

S. Tahoe delays expanding plastic bag ban

By Kathryn Reed

The South Lake Tahoe City Council remains confused regarding its vision about the use of plastic bags in town.

On Tuesday the council on a 3-2 vote decided to delay implementation of the plastic bag ban for retailers. It was supposed to go into effect Oct. 15. It has been delayed for a year.

Restaurants were never included in that group. But it did include dry cleaners, in addition to clothing outlets, hardware stores and other businesses deemed retail.

Of the more than 3,000 business licenses in the city, 800 are considered retail.

Councilmembers Brooke Laine and Angela Swanson wanted to go forward with the ban this year – as has been their stance from the get-go. Councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner have been against the ban all along. Mayor Hal Cole has consistently been the swing vote. On June 17 he cast the deciding vote to delay the ban.

While Cole said his big issue is the number of plastic bags ending up in landfills, he is also concerned with mandating what he called “mom and pop businesses” to eliminate plastic as an option to bag goods.

Paper bags cost retailers more to buy than plastic. But plastic is said to be worse environmentally, which is an overriding reason why cities are banning those bags.

Earlier this year grocery stores in South Lake Tahoe had to stop handing out the single-use bags.

Six people spoke at the meeting – most in support of going forward with expanding the bag ban to other businesses. Of the five letters the city received, three favored the ban.

Not a single business owner – small or large – was at the meeting asking the council to rescind or delay the expanded bag ban, or change what is in place now.

In July, the council will officially revise the current ordinance to reflect the delayed implementation for retail establishments. There is always the possibility there could be another delay or some other change to the use of plastic bags in South Lake Tahoe – especially since there will be a new council in a matter of months.

In other action:

- A consultant told the council at this time it is safe to stick with not having district elections. This is not the route Lake Tahoe Community College and Lake Tahoe Unified School District took. In November the education entities will switch to district elections. But their boundaries are different than the city's.