative will reduce the amount of single-use plastics going into our landfills and waterways and help generate billions of dollars to protect our communities from the impacts of climate change and pollution, while ensuring that the cost is shouldered by the petrochemical

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corporations producing the plastics rather than by small businesses or consumers. It will complement the strategies outlined in the Climate Smart San José plan approved by the Council in 2018, build on staff's work to reach our sustainability goals, and serve as a shield for our most vulnerable residents—for the communities that, for years, have disproportionately borne the repercussions of pollution and waste.

We need policies at the federal, state, and local level that recognize the gravity of our climate crisis and take real steps to address it. The broad consensus in the scientific community is that recycling, simply put, isn't going to cut it anymore; the only way to mitigate the impact of single-use plastics on our environment is to reduce their proliferation. The California Plastic Waste Reduction Regulations Initiative will bring us closer to that goal. In the process, it will boost our city's progress towards our Climate Smart goals, protect our residents from the health and environmental impacts of plastic waste, and help us build a better, cleaner, more sustainable San José.

Below is further information on the ballot measure from the city's Intergovernmental Relations Department:

The California Recycling and Plastic Pollution Reduction Act of 2020 is currently an eligible ballot measure but will not be qualified as a ballot measure until June 30, 2022. Discussions are underway in the state legislature around reaching a compromise ahead of that deadline; support for the ballot measure from cities like San José will help the legislature work towards a productive compromise. The measure has gained considerable support from a host of City Councilmembers in Los Angeles and from the County of Los Angeles, in addition to the Corn Refiners Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, Save The Bay, Surfrider Foundation and The Nature Conservancy. Principal opposition to this measure is from the California Retailers Association, California Business Roundtable, and California Chamber of Commerce, as well as petrochemical corporations and manufacturers.

If enacted, this measure would:

- Prohibit food vendors, including restaurants and grocery stores, from using Styrofoam and other plastic-foam takeout containers.
- Require manufacturers to reduce to the “maximum extent possible” the plastic packaging and single-use products they create. That could require them to offer more reusable containers.
- Create a fee of up to 1 cent for manufacturers on every plastic item or product with plastic packaging. The money would be used to build recycling and composting facilities, and to pay for restoration projects such as beach cleanups.
- Revenue from the fee would be distributed to CalRecycle, the California Natural Resources Agency, and local governments as follows:

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- 50% to CalRecycle for implementing and enforcing the measure and providing funds for statewide recycling, reduction, and composting efforts;
- 30% to the California Natural Resources Agency for state and local grants to address the environmental impacts of plastic pollution, such as habitat restoration; and
- 20% to local governments for recycling and composting programs and plastic pollution mitigation.