

Source: Santa Monica Daily Press

## Businesses on board with proposed plastic bag ban

by Nick Taborek

January 20, 2011

MAIN LIBRARY — If there are opponents in Santa Monica's business community of the proposed law banning stores from giving out free single-use plastic bags, they haven't made themselves known to the local Chamber of Commerce.

At an informational session about the proposed ban the business group held on Wednesday morning at the Main Library, no store owners spoke against the plan, which is expected to win the council's approval on Tuesday and would ban all retailers from using free carry-out plastic bags at the cash register. Grocery stores, pharmacies, liquor stores and convenience stores could provide customers with recycled paper bags under the proposed rule, but they would have to charge at least 10 cents per bag.

The plan, which aims to cut down on pollution from bags that wind up in the ocean by encouraging shoppers to bring their own reusable bags to the store, has been under discussion in Santa Monica since 2008. Members of the of the City Council have been anxious to pass the ban but have held off until now because of a series of legal concerns.

The chamber's director of government affairs, Brian Chase, said he's yet to hear from critics of the ban.

On Wednesday, several representatives from retail businesses that would be affected by the new law spoke in its favor.

Richard Johnson, store manager at Bob's Market on Ocean Park Boulevard, said he didn't foresee any negative impacts to business once the ban is in place.

"Our customer base is all for protecting the environment," he said. "And as the city says, it is a big problem at the beach. Being a surfer, I've seen them and pick them up off the beach and also in the water as they are floating by."

He said 15 to 25 percent of customers already bring their own reusable bags.

Laura Martino, marketing supervisor at Whole Foods in Santa Monica, also spoke favorably of the plan, though she noted her company has already switched to more expensive recycled paper bags instead of plastic.

"The transition [for other stores] will be a little costly, but in the long run it will actually pay off," she said, "especially if you can really get people to use these reusable bags."

Mark Gold, the president of the non-profit Heal the Bay and a principal backer of the ban proposal, said the absence of local opposition was no surprise.

"Santa Monica has an environmentally-supportive business community," he said. "The bag ban ordinance is the long-awaited next step, after the polystyrene food container ban, in the city's efforts to rid their beaches and the bay of plastic pollution."

He noted that opposition last year to a failed state initiative that would have banned free plastic bags at most stores throughout California came from bag manufacturers, not supermarkets and mom-and-pop shops.

[nickt@smdp.com](mailto:nickt@smdp.com)