History of Plastic Bag Ban

Overview

The effort to address plastic bag use in Los Alamos began in 2015 with a citizen petition to ban single-use plastic bags and impose a $0.10 fee on paper bags. After public meetings and surveys, where 80% opposed a ban and 72% opposed reducing distribution, the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) recommended education over regulation. In 2019, another petition sought to ban plastic bags, straws, and Styrofoam, prompting the County Council to form a subcommittee. By FY2021 budget process, Council actions focused on education campaigns, funding washable utensils for schools, and a feasibility study on food composting, but no plastic bag ban was implemented.

Chronological History

March 31, 2015 | Citizen Petition

Mark Jones submitted a petition requesting that Council pass an ordinance prohibiting retail establishments from distributing single-use plastic carryout bags to their customers and mandating a $.10 fee on paper bags to be collected and retained by the merchant.

April 14, 2015 | County Council Meeting

Council directs ESB to conduct two public meetings regarding an ordinance to ban or otherwise reduce the distribution of single use bags in Los Alamos and then offer Council options or a proposed ordinance.

July 15, 2015 | Environmental Sustainability Board Meeting

After hosting two public meetings and utilizing Open Forum survey to gather public comment, 80.1% of participants were opposed to the ordinance to ban the plastic bag and 72.2% of participants were opposed to reduce the distribution of single use bags, the ESB recommends County Council create an education campaign to reduce the use of single use plastic bags.

August 14, 2015 | County Council Meeting

Council moved to acknowledge the excellent work of the Environmental Sustainability Board (E.S.B.) in gathering public information regarding plastic bags, further, that Council acknowledge the education efforts of merchants regarding recycling, and acknowledge, and encourage the continuing education efforts of the County Solid Waste Department and finally, take no further action.

August 16, 2018 | ESB Meeting

ESB Member James Robinson presented “Instituting a Plastic Bag Fee in Los Alamos County” No action was taken.

July 9, 2019 | County Council

Resident Anne Le Page presented a petition to Council and asked them to implement a ban on the use and distribution of plastic bags, plastic straws and Styrofoam containers. Councilors Katrina Schmidt (Martin), James Robinson and Pete Sheehey volunteered to form the council subcommittee that would pursue this issue.

November 21, 2019 | ESB Meeting
Councilor Sheehey provided an update to the Environmental Sustainability Board regarding the petition.

July 7, 2020 | County Council Meeting
Council issues the following statement: We thank the petitioners, particularly the high school Eco Club, for bringing our attention to this issue. The Council, through our FY2021 budget process has taken the following actions:

1) The Environmental Sustainability Board, with help from County staff, is expanding their public education campaign on recycling and minimizing food waste and unnecessary use of plastic bags, containers, and straws. This will include engaging with local retailers and restaurants to help them minimize waste of food and plastic materials.

2) The County approved funding for washable utensils and trays for use at Los Alamos Public Schools.

3) The County approved funding for a feasibility study of food composting that includes evaluating available technologies, costs and benefits. The County is also offering education and equipment to the public for backyard composting.

In addition, it is proposed that Council approves the attached Proclamation (Attachment B).