

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section summarizes the characteristics of the proposed ordinance and the significant environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and residual impacts associated with the proposed Single Use Bag Ban Ordinance.

PROJECT SYNOPSIS

Project Sponsor

County of San Mateo Health System
Environmental Health Services
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Project Characteristics

The proposed Single Use Bag Ban Ordinance (“Proposed Ordinance”) would regulate the use of paper and plastic single-use carryout bags within the participating municipalities. Participating municipalities include the County of San Mateo and 24 cities in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties (see full list of participating municipalities in Section 2.0, *Project Description*). For the purposes of this Program EIR, the geographical limits of unincorporated San Mateo County and all of the participating municipalities listed above shall be known as the “Study Area”. The Proposed Ordinance would apply to all retail establishments located within the limits of the Study Area, including those selling clothing, food, and personal items directly to the customer. It would not apply to restaurants. The Proposed Ordinance would (1) prohibit the free distribution of single-use carryout paper and plastic bags and (2) require retail establishments to charge customers for recycled paper bags and reusable bags at the point of sale. The minimum charge would be ten cents (\$0.10) per paper bag until December 31, 2014 and twenty-five cents (\$0.25) per paper bag on or after January 1, 2015.

The intent of the Proposed Ordinance is to reduce the environmental impacts related to the use of single-use carryout bags, and to promote a shift toward the use of reusable bags. It is anticipated that by prohibiting single-use plastic carryout bags and requiring a mandatory charge for each paper bag distributed by retailers, the Proposed Ordinance would provide a disincentive to customers to request paper bags when shopping at regulated stores and promote a shift to the use of reusable bags by retail customers, while reducing the number of single-use plastic and paper bags within the Study Area.

Single-use plastic carryout bags are defined as bags made from petroleum or bio-based plastic that are less than 2.25 mils thick (0.00225 inches). The Proposed Ordinance would prohibit retailers from distributing both petroleum and bio-based single-use carryout plastic bags at the point of sale. The Proposed Ordinance would not prohibit the distribution of plastic “product bags”, as defined, which includes bags without handles provided to a customer (1) to transport prepared food, produce, bulk food or meat from a department within a store to the point of sale; (2) to hold prescription medication dispensed from a pharmacy; or (3) to segregate food or



merchandise that could damage or contaminate other food or merchandise when placed together in a reusable bag or recycled paper bag. The Proposed Ordinance would not apply to restaurants and other food service providers, allowing them to provide plastic bags to customers for prepared take-out food intended for consumption off of the food provider's premises.

As noted above, the Proposed Ordinance would require regulated retailers to impose a mandatory charge for each paper carryout bag provided. Retail establishments would be required to keep a complete and accurate record (including documents of the purchase and sale of any recycled paper bag or reusable bag) for a minimum period of three years from the date of purchase and sale. The record must be available for inspection during regular business hours by any County employee authorized to enforce this part at no cost to the County. The charge would be retained by the affected stores to compensate the stores for increased costs related to compliance with the Proposed Ordinance, actual costs associated with providing recyclable paper carryout bags or reusable bags, and costs associated with a store's educational materials or education campaign encouraging the use of reusable bags.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The County of San Mateo's and the participating cities' objectives for the Proposed Ordinance include:

- Reducing the amount of single-use plastic bags in trash loads (e.g., landfills), in conformance with the trash load reduction requirements of the NPDES Municipal Regional Permit
- Reducing the environmental impacts related to single-use plastic carryout bags, such as impacts to biological resources (including marine environments), water quality and utilities (solid waste)
- Deterring the use of paper bags by customers in the respective jurisdictions
- Promoting a shift toward the use of reusable carryout bags by retail customers in the respective jurisdictions
- Avoiding litter and the associated adverse impacts to stormwater systems, aesthetics and the marine environment (San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean)

ALTERNATIVES

As required by CEQA, the EIR examines a range of alternatives to the proposed project that feasibly attain most of the basic project objectives. These alternatives are described and evaluated in Section 6.0, *Alternatives*. Studied alternatives include:

- **Alternative 1: No Project** - *The no project alternative assumes that the Single Use Bag Ban Ordinance would not occur. The existing retail establishments would continue to provide single-use bags free of charge to the customers.*



- **Alternative 2: Ban on Single-Use Plastic Bags at all Retail Establishments** - This alternative would prohibit all retail establishments in the Study Area from providing single-use plastic bags to customers at the point of sale, including restaurants and other retailers not covered by the Proposed Ordinance.
- **Alternative 3: Mandatory Charge of \$0.25 for Paper Bags** - This alternative would continue to prohibit retail establishments (except restaurants) in the Study Area from providing single-use plastic bags to customers at the point of sale, but would increase the mandatory charge for single-use paper bags from \$0.10 to \$0.25.
- **Alternative 4: Ban on Both Single-use Plastic and Paper Carryout Bags** - This alternative would prohibit all retail establishments (except restaurants) in the Study Area from providing single-use plastic and paper carryout bags to customers at the point of sale.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Table ES-1 includes a brief description of the environmental issues relative to the Proposed Ordinance, the identified significant environmental impacts, proposed mitigation measures, and residual impacts. Impacts are categorized by classes. Class I impacts are defined as significant, unavoidable adverse impacts which require a statement of overriding considerations to be issued pursuant to the *CEQA Guidelines* §15093 if the project is approved. Class II impacts are significant adverse impacts that can be feasibly mitigated to less than significant levels and which require findings to be made under Section 15091 of the *CEQA Guidelines*. Class III impacts are considered less than significant impacts, and Class IV impacts are beneficial impacts.



| Table ES-1 Summary of Significant Environmental Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Residual Impacts | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Impact | Mitigation Measures | Significance After Mitigation |
| AIR QUALITY | | |
| Impact AQ-1 With a shift toward reusable bags, the Proposed Ordinance is expected to substantially reduce the number of single-use carryout bags, thereby reducing the total number of bags manufactured and the overall air pollutant emissions associated with bag manufacture, transportation and use. Therefore, air quality impacts related to alteration of processing activities would be Class IV, <i>beneficial</i> . | Mitigation is not required. | The impact would be beneficial without mitigation. |
| Impact AQ-2 With an expected increase in the use of recyclable paper bags, the Proposed Ordinance would generate air pollutant emissions associated with an incremental increase in truck trips to deliver recycled paper and reusable carryout bags to local retailers. However, emissions would not exceed BAAQMD operational significance thresholds. Therefore, operational air quality impacts would be Class III, <i>less than significant</i> . | Mitigation is not required. | Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation. |
| BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES | | |
| Impact BIO-1 Although the Proposed Ordinance would incrementally increase the number of recycled paper and reusable bags within the Study Area, the reduction in the amount of single-use plastic bags would be expected to reduce the overall amount of litter entering the coastal and bay habitat, thus reducing litter-related impacts to sensitive wildlife species and sensitive habitats. This is a Class IV, <i>beneficial, effect</i> . | Mitigation is not required. | The impact would be beneficial without mitigation. |
| GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS | | |
| Impact GHG-1 The Proposed Ordinance would increase the number of recyclable paper bags used in the Study Area. Implementation of the Proposed Ordinance would incrementally increase GHG emissions compared to existing conditions. However, emissions would not exceed thresholds of significance. Impacts | Mitigation is not required. | The impact would be less than significant without mitigation. |



| Table ES-1 Summary of Significant Environmental Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Residual Impacts | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| Impact | Mitigation Measures | Significance After Mitigation |
| would be Class III, <i>less than significant</i> . | | |
| Impact GHG-2 The Proposed Ordinance would not conflict with any applicable plan, policy or regulation of an agency adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of GHGs. Impacts would be Class III, <i>less than significant</i> . | Mitigation is not required. | The impact would be less than significant without mitigation. |
| HYDROLOGY/WATER QUALITY | | |
| Impact HWQ-1 The Proposed Ordinance would incrementally increase the number of recycled paper and reusable bags used in the Study Area, but the reduction in the overall number of single-use plastic bags used in the Study Area would reduce the amount of litter and waste entering storm drains. This would improve local surface water quality, a Class IV, <i>beneficial</i> , effect. | Mitigation is not required. | The impact would be beneficial without mitigation. |
| Impact HWQ-2 A shift toward reusable bags and potential increase in the use of recyclable paper bags could potentially increase the use of chemicals associated with their production, which could degrade water quality in some instances and locations. However, bag manufacturers would be required to adhere to existing regulations, including NPDES Permit requirements, AB 258, and the California Health and Safety Code. Therefore, impacts to water quality from altering bag processing activities would be Class III, <i>less than significant</i> . | Mitigation is not required. | Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation. |
| UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS | | |
| Impact U-1 The increase of reusable bags within the Study Area as a result of the Proposed Ordinance would incrementally increase water demand due to washing of reusable bags by a negligible amount. However, sufficient water supplies are available to meet the demand created by reusable bags. Therefore, water supply impacts would be Class III, <i>less than significant</i> . | Mitigation is not required. | Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation. |
| Impact U-2 Water use associated with washing reusable bags would increase negligibly in the Study Area resulting in an increase in wastewater | Mitigation is not required. | Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation. |



**Table ES-1
 Summary of Significant Environmental Impacts,
 Mitigation Measures, and Residual Impacts**

| Impact | Mitigation Measures | Significance After Mitigation |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| generation. Projected wastewater flows would remain within the capacity of the wastewater collection and treatment system of the Study Area, and would not exceed applicable wastewater treatment requirements of the RWQCB. Impacts would be Class III, <i>less than significant</i> . | | |
| Impact U-3 The Proposed Ordinance would alter the solid waste generation associated with increased paper bag use in the Study Area. However, projected future solid waste generation would remain within the capacity of regional landfills. Impacts would therefore be Class III, <i>less than significant</i> . | Mitigation is not required. | Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation. |

