

S. Lake Tahoe says yes to using plastic bags

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe has done a 180 on being an environmental leader, according to some people.

It all has to do with plastic bags.

The council on a 3-2 vote Jan. 19 said only grocery stores and food outlets must adhere to the plastic bag ban. Mayor Wendy David and Councilmember Austin Sass were in the minority.

There had been a misunderstanding by Councilmember Hal Cole at the original vote in 2014. He thought the council was going to discuss how things were going before the ban expanded instead of automatically encompassing other establishments a year later – which was in October 2015. That is why last fall he asked to revoke the ordinance beyond grocery stores and restaurants.

Cole is also concerned about the economic repercussions on businesses. He also pointed out that businesses could always voluntarily not use plastic bags.

But at no time when the revocation has been discussed has there been mention to assess how the bag ban is working. No business person has either come forward at a meeting or written a letter asking to retain the use of plastic bags.

Instead, the vote was based on personal preference and not facts based on zero evidence being presented at the meetings as to the ban being negative for businesses.

Sass asked if any businesses have complained about the ban. City Clerk Suzie Alessi said not to her knowledge.

Councilwoman JoAnn Conner said people are afraid to speak up for fear of retribution.

Sentiments from the public included:

- Jerry Goodman: The council is not environmentally sensitive.
- Joe Stanton: The real compromise would be to allow businesses to use their existing plastic bag supply before implementing the ban. People come to Tahoe because they see it as an environmental leader, but rescinding the bag ban delivers the opposite message.
- Bruce Grego: There is no environmental impact by having a plastic bag ban. Paper bags aren't as useful.
- Pete Fink: It's about bringing your own bag; plastic bags weren't around when he was a kid; Europe is doing just fine without plastic and the U.S. could be in the same boat.

—

In other news:

- A taxi driver questioned why the city is allowing Uber to operate here. City Attorney Tom Watson said it's a state issue and the city has no control.
- Hilary Roverud is interim director Development Services because Shawna Brekke-Reid left earlier this month.
- The city eliminated the following subcommittees: airport master plan, Lake Tahoe Unified-Lake Tahoe Community College memorandum of understanding (for the fields), parks and rec master plan, policy for giving to nonprofits, single room occupancy and warm room.
- Subcommittees added include development services code (Sass-Cole) and Champions Plaza (David-Tom Davis).

- Representation to the two chambers of commerce, lodging association and South Tahoe Public Utility District remain intact after being proposed for elimination.