

COUNCIL MEMBER'S MOTION

4. Strengthening the City of Vancouver's Ethical Purchasing Policy

Submitted by: Councillor Boyle and Councillor Swanson

WHEREAS

1. When Vancouver City Council adopted a policy on ethical purchasing in 2005, the then City Council said:

“The goal of the City of Vancouver's Ethical Purchasing Policy (EPP) is to ensure that all suppliers to the City meet, at a minimum, the performance standards outlined in the Supplier Code of Conduct, which includes core labour conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). It demonstrates a commitment to sustainability by seeking to ensure safe and healthy workplaces for the people who make products for the City of Vancouver, where human and civil rights are respected. The EPP also ensures that purchasing activities are aligned with the City's Mission Statement and Values. The policy establishes an avenue whereby complaints of abuses in workplaces that are involved in the manufacture of apparel and agricultural products purchased by the City can be made to the City. The City will determine the level and the degree necessary to investigate and act upon complaints. The policy is not intended to interfere with the City's collective agreements.”;
2. The complaint-driven stance adopted by the City of Vancouver so far has led in at least two known instances of suppliers approved to sell to the City being involved in serious labour abuses without the City knowing about these serious breaches. Two Haitian factories that appear on the City of Vancouver's list of suppliers as of March 2021 failed to forward health insurance fees deducted from worker salaries to the appropriate health insurance program, leading to seriously ill workers being denied health care and subsequently dying. These deaths and the abuse of worker rights that led to them did not become known to the City of Vancouver until concerned citizens brought this lethal oversight to the attention of City. There is, currently, no reason to be certain that other suppliers on the City's list have not committed similar or more egregious abuses of workers;
3. The experience of cities like San Francisco point to the usefulness of an active approach including regular liaison with unions and human rights advocates in source countries in enforcing ethical purchasing. And point to the usefulness of contracting some elements of policy enforcement to a specialist non profit NGO such as the Workers' Rights Consortium, which has performed well for San Francisco;
4. Over the life of the Ethical Purchasing Policy (EPP), the City has not retained the services of an outside body to ensure that suppliers the City purchases from are in compliance with the EPP; and

5. The current approach relies on suppliers to proactively provide information which may be at odds with their business interest.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council directs staff, within three months to obtain cost estimates from organizations such as the Workers' Rights Consortium to:
 - i. Monitor the list of City of Vancouver apparel suppliers and advise the City if any of these suppliers are in breach of the City's EPP;
 - ii. Advise the City as to whether or not any potential suppliers the City is considering contracting with are in compliance with the City's EPP.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to report back with recommendations on creating a volunteer ethical purchasing oversight committee made up of members drawn from local unions and human rights Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other relevant expertise. With the intention that the committee would liaise regularly with the City of Vancouver's Procurement and Supply Chain Management staff, as well as with relevant labour and human rights organizations and report annually to council on enforcement of the City's ethical purchasing policy.

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