



## [Episode 51: "Using BI to Encourage a Return to Reusable Lifestyles"](#)

*with Marika Smith, Sustainability Specialist with the City of Victoria.*

*Marika Smith completed UBC's Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights to learn how she could be intentional in how she shapes behaviour toward sustainability. Marika weaves behavioural insights into her discussion of the barriers and opportunities around a reusable lifestyle. She also shares how local governments are uniquely poised to use BI given their many connections with their populations.*

### *Transcript:*

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KIRSTIN APPELT, HOST: Welcome to this edition of Calling DIBS. I'm your host, Kirstin Appelt, Research Director with UBC Decision Insights for Business and Society, or DIBS for short. Today we're calling DIBS on Marika Smith.

Marika is a Sustainability Specialist with the City of Victoria's Engineering and Public Works Department, and she was one of our lovely, brave graduates of the first ever cohort of the Advanced Professional Certificate in Behavioural Insights. We finally had the chance to meet in person this summer, and now I'm excited to catch up some more. So welcome to the podcast, Marika.

MARIKA SMITH, GUEST: Thank you, Kirstin.

APPELT: Let's start off by just having you tell us a little bit about yourself and your current role.

SMITH: Yeah, my background is in soil science, specifically looking at microplastics in compost and food systems. And that sort of led me down to the winding and always interesting world of waste management and waste reduction.

Before working at the city, I ran an environmental non-profit that was encouraging people to waste less food and compost the food responsibly that they didn't eat, that they didn't use. So it's all been a waste journey for the past 15 years.

And now I always knew behavioural science, and obviously, human behaviour plays a huge part in waste reduction initiatives. And I was asked in 2019 if I wanted to attend the Behavioural Insights Group Boot Camp in the fall of 2019, before the world shut down, and realized that this is such a critical element to actually applying sort of more rigorous behavioural science to waste reduction initiatives and then invited to enroll in the pilot year of the program, as you mentioned, and really, really, really enjoyed it. And I think it also just helped get through the COVID situation as well.

APPELT: Yeah, it's nice to have a distraction in times like that.

SMITH: For sure.

APPELT: So you've already told us a little bit about your winding route to BI. So was the boot camp the first time BI got on your radar, or what was your journey to BI like?

SMITH: In official capacity, I had actually never heard of it and didn't realize that the province actually had a program, and felt really lucky that I was one of the only kind of municipal workers to be invited to it. And it just made me realize that everybody should have a BI practitioner on their staff, probably in every department, really, in an ideal world. So, it was pretty much the first time I had actually come across it as a discipline. And I'm a huge research nerd and huge science nerd, so it just complemented all the other sort of array of schooling that I already done.

APPELT: Awesome. And like you said, in sustainability, at the end of the day, a lot of it is a problem of human behaviour. So based on what you've done, what you seen in your work in the nonprofit, your work in government, etcetera, how do we encourage sustainable choices?

SMITH: Well, there's a lot of barriers and challenges to that. It's become, especially in the last 5 to 10 years, there's so much more awareness of pollution and waste and impact that it has on climate change, environmental pollution and social inequity as well. So even though waste is just one discipline, it's really quite huge. And mainly because we are consumers and we've become even greater consumers after World War II.

If you sort of look at the history of waste and how it relates to sustainability, our reliance on convenience, particularly with disposable products, took off after World War II and hasn't really slowed down. So during the war the extraction and manufacturing industries ramped up to serve the war effort. But once it was over, they sort of thought, well, what are we going to do now?

And the answer was to keep churning out all these materials through the economy. And one of the big ideas that took off was to sell these materials like aluminum paper and eventually plastic in the form of disposable products. And we just became more and more used to them.

And it's not to say, at the city we try to focus on reducing waste and our impact overall, and not particularly just look at plastics because it is all products, it is all consumerism that can contribute to these sustainability issues. But plastic has become very, very visible in the news and social media, and it's not a bad thing. Lots of action is being taken at all levels of government to address the issue. But in Canada, almost 30,000 tons of plastic waste escapes collection and enters the environment every year. Even though in a lot of places like BC, we have really robust recycling and recovery programs, but it isn't necessarily the answer, the big answer that everyone's looking for.

And we're focusing more of our effort onto waste reduction and shifting to behavioural change, to just not be using those products if we don't need them, not buying them if we don't need them, repairing and reusing and refilling products as much as possible. So, it's really not new news. It's just going back several decades to like a return to a reusable lifestyle, a return to just not consuming as much as we need to, and just shifting that behaviour away from that overconsumption. And we don't want to ever shame people. This is just something that marketing companies want us to do and planned obsolescence with materials.

So, it's become kind of ubiquitous in our culture, but we're looking at ways to reverse that, for lack of a better expression.

APPELT: Yeah. And you bring up so many good points there. So, one thing maybe we can focus on, thinking about behaviour, so you said there's things like planned obsolescence, but when we have people who are wanting to do the right thing, what are some of the barriers that prevent them from making the right choice?

SMITH: Right. Great question, because there is a lot, especially in the waste world. It's very complex. It's very confusing. And that's why sort of recycling, while great as an option isn't necessarily the best one, because it's not always clear what's recyclable or where to-- not everybody has access, equal access to recycling programs. There's a lot of inequity that goes on in that realm as well. And there's also an assumption that disposable is okay because everything gets recycled.

There is something that we love to call "wishcycling", which I'm sure you've heard of, where let's just put it in this bin over here and it will magically, the recycling fairies will come along and separate everything and everything will be fine. And I think one of the biggest sort of issues as well is we're so disconnected from our products, once we've used them and disposed of them wherever they go, whether it's landfill or recycling. We don't really understand the very complex systems and inconsistencies that can happen. And I love our regional district actually takes people on landfill tours here and tells the busload of kids to like wave hello to away, because "This is away, this is where your stuff goes". There's actually no away.

I do believe, like I truly, truly believe, especially coming from the nonprofit world and being so community based as local government, too, people really do want to do the right thing, but they are so confused over what is truly sustainable. There's a lot of misinformation. Compostable plastics are a perfect example.

I do a lot of research in the bioplastics area where it's a really good intention, but there is heavy resource implications to bioplastics. It's still a single use item that gets disposed after one use, and often they don't break down in the sort of technologies that we have currently. So, there's this huge disconnect between what's marketed and what's actually able to be recovered. And it causes people to just get information overload and they're discouraged and they're not really sure what to do.

So, we need evidence-based decision making and we need clear messaging where people can make it, going back to the EAST framework, make it easy, attractive, and also sort of making it the social norm. And that's why we're kind of, you know, leaning towards more make "re-use" the norm. And that's our sort of tagline for Zero Waste Team.

APPELT: Yeah. And it's so interesting, like you were saying that mixed messaging, things like products like flushable wipes that are called flushable wipes that are not flushable.

SMITH: They are not indeed!

APPELT: Or compostable plastics that are not compostable, but they're in the name. Or things like, do you have to rinse the plastics before you put them in? And all this information overload, like you mentioned. Well, that's the discouraging side.

Looking at the more positive side, the solution side, like you said, your focus is on reusable lifestyles. So can we actually just start with what does that mean? What is a reusable lifestyle?

SMITH: Yeah. So, as I mentioned, it's sort of like a return to pre-World War II, where you had, you know, the milkman or milk person, if we're using today's lingo, where they would bring you your milk jug and you pay a deposit and you bring it back. And there's still lots of deposit-based systems in existence today. They're just not often as easy and convenient as the disposable option.

But we started using the term "make re-use the norm" or "return to reusable lifestyle" when we developed Zero Waste Victoria a few years ago, which is really, zero waste is really just a term, it's a concept for setting policy where three key things happen to shift that change to reuse and refill.

Number one, eliminating unnecessary products and materials where the negative impacts to the environment community outweigh the consumer benefits and where viable, sustainable alternatives exist like reusable cup exchange programs. And that's where make reuse the norm comes through with policies that help to establish this lifestyle, and that includes repair and refurbishment as well. And we need to make it the default option through the community.

So, right now there is really fantastic programs going on, but they're quite small scale. So they're not always accessible and affordable at a small scale level. But if it scales up to where the entire city, every restaurant has a reusable takeout container program, where it's affordable or, you know, the school of thought is it needs to cost the same or less than a disposable option for it to actually be scalable and have widespread adoption. And we can support those programs through local government as well. And there's always going to be some residual waste. So, recycle the waste responsibly, but make that easy and accessible for people as well.

So as much as possible, that's what the "circular economy" is about. It's become quite the buzzword, but really it's just the alternative to linear economy, where we're designing out waste and pollution to an extent, and keeping products and materials in use as much as possible. And then when they finally come to, they're far past their break even point environmentally, then they're recovered responsibly. So it's more of a closed loop system.

APPELT: You've already triggered some thoughts from me on like where behavioural insights can play a role, but before I ask you about that, I just want to mention one thing I really like about what you said, is the idea that this is a return to a reusable lifestyle which makes it feel like something we can accomplish. It's not this new thing. We have to figure out how to do a reusable lifestyle. We've done it. We just have to get back to doing it.

So I feel like that's already weaving in some behavioural insights about making it feel easier and more attractive than if it was this new, scary thing that's never been done before. So the question I want to ask you is where do you think the role for behavioural insights is? What are the ways behavioural insights can help people adopt reasonable lifestyles?

SMITH: Well, I think from our point, we're policymakers so definitely we can integrate behavioural insights into the work that we do. We get direction from our Mayor and Council to write policies, mostly in the form of bylaws and guidance campaigns for the community and businesses. Some of that is very prescriptive language because it's actual legal bylaw. But we can use behavioural insights more in the education and outreach tools and the business toolkits that we put together.

For example, four years ago, 2018, we introduced a check out bag regulation bylaw, so banning plastic bags, including bioplastic material, and setting a fee on paper and reusable. And that's, I guess, if I remember correctly from my studies, like the friction created a bit of friction. So that it sort of encourages the choice "Well, I don't want to pay for a paper bag every time, so I'm going to bring my reusable bag".

And there were some feelings at the beginning. There always is with policy. But really right away we had really great eye catching, very attractive, fun slogans. We had some fun with it like BYO-Bag and we'd give out little stickers, you put them on your car, right in front of your face, on your windshield, so that you grab a bag when

you go into a grocery store. So even if the bylaw itself is quite legal prescriptive, we can introduce behavioural insights into our campaigns, our education campaigns.

And six months after the bylaw came into effect, we did a compliance check with several hundred businesses and it was 99% compliant. So, it's not hard for people to shift back to that reuse. It just takes some time and it takes some encouragement and it does need to be easy and convenient as well.

And then we've got, that's our whole stream of make reuse the norm. And we've got a kind of I Heart Reusables campaign coming up. We've got several that we're sort of supporting through education, take out container and cup programs in the city. And fairly soon, it's just in development, we'll also have a single use item reduction bylaw, which will require businesses to ask if the person if the customer needs accessories like cutlery and straws and chopsticks and just causes them to think a little bit, take a beat and say, "Do I need this item or am I taking this home? And I have forks at home."

We all have that drawer full of chopsticks and soy sauce and ketchup containers. And so a lot of the time we call it, it's not even single use, it's like zero use, because you don't need it. But it's also just good customer service to give you what you need. But we're just trying to dial that back and say "Do you actually need this?". And the other part of it that I'm really excited about is we're also going to have require reuse on site.

So, for restaurants, when you're dining in, it's going to be a requirement that the business only serve food and beverage in reusable food service where again, not new. We did this decades ago. And there'll also be a fee on disposable cups and containers, which again will have that sort of friction point, which will just encourage people, hopefully, to bring their own reusable cup and also encourage more startup and wide spread of reusable takeout container programs.

So, we kind of mix that balance between what our regulatory obligations are with what we can do. We're direct facing with the community unlike other levels of government. So, we can have a little bit more of a conversation and a little bit more thoughtfulness into what we do.

And it's not new. Other departments are, I think they're using BI without even really realizing and it's just kind of integrated in our planning departments and urban design teams have to think about how properties are developed to encourage walking, to mitigate crime and are, you know, place road signs and speed bumps to keep the public safe. So, I think it's something that we just kind of inherently do, but we could maybe be a little bit more intentional with it.

APPELT: Absolutely. And I love what you're saying about the friction points, because you're making this great point that there's kind of two things you're doing simultaneously. One is you're making the desired behaviour easier with things like reminders, but you're also making the less desired behaviour more difficult. So, you're kind of shifting both those things at the same time. And kind of sometimes we focus more on the "let's make the desired behaviour easy".

But this idea of putting in checks to stop the desired behaviour, making that more difficult, I think is also really important because, like you said, so many of these things are just automatic, like we just do them. And so you need that moment of reflection to push you to say, like, "Do I actually need this bag or this chopsticks or whatever it is?" You just having that moment of friction can really make a difference.

SMITH: Yeah, exactly. And I think that's why I got so excited. You sort of reminded me of, like, why I really loved the program and the boot camp and everything was because I realized that sort of like, I think we're already kind of doing this. But maybe we can, like you said, sort of do it better or more intentionally, and

weave a little bit more BI into our policies and our educational campaigns. And we're always thoughtful, too, with it, too. There's - we don't want unintended consequences.

So, when we do these, when we write these policies, there is so much public engagement and we end up with exemptions for charitable organizations and obviously hospitals and things where disposability, disposable products are our key to safety, food safe or, you know, for certain, for instance, the cup fee, it'll be exempt for sort of transition houses and support services that might give out free drink vouchers and that sort of thing.

So often policy can negatively impact the sort of more vulnerable citizens in our communities. So, we're very cognizant of that, where it needs to have that balance as well.

APPELT: Yeah. And then that also triggered for me another thought, is that something that you've already been doing that behavioural insights also encourages and maybe helps you do even more is this idea of figuring out rigorous ways to measure the impact. So, before you might be measuring it in one way, and behavioural insights might help you think of other ways you can be measuring impact of the new legislation or campaigns.

SMITH: Yeah, I think that's funny. We were talking about that the other day. I think one of our challenges that we see, first of all, it would be awesome to be able to do random control trials for every policy initiative. And that just isn't, that's not a thing that's feasible, unfortunately. So sometimes we have to do something. If it doesn't work, it gets amended or goes in a different direction.

But measuring the results is something that we also find challenging. And so, for these sort of policies, we can do things like physical waste audits. Sometimes, it can be very costly and you know, it takes a lot of resource to do those. But we're also working with different levels of government. We've, you know, the regional districts do waste audits at the landfill and we over the years have much closer relationships with them now because something like waste and sustainability, that's not just municipal, it's cross jurisdictional.

So, they'll do things like do a little deeper dive when they do landfill audits. So, they're going to start looking at individual packaging like single use items and stuff like that. And Vancouver started doing that as well because we need to share these resources and measuring might go beyond our municipal borders as well. So, we are always looking at metrics and how we can do that well. But that's definitely a challenge and measuring behaviour is a challenge.

We were talking about that the other day, like what caused the change. I remember that from our lessons as well, where it's like did it, you know, did it work because of the policy or did it work because of our educational campaign? We're not really sure. I mean, great, we've got the desired state, but it's difficult to sometimes completely measure which had the most impact.

APPELT: Totally. Yeah, that makes the real world so much better. Totally. Well, since you're knowledgeable in this space, I thought, I know this is an area where a lot of people are interested. So, are there organizations you would point to as leaders in the BI sustainability space? Are there places you would recommend people look for inspiration or case studies?

SMITH: Yeah, I think my favorite organization that I am a part of, we're actually part of a North American Municipal Government Network and there is well over probably about 150 cities part of it. But there's a wonderful nonprofit in the States called Upstream, and they are all about their - they're basically a think tank to shifting the reusable campaign, reusable lifestyle. And they have amazing resources and studies. It is US based, but it's relevant pretty much everywhere and they're trying to make things, I think they're sort of a

thing too, they're using so much BI, but I'm not I'm not sure if they're completely aware that, but I think they are. They do have people with behavioural science backgrounds, they have some really amazing resources on how businesses can save money through reusable programs. They've got cost-benefit analysis studies. They have really, really great deep dives about what actually happens to your material, the recycling end of life, that sort of thing. So, I would say Upstream is just a wealth of resource, a fabulous website.

Really just I think, reach out to your local government too, if you're not sure what can be recycled, if you're not sure, if you're feeling a bit discouraged. The great thing about municipal work is like we will actually talk to someone on the phone, like we will answer the phone, we will let you know what happens to your peanut butter jar. So whereas, you know, yeah, you can search a lot of things on the Internet, but it's not all clear.

We get a lot of people call that people move a lot. So they've come from North Vancouver they've come from Toronto and now they live in Victoria and they're totally confused about what can be recycled or composted. And one day, I mean, it would be great for everything to be harmonized. That's kind of the pie in the sky unicorn dream, but it's not necessarily going to happen overnight.

But we do try to streamline our messaging with our neighboring municipalities, because if you go to this mall, you can get a plastic bag, but if you go to this one you can't! So, I get confused. I work in the industry, so I feel for people. People should reach out to their local representatives because we will be transparent with them.

APPELT: That's amazing. Yeah. Here in Vancouver, a lot of us get frustrated because the rules between Vancouver and UBC are different.

SMITH: Oh really?

APPELT: Yeah. The other topic I wanted to touch on with you because you are in local government and that is a bit different, so BI is different when it's done by private companies, federal government, some organizations have a full BI unit, some have an individual BI champion.

My sense is that in local government, it's more often there's someone who's a BI champion who might be doing a little BI on the side, kind of like what you do. Is that what you see, is that what you've experienced?

SMITH: I think it's happening organically. I don't think I would notice it unless I went and looked for it because I think, and we have, you know, at the city we have over a thousand, I think, employees. And it's highly possible that other people other than me have that background as well. I definitely think our urban planners do programming in behavioural science, just part of their discipline.

But I do think it's kind of unspoken. And I think it would be really neat if we all had, I know our management team has talked about wanting a behavioural economist or behavioural scientist on the team because it makes so much sense. And then you're sort of consulting with all, you wouldn't necessarily be with just one department, you'd be kind of consulting with everyone.

For instance, we have a newly developed EDI, equity, diversity and inclusion department. So, they work with the other departments on making sure that's all integrated into all of our policy work and considerations. And so, I sort of, resource allowing especially with larger municipalities because we are the core, and we tend to kind of, without sounding arrogant, like pave the way for our other municipalities with less sort of lower staff, staff resources. So, we can share that insight with our neighboring governments as well. So, I think it's on our wish list to have a little bit more of a dedicated behavioural insight, behavioural science.

We did actually, we were lucky enough to have had an intern last year who was also-- she was at a different university, but she was doing behavioural science education where to improve on multifamily waste sorting, which is really interesting. So behavioural insights was just naturally woven into everything she was doing. And she came up with some things I wouldn't have ever thought of either. So, I definitely think it would be great to have that.

Right now, we're kind of just doing that probably without realizing or I having taken this wonderful course, I'm a little bit more intentional with it now, but I think it would be great if it was a little bit more called out and maybe our Mayor and Council understood the importance of, I think it's inherently understood, but it would be neat if it is a little bit more formalized.

APPELT: Yeah, that's an interesting distinction. The idea between kind of informal, unintentional versus formal, intentional practice.

SMITH: Yeah.

APPELT: Well, compared to other organizations, you worked in the nonprofit space, for example, what do you think are some of the opportunities for BI in local government?

SMITH: I think there's absolutely tons. I think, like I said, we're sort of doing it already unintentionally, but I think we're doing it with the altering the levels of friction with our policies, making more or less difficulty in competing behaviours, making, you know, preferred to prefer decisions a little bit more difficult, like adding the fees to the disposable items, that sort of thing. We can definitely apply it to our messaging.

We have signage everywhere. For example, we've just installed, over the last couple of years, new zero waste stations. So, streetscape is where you're just getting a mix of everybody, your citizens, your residents, your businesses, especially Victoria, your tourists. And it's so crucial, so critical that that messaging is effective and so is a lot of time. And our manager also is very well versed in the behavioural science part of things and he and our team designed the stations to be really attractive, eye catching colors and icons and kind of made it a bit fun too.

We know that contamination is a big issue with streetscape recycling and composting and sorting is like usually the most highly contaminated bins you see. And even if someone means well, ten other people might not sort correctly. So, we have these little slogans on them that says, "Smile, scrape, sort." And it's just supposed to, like, appeal to people's like "Oh, yeah, okay, I'm supposed to do that." But we were trying to make it fun.

So just things like that, like everywhere in a local community, I think there's-- and with our Bring Your Own Bag campaign, I think every policy that we have can have behavioural insights attached to it when it comes to the messaging and the signage that we do throughout the community.

APPELT: Absolutely. And I think, like you were saying, kind of local government is uniquely poised because you have so many touchpoints with citizens, residents, visitors, etc., because like almost every block has something from the local government there. So, there's just so many opportunities to interface with folks. And weave behavioural insights into, like you said, both policy and communication.

SMITH: Thank you. Touchpoints of sorts, I've been trying to think about for the last half an hour. I was like "Yes, that's the word. I know this is holy grail word", so thank you, Kirstin.



APPELT: Totally. Well, on the flip side, whether it's in Victoria or elsewhere, what are the challenges of trying to use BI in the local government context?

SMITH: I think I mentioned earlier we're not always able to run control trials so often it can be, it just needs to sort of, you've done this, you've done the engagement, you've done the research, and you just need to sort of run with it. And more often than not, hopefully it works.

But we can't rigorously test it out often before. And usually at the time sensitive thing too, if we're responding to something like an environmental emergency in the city, or if there's something in recycling infrastructure or something breaks down, it has to be a very immediate response. So, there's not always time to do a bunch of rigorous testing. But when we have a little bit more time to run our policy campaigns, we can do that.

And I think I also mentioned is challenging is measuring the results and knowing where the results came from, whether it was carrot or stick, whether it was just the regulatory aspect or whether our thoughtful, wonderful, colourful campaigns are doing their thing to shift things to more of a social norm situation. So, I'd say yeah, the inability to completely I mean - it's real world, we know we're not going to be able to do that.

Yeah, I think those are mainly the two things, I can't think of anything more at the moment. I mean, also we have to follow city policy and we come under the provincial legislation for being able to enact certain policies and things like that too. We are beholden to legislation because we are regulators. But where the BI can, as mentioned, come into play is more so in our guidance and communication campaigns.

APPELT: Yeah, absolutely. And I think the other thing you mentioned earlier, too, is just the idea of resourcing and that sometimes, like you said, sometimes the emergency is in the domain you're working in, but sometimes the emergency is something else and it pulls resources away.

So, you know, COVID-19 dragged a lot of resources towards that, which is, of course, very important. But then maybe it meant some other projects had to have less attention or less resourcing. So, I imagine resourcing can also be a challenge.

SMITH: Yes. And priorities shift all the time in any level of government or local government and we are much more ear to the ground with resident communication, which is great because that's a positive because we are directly connected to our community. So, we can do a lot of observational trials. We're just much more in tune with the kind of beat of the streets, so to speak.

And yeah, and I mean, we just had an election. So, there's going to be a lot of opportunity to engage with and educate our pretty much brand-new council that we have. So that's actually exciting to sort of introduce them and weave BI through our council reports as well.

APPELT: Totally, yeah, that is exciting. Are there any other surprises or differences about BI in a local government context, do you think?

SMITH: No, I think major differences is just what we said. We can use communication a lot more to play off social norms than other levels of government can. Just because we have that closer connection to our business and residents and we're more approachable. What's the word I'm looking for? Let me try that one again.

We are reachable. We're there. You can walk into City Hall and talk to city staff and we can directly advertise and run campaigns and sign a starter community that can use behavioural insights quite heavily indicating that

resource is the norm. Things like that, bring your own bag, we've got lots of little prompts. We have lots of prompts to encourage people to use transit, encourage people to walk, encourage, especially with, we have an amazing bike lane connection, so we have a lot of really great campaigns going through that to encourage people to change their mode of transport. So, I think it's more that community level that we have advantage over other levels of government.

Surprises, I think for me the surprise was just learning that behavioural insights is a part of what we already do. And that's exciting and also made it super relevant for me to take that program. I hope more of our staff do. And I hope it just becomes a little bit more intentional. But I do think that it's already happening, but it would be great to streamline it a little bit more.

APPELT: Yeah, I like what you're saying, too. The other point about the touch points and having the ear to the ground, and actually picking up the phone when people call unlike potentially other organizations is also that other part of the behavioural insights process that we talk about is the exploratory research.

So, understanding people before you make a change, before you change your information campaign, for example, you're talking to citizens, you're talking to residents, so you have a sense of how things are landing. So you have that kind of input before you go into design, which I think is really crucial.

SMITH: We do, and I think it's important that our community knows that we are a team of scientists, and that's who the city has hired. And 90% of our job is research and engagement. Because a lot of people don't really know what goes on behind closed doors. But we do get out there in the community because, hey, you know, there's thought and research that goes into this. We want evidence-based decision making. So that's where our policy comes in.

And then we have a really great engagement team that makes sure that that's communicated out in a way that's easy for people to understand and follow. And if there is confusion, there's going to be somebody there that can give you some guidance instead of just like "You're on your own". So, I think that it's forming that relationship with community. I mean, you're government at the end of the day, and you have a job to do to combat really important things like waste and climate change. And there's some things, decisions that might not be popular, but it's important to do because these issues are big and they're not going away.

So, it's just balancing the necessary regulation with making sure, encouraging people that it's actually not that difficult. And you can return to that reasonable lifestyle. It was just mere decades away and we can get back there.

APPELT: Absolutely. Yeah. And I think there's also interesting research, which we touched on a little bit. I think just the idea that because people are used to the status quo, it feels comfortable. And so, a change in policy always feels a little scary or a little daunting. But then once people acclimate to the change, often they're like, "Oh, this is fine. This is not a big deal at all". And so that kind of initial negative reaction to a change usually fades over time if it's a well-designed change.

SMITH: Exactly. And I think people are often pleasantly surprised. We got a bunch of reusable coffee cups for our kitchens at City Hall, and people that I don't think had ever used one before in their life are actually quite excited about it. And they're like "Well, it's great. Doesn't leak. It's not burning my hand". It's like "Oh, so this is sustainable and it's actually improving my life so it doesn't have to be painful".

Often, we do these things and when businesses switch, we're hoping, and research is out there, we know that, you know, through COVID businesses, the restaurant industry has taken a really big hit. We don't want to

overburden them, but things like they've spent a lot of money on disposable items. So, it's just the status quo, and it's easier right now to just give that out, throw it out, whatever.

But multiple studies have shown that once they're eventually able to switch back to reusable cups and plates and that, it actually will save them a lot of money in the long run. So, this has really positive, far-reaching effects, these sort of regulations, and it's just getting that messaging out and supporting them through. I mean, it's coming out of COVID, it's a really tough transition. So, we are very cognizant of that.

But that's why I really love the whole waste reduction and make reuse the norm model because it actually will be beneficial and hopefully people will see that in the shorter term, definitely in the longer term. But I think it won't take long. We already have something like over 20 restaurants on a reusable takeout container program that we support through education. Unless you're a nonprofit, we can't unfortunately fund sort of these programs.

But there is a nonprofit organization that's a group of restaurants that have started a takeout container program that's just in its pilot phase. But it's been really well received, and I think it will just grow from there. And we're here to support those efforts. But also, yeah, that balance between regulation and support.

APPELT: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. And I've seen really interesting research that before of policy comes in, a lot of times people focus on the negatives that will happen. But then once the policy comes in and you start focusing on the positives.

And for me, the clearest example of that was when the smoking laws changed and people were like "Oh, if people can't smoke in bars, no one's going to come to the bar anymore". Then the non-smoking laws go in and everyone's like "Hey, it's nice when it doesn't always smell like smoke at the end of the night".

And so people, you know, their mindset flips and they start seeing all the positives that were hard to anticipate or didn't feel concrete until you actually experience them.

SMITH: Yeah, exactly. I think that's why some of it is a little bit of a waiting game for the transition to take place and for people's comfort levels to return to a state where they've accepted it's the social norm and it's a good thing.

APPELT: Yeah. Yeah. And then I think once we all adapt, then we'll say "I can't believe we ever used to do that the other way, because this way is so great".

SMITH: Well, social normie, for me, I feel really self-conscious the really rare occasions that there really is nary a plastic bag in sight in most of our retail outlets. But I think I was in California, I think and they have a slightly different thing where they've just got like a thicker plastic bag, they charge for it. But I felt really weird walking down the street with a plastic bag because I'm just not used to it. And I felt like, almost guilty. So, these campaigns work.

APPELT: Definitely. Definitely. Well, on that note, switching gears a little bit and heading towards our wind up, do you have a message for our new BI practitioners in training?

SMITH: I thought about this question. I can't think of anything. All I would say is really, really enjoy the program. And when you're going back to work, when your program is finished, or even while you're doing it, just like make a conscious effort to think about where BI applies in your work. And I found it applies pretty much to everything that I do in my role at the city.

But it's interesting just to make it - I think when you're in the middle of doing a school program and you're balancing life and school and everything, and it can be a bit overwhelming. So, applying it, making it sort of practical even while you're studying, think like "Oh, this is going to be so useful because I can apply it to here". And I really do think it was an amazing program and I would recommend it for everyone. So, I think if you just apply what you're learning along the way to your daily job, and it just makes it so much more helpful.

APPELT: Yeah, I think what you were saying before about the idea that you've probably been using behavioural insights unintentionally, to take a moment to think about how can I switch from that unintentional usage to the intentional usage. It's a really great, great takeaway.

SMITH: Exactly. That's what I'm finding over the last, I can't believe it's been a year and a half. Where does the time go! But it really has opened my eyes to the point where I do want to continue sort of the BI pathway, wherever that may lead. So, if you have more courses in it, I'd be definitely interested and probably other staff members would be interested as well.

APPELT: Well, any last thoughts? Any questions I should have asked?

SMITH: No. I really enjoyed sharing my nerdy waste knowledge with you, and we're just really excited about our upcoming waste reduction policies. And I've seen, you know, a really tough couple of years for everybody, seeing a real shift back into engaging with community more.

And it's all sort of, even things as simple as like our policy, I equate our require a reusable, you know food service-ware for dining in, hopefully that will encourage more people to dine in and have that social connection again because that has been sort of lost in the last couple of years. And I feel like behaviour is just woven into everything we do. So, we're humans, we're social, and we can enjoy, ourselves, while we're sustainable.

APPELT: Absolutely. Yeah. I think that's a lot of good nuggets in there. The idea of, you know, we've kind of gotten away from some of the things that we used to do. Both in terms of COVID and the longer-term shift away from the reusable lifestyle. And so, returning to some of the things we used to do is a great, great message.

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. As a fellow sustainability enthusiast, it's been really nice to chat and to hear someone with more of a deep science background and all of that. So, I enjoyed all the nerdy wisdom you passed along and I'm looking forward to watching your BI journey continue. So, thank you for joining us today.

SMITH: Thank you for having me, Kirstin.

APPELT: And thanks to our listeners for joining another episode of Calling DIBS.

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