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Subject: **Shopping Cart Management: Feasibility of Locking Technology**

From: Bill Boyes, Commissioner, Community Services
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Report number: Legislative Services-2026-286

Strategic Focus Area: Environmental Resilience & Sustainability

Recommendations

1. That the report prepared by Allyson Sander, Manager Special Projects and Administration to the Committee of Council Meeting of April 15, 2026, re: **Shopping Cart Management: Feasibility of Locking Technology**, be received; and,
2. That staff be directed to monitor the effectiveness of the new cart retrieval user fee by tracking service requests related to abandoned shopping carts and identifying associated retailers, where possible.

Report Summary

This report responds to Council direction to assess the feasibility of requiring retailers to implement locking technology to prevent shopping carts from leaving retail properties and assesses alternative regulatory approaches, including the approved cost recovery model. Based on the analysis and municipal benchmarking, staff recommend continuing the approved cost recovery model and public education, while monitoring service request trends and operational impacts to assess effectiveness over time.

The 2026 Community Services Operating Budget includes \$35,000 for user fees related to the retrieval of abandoned shopping carts. Any changes to the status quo approach may have financial implications and would need to be further assessed.

Background

During Council's consideration of the 2026 proposed budget for Community Services, Council discussed the issue of abandoned shopping carts found on City property and the associated operational and financial impacts to the municipality. As part of the deliberations, Council directed staff through [C039-2026](#) to implement a \$100 user fee per shopping cart retrieved to recover staff time and resource costs associated with collecting and returning abandoned carts found on City property.

The motion further directed staff to report back on the feasibility of legislating a requirement for Brampton retailers to implement locking technology designed to keep shopping carts within the proximity of their property. In response to this direction, staff undertook research and jurisdictional benchmarking to assess the feasibility of such a requirement and to identify regulatory approaches used by other municipalities. Findings are summarized in this report.

Current Situation

Shopping Cart Inventory Management

Shopping carts are the property of retailers and are intended for use on retail premises. When carts are removed from these locations and abandoned on City property, municipal staff may be required to retrieve and manage them. In 2025, Community Services received approximately 400 service requests related to abandoned shopping carts located on City property.

One form of shopping cart containment technology involves wheel-locking mechanisms installed on carts. To prevent carts from being abandoned in surrounding areas, the wheel-locks activate when a cart crosses a predefined boundary around a retail property. In addition to wheel-locking technology, other common cart inventory management practices include coin-deposit systems, routine staff collection of carts from parking areas and contracts with third-party cart retrieval services.

Considerations for Mandating Locking Technology

Retail operations vary in terms of site configuration, ownership structure and the frequency of cart removal incidents. In many retail environments, particularly multi-tenant commercial plazas, retailers operate as tenants and own the shopping carts, while parking lots and surrounding lands where containment infrastructure would need to be installed are controlled by property owners or landlords, often commercial property management companies or real estate investment trusts (REITs). These site and ownership differences are important considerations when assessing the feasibility of requiring locking technology across all retail settings. Key feasibility considerations include:

1. **Applicability:** Locking technology is typically most effective where a retailer controls the entire site and parking area. In retail environments where site infrastructure is shared or controlled by a property owner, the ability of an individual retailer to install perimeter-based containment systems may be limited.
2. **Equity:** Retailers may employ a range of practices to manage shopping cart inventory. A mandatory technology requirement could impose capital and maintenance costs on retailers who are already effectively managing carts and not contributing to the issue of abandoned carts on City property.

Accordingly, a uniform citywide requirement may create disproportionate impacts for businesses that have already implemented effective cart management practices.

Assessment of Alternative Approaches

1. **Status quo with cost recovery (recommended):** Under this approach, the City would continue to retrieve abandoned carts found on City property and apply the approved \$100 user fee where carts are identifiable as belonging to a retailer. No additional regulatory requirements would be imposed on retailers beyond the cost recovery mechanism.

This approach is simple to administer and avoids introducing additional regulatory requirements for businesses, while allowing the City to recover costs associated with retrieving abandoned carts.

To support the implementation of the status quo cost recovery approach, targeted communications for retailers whose carts are retrieved from City property will be implemented. This would include providing informational materials when invoices are issued for cart retrieval. The materials would outline the impacts of abandoned shopping carts on public safety and identify practical measures retailers may implement to improve cart management and prevent carts from leaving their premises. This approach is intended to increase awareness among retailers, encourage proactive improvements to cart containment practices and reduce repeat incidents over time.

Based on the analysis and municipal benchmarking, staff recommend continuing the status quo cost recovery approach at this time.

2. **Mandating a cart management system:** Rather than prescribing specific containment technology, the City may consider a model that focuses on outcomes such as requiring a cart management system, allowing retailers the flexibility to implement cart containment practices suited to their site configuration. Under this approach, retailers that provide shopping carts would be required to implement measures intended to prevent carts from leaving their premises and to retrieve carts found off-site.

A potential drawback of this approach is the lack of a clear standard for what constitutes an adequate cart management system, which can create challenges for consistent enforcement. Because retailers would have flexibility to implement different practices, it may be difficult to determine whether the measures in place are sufficient to prevent carts from leaving the premises or whether a retailer has taken reasonable steps to manage their cart inventory.

Any changes to the current approach may have resource implications, including impacts to staffing, operational processes, and administrative requirements, which would require further assessment.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking undertaken by Community Services supports the continued use of a cost recovery approach. A jurisdictional scan of comparator municipalities found that several municipalities, including Mississauga, Oshawa, Markham, Guelph, and Ottawa, have implemented stand-alone shopping cart by-laws; however, most of these frameworks primarily focus on cart retrieval and cost recovery rather than mandating containment technologies.

The review further indicates that stand-alone by-laws have not been effective in preventing carts from leaving retail sites, particularly where removal results from customer behaviour outside the retailer's direct control. This approach is consistent with the City's current fee-based model, which emphasizes cost recovery.

Retailer Engagement

As part of the review process, Economic Development staff engaged with retailers identified as frequent sources of abandoned carts. Through these discussions, retailers indicated that store management teams are committed to conducting periodic cart retrieval sweeps. Retailers also advised that additional cart tracking solutions are currently being introduced to improve inventory management. Additionally, the City will share the location of retrievals when returned so retailers can plan sweeps more effectively.

Next Steps

With the implementation of the \$100 cart retrieval user fee and ongoing retailer engagement, staff will continue to monitor abandoned cart service requests and retrieval activity over the coming year and will assess the effectiveness of the current approach.

Financial Implications

There are no financial impacts resulting from the recommendations in this report.

The 2026 Community Services Operating Budget includes \$35,000 for user fees related to the retrieval of abandoned shopping carts. Staff will continue to monitor revenues and propose changes as required in the 2027 Budget submission which will be presented to the Mayor for consideration. Any changes to the status quo approach may have financial implications and would need to be further assessed.

Communications Implications

A comprehensive communications strategy will be developed in collaboration with Strategic Communications to effectively inform stakeholders about the report's recommendations.

Conclusion

This report responds to Council's direction to assess the feasibility of requiring retailers to implement locking technology to prevent shopping carts from leaving retail properties. While such technology may be effective in certain retail environments, site ownership structures, operational differences among retailers and existing cart management practices present considerations for implementing a uniform citywide requirement. Based on the analysis and municipal benchmarking, the City will continue implementing the approved cost recovery model and retailer engagement approach, while monitoring service request trends and operational impacts to assess the effectiveness of the current framework over time.

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