

S. Tahoe council to vote again on plastic bag ban

By Kathryn Reed

If South Lake Tahoe adopts an ordinance banning plastic bags, it is likely it would not be the law of the land until 2014. This is because the ordinance as written takes three months to be implemented and the council isn't likely to vote on it until late summer, early fall.

A group of bag-ban supporters were at today's City Council meeting advocating the electeds implement the ordinance that was voted down in January. The advocates came back with more information as was requested by the council at the time.

No longer does the city have a Sustainability Commission. It was axed at the same meeting the bag ban was defeated. But a group has formed to be a committee focusing on sustainable issues in the city.

Karen Fink, who is part of that group, pointed out that consumers are already paying for bags from stores – it just isn't overt. There also isn't a choice because it's incorporated into the price of goods sold, much like any overhead expense.

Most of the 76 communities in the state that have plastic bag bans allow stores to use plastic and paper at a 5 or 10 cent charge per bag to the consumer.

Some talk on June 11 was about whether the fee would impact lower income individuals unjustly.

Julie Lowe, a plastic bag ban proponent, told the council, "It's more of a problem with the affluent. We consume more and waste more. I feel the low income are way ahead of us."

Darcie Collins with the League to Save Lake Tahoe said her group supports the ban. While no one from the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce spoke, it was relayed that that board and the majority of the membership support a ban.

Supporters also believe such a ban would send a message to tourists that South Lake Tahoe is environmentally friendly.

Mayor Tom Davis said with the League, Sierra Club and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency having offices on the South Shore that in itself shows the area is environmentally friendly.

Davis and Councilwoman JoAnn Conner remain strong voices against the ban. Davis in particular said he does not see a problem. This was right after he cited how much trash Clean Tahoe picks up. He also said he drove around town and didn't see an issue with plastic bags blowing around.

But the errant bags are found at the bottom of waterways, in bushes, meadows and elsewhere that a motorist would not see.

Conner said recreationists she knows don't believe there is a problem either.

"We're still looking at legislating personal behavior," Conner said.

Councilwomen Angela Swanson and Brooke Laine are in lockstep in wanting the issue to come back for a vote. Swanson was not at the January meeting and Laine was not on the council then.

Councilman Hal Cole wants something done about the bags, but also would like some leeway for nonprofits like the food banks that fill bags for the needy to take with them.

Even though the California Legislature earlier this year voted against a statewide ban, the California Grocers Association came out in support of it.