

History of Plastic Bag Ban in Los Alamos County (as of July 2026)

Overview

Since 2015, Los Alamos County has evaluated policies to reduce single-use plastic bags through citizen petitions, public engagement, and Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) research. Following a 2015 citizen petition requesting a plastic bag ban and a \$0.10 paper bag fee, the County Council directed the ESB to conduct public outreach. After two public meetings and an Open Forum survey, 80.1% of participants opposed a plastic bag ban and 72.2% opposed reducing the distribution of single-use bags, leading the ESB to recommend education rather than regulation, and Council took no further action.

A second citizen petition in 2019 sought to ban plastic bags, straws, and Styrofoam, but Council instead focused on waste reduction initiatives including public education, reusable school food service items, and food composting.

In 2025, Council renewed the discussion by directing the ESB to evaluate the recyclability, alternatives, costs, and impacts of single-use plastic bags. Following months of research and review of policies in other communities, Council directed the ESB in 2026 to develop a proposed single-use plastic bag ordinance informed by other New Mexico programs, resulting in the draft ordinance currently under consideration.

Chronological History

March 1, 2015 | LA Daily Post

Los Alamos Plastic Bag Survey: 64.65% Against ban.

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.

June 17, 2015 | Los Alamos Monitor

A possible ban on the distribution of plastic bags by county retailers has been a contentious issue since it was introduced.

However, according to both an online “Open Forum” poll on the county’s website and an online poll on LAMonitor.com, most residents are against getting rid of the bags altogether.

In the Open Forum, there was a nearly 80 percent-20 percent split of the 252 respondents since April 23.

Contrary to the contention of both opponents and proponents of the ban, only 12 of the 252 participants self-registered as being from outside of the community. The biggest single block of participants were from White Rock.

On LAMonitor.com, a poll has been opened since early February. While the majority of the nearly 500 respondents were against a ban, the split was smaller, with 60% voting no and 40% voting yes. The ban is backed partially by members of the League of Women Voters and the local chapter of the Sierra Club. An affiliation of community members, which calls itself the Save the Bag Los Alamos, joined in opposition to the ban proposal.

June 18, 2015 | County Council Meeting (June 19th 2015 Los Alamos Monitor)

A motion before the Los Alamos County Environmental Sustainability Board to add a \$0.10 fee to both single-use plastics and paper bags failed by a 3-3 vote.

In April, the Los Alamos County Council charged the ESB with holding two public meetings on whether “to ban or otherwise reduce the distribution of single use bags” and to make a recommendation to council.

Before motions were entertained, the board heard presentations from representatives on both sides of the issue, reports from each board member on interviews they conducted with the business community and information regarding recycling plastic bags gathered from the recycling company which the city contracts.

Initially, residents and groups, notably the local chapter of the Sierra Club and the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos asked the County Council to introduce a ban on plastic bags at retail outlets, like the one currently enforced in Santa Fe and other cities.

Last month, proponents of the bag ban asked to withdraw the motion, instead proposing the bag fee.

Both proposals have been controversial since their introductions.

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 (ESB) 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 Environmental Services Division 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).

July 12, 2020 | Los Alamos Monitor

Los Alamos County Council decided not to act on a petition to ban plastic bags in Los Alamos County.

The Council decided to go with Councilor Randall Ryti's modified proposal to acknowledge the main organizers of the petition and listing the actions the council already accomplished in the last two years that has made Los Alamos County more recycle-friendly.

The petition organizers were also seeking a ban on plastic straws and other one-use plastic items in the county.

One of the reasons the petition was rejected was because of the COVID-19 pandemic: Smith's grocery store has already banned the use of reusable bags to stop the spread of the virus.

The new motion created by Councilor Ryti lists the things Council has done in recent months to help protect the environment. That includes funding the council's efforts to help the Environmental Sustainability Board educate the public on the benefits of recycling and composting food waste, buying reusable utensils and trays for the Los Alamos Public Schools lunch program, and funding an Environmental Sustainability Board composting feasibility study for the county.

January 14, 2025 | County Council Meeting

It was requested by Councilor Ryti to bring to Council several ordinances to discuss. These ordinances include ones that have had some prior Council discussions and public engagement including: charging a fee for single-use plastics; discouraging vacant and abandoned properties; and raising the minimum wage.

Council directs ESB to "Evaluate single use plastic bags to include factors such as ability to recycle and other alternatives and cost to County to recycle and engagement to include local businesses and other interested parties."

February 20, 2025 | ESB Meeting

The Board discussed Council's request for the ESB to research the Plastic Bag Fee.

April 8, 2025 | County Council Meeting

Sustainability Manager Angelica Gurule provided an update on general sustainability efforts, including the research related to the County's requested plastic bag fee.

July 8, 2025 | County Council Meeting

Ms. Gurule will provide an update on general sustainability efforts, including research related to the County's requested plastic bag fee.

July 17, 2025 | ESB Meeting

During the January 14, 2025 Los Alamos County Council meeting, they requested of the Environmental Sustainability Board that they “Evaluate single use plastic bags to include factors such as ability to recycle and other alternatives and cost to County to recycle and engagement to include local businesses and other interested parties.” The Environmental Sustainability Board has adopted this into the 2025 Work Plan. They formed a working group with Chair Shannon Blair and members Hermann Geppert-Kleinrath and Rebecca Paley-Williams. This group spent the past couple of months researching and interviewing other municipalities that have adopted a plastic bag ordinance. The working group will provide an update to the ESB.

September 18, 2025 | ESB Meeting

During the January 14, 2025 Los Alamos County Council meeting, they requested of the Environmental Sustainability Board that they “Evaluate single use plastic bags to include factors such as ability to recycle and other alternatives and cost to County to recycle and engagement to include local businesses and other interested parties.” The Environmental Sustainability Board has adopted this into their 2025 Work Plan. They formed a working group with Chair Shannon Blair and members Hermann Geppert-Klienrath and Rebecca Paley-Williams. This group has spent the past couple of months researching and interviewing other municipalities that have adopted a plastic bag ordinance. The working group will provide an update to the ESB.

October 16, 2025 | ESB Meeting

During the January 14, 2025 Los Alamos County Council meeting, they requested of the Environmental Sustainability Board that they “Evaluate single use plastic bags to include factors such as ability to recycle and other alternatives and cost to County to recycle and engagement to include local businesses and other interested parties.” The Environmental Sustainability Board has adopted this into their 2025 Work Plan. They formed a working group with Chair Shannon Blair and members Hermann Geppert-Klienrath and Rebecca Paley-Williams. This group has spent the past couple of months researching and interviewing other municipalities that have adopted a plastic bag ordinance. The working group will provide an update to the ESB, and the board will make a recommendation to provide to County Council.

October 21, 2025 | County Council Meeting

The Environmental Sustainability Board will provide an update on the Plastic Bag Research. The ESB voted unanimously to forward the Plastic Bag Research (ATTACHMENT C) to Council for consideration and further guidance. Due to the history of limited community support and the sensitive nature of this topic, the ESB indicated that additional Council guidance was needed before pursuing further engagement with businesses and community.

Overview of Attachment C: Evaluates single use plastic bags to include factors such as ability to recycle and other alternatives and cost to County to recycle and engagement to include local businesses and other interested parties.

While plastic bag bans have shown a reduction in plastic waste, other studies show an increase in plastic bag purchases.

April 7, 2026 | County Council Meeting

Council directed the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) to return within 90 days with a proposal for a single-use plastic bag ban informed by other programs in New Mexico. Council also expressed a preference for an approach that does not include a mandatory fee. While not formally included in the motion, Council indicated that community engagement should be incorporated into the process. The ESB will discuss how they would like to proceed and possibly create a working group to continue working on this item.

During the development of the 2026 Work Plan, the ESB requested direction from Council on whether to continue exploring a plastic bag ban and/or fee. If Council chooses to pursue either option, the ESB also requests guidance on the desired level and type of community engagement, such as whether Council would like staff or the ESB to conduct a community survey, host stakeholder meetings, or pursue other outreach methods before bringing forward potential policy options.

April 16, 2026 | ESB Meeting

Chair Hampton appointed a working group consisting of Vice-Chair Erik Loechell, Member Shannon Blair, and Member Jack Grow. They will provide an update on the progress made toward the development of the single-use plastic bag ordinance.

May 21, 2026 | ESB Meeting

The plastic bag working group reported they developed a draft ordinance, and it was submitted to the County attorney for their review and revision.

June 18, 2026 | ESB Meeting

The Plastic Bag Working Group will present the proposed single use plastic bag ordinance to the Board for their review and input. The Board made a recommendation on the proposed single use plastic bag ordinance with amendments. This is included in the agenda packet for July 16, 2026.