

EEC Recommendation on Straw Use Regulation in Oak Park
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Background:

Regulation of plastic straw use around the nation has gained significant momentum with rising awareness of the environmental impact from single-use plastic straws. Several municipalities, such as Malibu, Seattle, Miami, and others have gained attention for their bans on plastic straws and other single-use plastics. Oak Park has always been a progressive community and wants to understand the potential for crafting regulation of single use plastic straws.

What was done:

At the request of the Oak Park Trustees, EEC has conducted a 5-month review of the burden of straw use on our environment. The EEC reached out to community groups that were actively examining the issue, like League of Women Voters and Interfaith Green Network, to get a community input and understand a variety of viewpoints. The EEC, LWV, and IGN also reached out to experts in the field, such as Andrea Densham (Shedd the Straw), Surfrider foundation, and Adam Ballard (Access Living), to understand the impact on under-represented constituencies. We compiled the input from surveys, personal interviews, examples from other municipalities, and analysis into background presentation and list of options (Attachment A). As part of the analysis, the group discussed benchmarks from Malibu, Seattle, and others as implementation benchmarks for Oak Park to learn from. A selected set of implementation materials were collected (Attachment B).

The team developed a select set of options for Oak Park that included regulation of single-use straws only and regulation of a variety of single use plastics. As a final step, the team took the additional step of creating a draft legislation to understand potential blind-spots in implementation. To create the draft legislation, the team interviewed the Village CFO to get his input on the various options and key considerations for the Village (Attachments C and D).

Recommendation:

The EEC, Interfaith Green Network, and League of Women Voters recommend that the Village of Oak Park pursue measures to curb the use of straws and other single-use plastics. Specifically, the EEC recommends the following 3 actions targeted toward restaurants and villagers:

1. Educate restaurant staff and villagers on use of straws and other single-use plastics –Single use plastic items, including straws, plastic lids, containers, and utensils, are together contribute to pollution, and most restaurant staff are not aware of their impact.
2. Standardize to “upon request only” dispensing for single-use plastic items – Customer request is seen as the least offensive way to address groups who may require single-use plastics for physical, social, or economic reasons.
3. Implement data collection of single-use plastic inventory – Restaurants EEC, the Village Manager, and community groups should work together to collect baseline data about single-use plastics from Oak Park businesses. These data can be used to assess the plastic consumption.