

City's executive committee holds onto bag tax

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Councillor Paul Ainslie. (Toronto Sun files)

A bid by Councillor Paul Ainslie to trash Toronto's five-cent bag fee got tossed out Monday night.

Mayor Rob Ford's executive committee voted 10 to 3 not to ask city staff for a way to kill the "bag tax."

Ford, Deputy Mayor Doug Holyday and Ainslie were the three votes in favour of finding a way to scrap the fee brought in by former mayor David Miller's city council.

The committee did approve Councillor Michelle Berardinetti's request for the city to find a way to encourage businesses to donate the five-cent fee towards the city's tree canopy efforts including the fight against the emerald ash borer.

Ford and Holyday were the lone votes against that effort. The mayor has vowed to try to kill the fee at some point this year.

Ainslie — who voted in favour of the fee — wanted the city manager to report back in April with options to remove it.

"We don't have any ability to tell (retailers) how to spend that money," he said.

While Ainslie said he thinks the fee is a success, he doesn't think council should be imposing it.

"I don't think we should be involved in forcing businesses how they support environmental initiatives or having to disclose to municipal council how much profit they are making by selling products in their stores," Ainslie said.

Councillor Shelley Carroll urged the committee not to eliminate the fee, she argued it is "fastest and most effective way" the city has changed people's behaviour.

City staff say there was a 53% reduction in the generation of plastic bags once the fee was imposed. The city has seen a 65% reduction in plastic bags in the garbage stream.

Councillor Doug Ford said the bag fee should be up to the retailer.

"For the government to come in and force it on people and try to manage it, anytime the government gets involved in our lives it just turns upside down," Ford said.

"If they want to charge 25 cents for a bag, good luck to them, let the free market decide."

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