

Plan to create a “Boomerang Bag” Pilot Project in Evanston

Inspired by Boomerang Bag Toolkit and related community efforts in Fort Collins, CO and Durham, NC

Background — Bag bans are not enough

The recent plastic bag ordinance in Evanston, while a critical step forward, does not yet fully address the environmental issues around shopping bags. According to extensive life cycle research, *all* shopping bags have significant impacts on the environment unless the bags are reused for a sufficient number of grocery shopping trips. However, in a recent national survey, a majority of consumers report they do not reuse their reusable bags for this sufficient number of trips. And this is especially true for Low Density Polyethylene Bags. Moreover, 40% of people forget to bring their reusable bags with them to the store. 50% of people who say they prefer reusable bags used single-use bags on their most recent shopping trip. Many reusable bags, especially the Non-Woven Polypropylene type end up donated to thrift stores, or prematurely thrown away. For consumers, having too many reusable bags appears to be a common problem.

Proposal — A community complement

Inspired by similar efforts in [Fort Collins, CO](#) (Choose to Reuse) and [Durham, NC](#) (implementing a global program branded as [Boomerang Bags](#)) we propose to pilot “community companion” program to complement the new ordinance and to ensure sufficient re-use of re-usable bags in order to actually achieve the lifecycle impact that the ordinance hopes to have. This pilot would consist of:

1. Citizen- and retailer-supported system to re-circulate shopping bags
2. A “brand name” to signal participation by retailer and promote participation by citizens
3. Volunteer-staffed sort/clean/repair activities
4. Sort/clean/repair space hosted by a community partner (Rebuilding Exchange, YOU?)
5. Simple web page hosted by community partner organization (CGE, Ecology Center?)
6. Point of Sale communications to remind people of ordinance and to bring their bags

Based in voluntary participation by both citizens and retailers, funding needs for this program should be minimal, mostly related to the printing and distribution of communication materials. We would hope to fund through private donations, perhaps in consideration for sponsorships on the web page and/or the bags themselves.

As a pilot, we would plan to implement and measure over a defined time period — likely 9 months in order to capture seasonal variations due to weather and opportunities for publicity.

Opportunity to have a laundry/dry cleaner own the cleaning in exchange for promotion and publicity.

Detailed Plan

1. Prepare for the Pilot

- A. Recruit Core Team of Volunteers — Via CGE, EEB, Ecology Center, etc.
- B. Enroll retail participants for the program.
 - Target major retailers as well as specialty retailers most likely to be early adopters
 - Create leave-behind brochure to explain concept, clarify the “ask” and solicit interest
- C. Enlist paid sponsors and/or philanthropic support for the program
 - Create sponsor levels and incentives
 - Partner with CGE or Ecology Center for tax-deductible structure and co-promotion
- D. Gather baseline information from retailers, such as:
 - How many people leave the store with plastic bags, how many leave with reusables?
 - How many plastic bags are leaving the store every day?
 - How much money might the store save by not purchasing plastic bags? Paper bags?

2. Launch the Pilot

- A. Recruit Volunteers
 - Collectors to gather reusable bags from donation bins, Goodwill, Freecycle, Nextdoor, etc.
 - Runners to drop off and pick up bags for washing at commercial laundromats or via City uniform laundry contract. At larger retailers, we might ask them to self-service the cleaning via their own uniform laundry contract.
 - Ambassadors to be on-site at stores to help customers and staff get up and running in the first few weeks and periodically beyond
 - Designers to conceive, design and print signage
 - Crafters to repair bags and to embellish bags with program identifier/logo, etc.
- B. Install containers/fixtures and signage in each store.
 - Convenient, near-checkout fixture for “take one”
 - Large box for “leave one.” To be washed/disinfected and returned to the “take one” area.
 - Placement of bins near checkout stations must be carefully considered. Retail stores have a plan for every square inch of their facilities and everything is strategically placed.
 - Ensure signage describes the circular process or “boomerang bags” concept.

3. Monitor and Measure

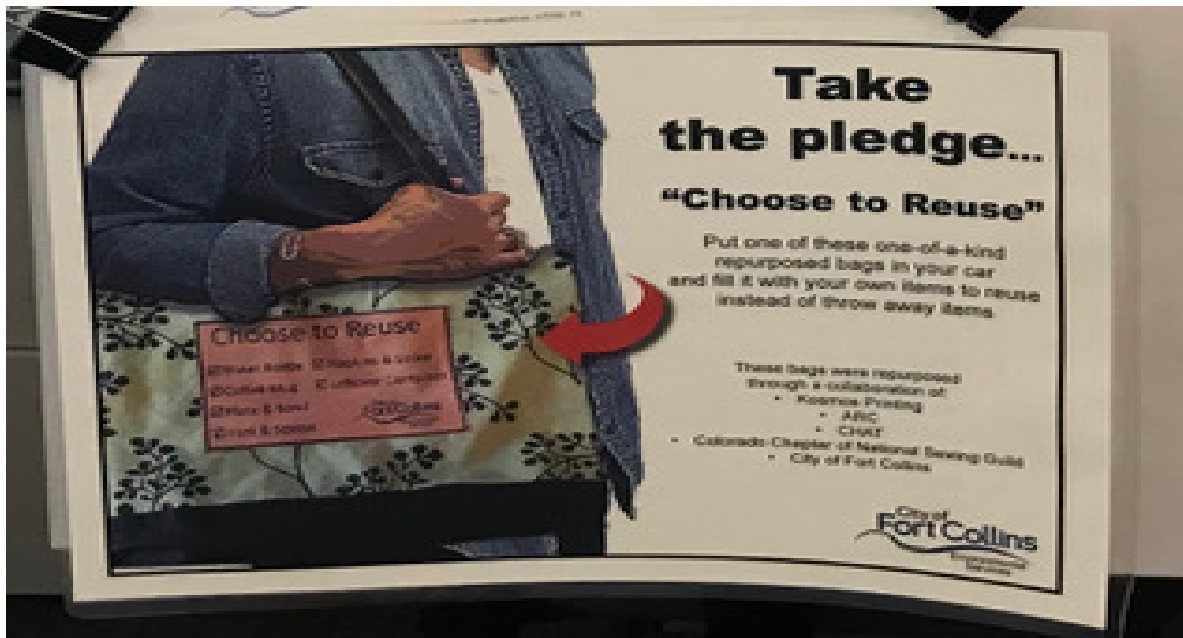
- A. Recruit Volunteers...
 - Ambassadors to check in on stores over time and do ‘refreshers’ with staff
 - Data Collectors to collect and tabulate data across all measures
- B. Set Measures and Measurement cadence
 - Circulation of bags
 - Disposal of bags
 - Retailer savings and/or operational impact

INSPIRATION

HERE is an example of a group “Boomerang Bags” in NC making a program like this work!
Program in Bull City-Durham.... <https://boomerangbags.org>



Here is what local seamstresses in Fort Collins created for the “Choose to Reuse” campaign.
[Program in Fort Collins](#)



DISCUSSION IN CLIMATE ACTION BOARD MEETING. SEPTEMBER 21 2022

- Interested?
 - Yes
- So interested that you want to plan or lead?
 - ????
- Overlap with other initiatives under way?
 - Effort for this when first bag ordinance went into effect
 - Centered at the Ecology Center...is there feedback about how it worked?
 - Kumar was trying to drive this (with interns)...but overwhelmed maybe
 - Bag-share collection points are still there in the community centers and civic center
- Other thoughts or cautions?
 - In many cities around the world, this is just 'how we do things'
 - Possibly work with the SSAs (Main-Dempster, CSBA, etc.)....work with the willing first
 - Engage Valli to reach diverse audience
 - Concerns over disinfection, etc. (Covid). Can people trust that they are disinfected?
 - Retailer resistance?
 - Possible to engage community in branding....logo contest?
 - Challenge to engage broader community = 'top of my mind'
 - Reusable bags can be a tangible symbol