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Calabasas wrapping up work on plastic bag ordinance

Ban goes into effect next year

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The Calabasas Environmental Commission voted unanimously to recommend to the City Council a ban on plastic bags.

The proposed ordinance would ban the use of plastic carryout bags at all Calabasas retail establishments and at city-sponsored events. The law would go into effect six months after its passage by the council.

At the council's request, the Calabasas Environmental Commission began reviewing the plastic bag issue in September. In October, the commission asked for a survey of businesses that could be affected by the ban.

According to survey results discussed last month, the majority of Calabasas businesses were in favor of regulating plastic bag use, said Alex Farassati, environmental services manager. But Rick Crandall, director of environmental steward operation for Albertsons, pointed out that paper bags create environmental problems of their own.

"Reusable bags are the only way to go," Crandall said. "As a company, we want to ban all bags. That would be utopia for the environment. My concern is not that you are going down the wrong road. I just want you to consider the entire environment, not just the recycling piece. We want to do the right thing for the environment."

Crandall said one truck can deliver 2.2 million plastic bags to a grocery store, while it would take 11 trucks to carry the same number of paper bags. Crandall said plastic bags cost 1 to 2 cents each, while paper bags are 4 to 6 cents each.

Commissioner Ronit Levy was concerned about the increased use in paper bags as well.

"How many more paper bags are we going to be using?" asked Levy. "It recycles better; it's not going to end up in the ocean, but it's still an issue of how many more bags we're going to be using.

"It sounds like we are talking about considerable impact on the alternative free bag—paper. I'm concerned, the way this is set up, paper bags are going to be used (more)."

Levy recommended charging a fee per paper bag to discourage the use of more bags.

"People are taking these bags because they are free, not because they aren't environmentally conscious," Levy said. "I think there's one more tiny step we could take to close that circle and to (avoid) creating an avenue to waste more paper."

Farassati said that according to state regulations, grocery stores cannot collect fees for bags until 2010. Levy asked that a paper bag fee schedule be added to the ordinance, but the rest of the commission wanted to wait and see how the ordinance does in its first year.

The commission did agree to advise the City Council to review the impacts of any type of free bags offered.