

# S. Tahoe delays plastic bag fine; Cole now mayor

By Kathryn Reed

On a 4-1 vote the South Lake Tahoe City Council decided to waive all fines associated with the plastic bag ban for the first 90 days.

The ban for grocery stores takes effect Jan. 15. Other retail outlets will be banned from using the single-use bags starting Oct. 15.

Councilman Tom Davis was the lone dissenter. He has been against this ordinance since the get-go.

Councilwoman JoAnn Conner pushed hard for the delay in implementing a fine so businesses can adapt to the change. She also initiated the reduction in the fine structure to have it start at \$50 instead of \$100 as City Attorney Tom Watson had proposed.

Warnings will be given to businesses until mid-April, after which financial penalties kick in. Those fines are per day that the retailer hands out plastic when they aren't supposed to.

Mayor Hal Cole said he would like the money collected to be used for the program either in terms of education or being able to provide bags to nonprofits that use them. However, this was not incorporated into the resolution that was adopted Dec. 10.

The plan is for city staff to assess in the spring how the program is going and then convene a meeting with the rest of the businesses that must adhere to the plastic bag ban. It's possible the grocery stores could offer advice. The council

will then revisit the ban in the summer.

**In other action:**

- Cole was elected mayor for the next year by his peers on a 4-0 vote. He chose not to vote. Brooke Laine was elected mayor pro tem on a 4-1 vote. Conner's issue with Laine is that she had not been elected to the council, but was appointed.
- The 911 fee on phones is going up from \$1.55 to \$2.25 on Jan.1 and then to \$2.65 on Jan. 1, 2015, on the 26,463 phones in the city. The city wants to have the system pay for itself and no longer subsidize it at \$300,000 a year. Police Chief Brian Uhler said the gap is because of salary and benefit increases since 2009.
- The council, with a good portion of the fire department staff in attendance, approved the purchase of a new engine. The city does not have a backup engine, so it uses a brush truck, a state vehicle or borrows one from another agency when an engine is sidelined. The engines are 11-, 14-, and 22-years-old. To date combined they have been out of service for 107 days this year. The cost of the new engine is \$529,746.60. It will be financed and paid back via Proposition 172 funds.