

S. Tahoe reaffirms decision to ban plastic bags

By Kathryn Reed

Advocates for banning plastic bags in South Lake Tahoe got a partial win Tuesday.

While the ordinance for the ban was on the consent agenda as a second reading, it got pulled for discussion.

Tim James, manager of the California Grocers Association, wanted time to explain how without putting a fee for paper bags in the ordinance, the council would hurt businesses.

“When you only ban plastic, there is a move to paper,” James told the council on Oct. 15. “In South Lake Tahoe, if you go without a fee, it will be about a \$60,000 increase in bag costs to have free paper and no plastic available.”

James represents the two Raleys and one Safeway in town.

Ryan Schouten, whose family owns the Grocery Outlet, agreed with most of what James had to say.

“We don’t offer paper bags because of the cost. They are 9 to 10 cents for us,” Schouten said. He expects his store alone will take a \$50,000 hit each year to provide paper bags.

Plastic grocery bags on average cost 3 cents each.

The ordinance takes effect Jan. 15 for all grocery stores in South Lake Tahoe and on Oct. 15, 2014, for all other retail establishments.

Resident Norm Strobel told the council he and his wife would shop outside the city if the ban were approved.

Eleven of the 13 people who spoke at the meeting favored the

ban. One of those advocates was B Gorman, CEO of Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce. She said not putting the fee in for paper was a vote against business.

Many of the 80-plus jurisdictions in California that have implemented plastic bag ordinances also impose a fee for paper. This is designed to be an incentive for people to switch to reusable bags that they would bring to the store.

Councilmember Hal Cole believes charging a fee for a bag is a tax that shoppers should not have to endure. He was the deciding vote Tuesday as well as earlier this month.

Councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner have been adamantly against the ban. He believes there is not a plastic bag issue. She believes there are health concerns with reusing canvas bags or the like. He would support the state taking the lead. She doesn't believe stores have been part of the discussion.

The bag ban has been discussed for four years in South Lake Tahoe. And stores like Safeway, T.J. Maxx, Kmart and Big 5 operate stores in jurisdictions that have banned plastic bags and have managed to survive.

Councilmembers Angela Swanson and Brooke Laine wanted the fee for paper. But what they wanted more was for plastic to be banned, so they voted for the ordinance without the fee.

It was the same 3-2 vote as two weeks ago to ban plastic bags, with Davis and Conner in the minority.

It was agreed that a few months after the plastic ban has been in effect the council would revisit the ordinance to see how it is working.

In other action:

- The second reading of the tourist core area plan was voted on. This time Conner voted for it. It passed unanimously, where it was a 4-1 vote at the first reading earlier this

month.