

The Seattle Times

Winner of Eight Pulitzer Prizes

Local News

Originally published Tuesday, January 17, 2012 at 5:26 PM

Petition to force vote on Seattle's plastic-bag ban crumples

Craig Keller's effort to put Seattle's plastic-bag ban before voters fell short, as he collected far fewer than the 16,000 signatures needed.

By Lynn Thompson

Seattle Times staff reporter



An effort to collect enough signatures to place a Seattle plastic-bag ban before voters has fallen short.

Craig Keller, a Republican activist who organized the petition drive, said he'd collected between 2,000 and 3,000 signatures, far less than the needed 16,000.

Tuesday was the deadline to turn signatures in to the City Clerk's office to qualify the measure for the August primary ballot.

"I appreciate everyone who licked a stamp and took the time to mail in a petition, but we don't have enough signatures," said Keller.

Keller spent the past month reaching out to small and independent grocers and convenience stores that, like larger grocers and retailers, will be subject to the ban.

"Most merchants don't know about it and don't have a contingency plan," he said. "It's not going to be welcomed."

In December, the City Council unanimously approved a ban on thin plastic checkout bags at all retail, grocery and convenience stores as a way to reduce litter and protect the marine environment.

The measure allows stores to charge a 5-cent fee for paper bags to help offset the higher cost of paper and to remind shoppers to bring reusable bags.

Seattle officials say that with the repeal effort failing, they will begin outreach to stores across the city. The ban is scheduled to go into effect July 1.

The city plans to distribute a brochure explaining the new law in five or six languages and make personal visits to about 500 stores, said Dick Lilly, a waste-prevention manager for Seattle Public Utilities, which handles the city's solid-waste disposal.

Lilly said the city undertook a similar effort when Styrofoam food containers were banned in 2009, and again in 2010 when all single-use food packaging had to be compostable or recyclable.

Lilly said the city also will likely mail information to retail outlets and hold meetings for grocers about the ban's requirement that paper bags be made of at least 40 percent recycled materials.

The state Legislature is considering a statewide ban. The Northwest Grocery Association, which supported the Seattle ban, said it prefers one standard across the state rather than a patchwork of local ordinances.

Rep. Joe Fitzgibbon, D-Burien, has introduced a bill in Olympia to ban plastic bags and impose a 5-cent fee on paper bags. Two Seattle legislators, Democratic Reps. Jamie Pedersen and Reuven Carlyle, signed on as sponsors.

The bill will get its first hearing before the House Environment Committee at 1:30 p.m. Friday, Hearing Room C, John. L. O'Brien Building, Olympia.

The plastics industry has successfully opposed attempts to enact statewide bans in California and Oregon.

Lynn Thompson: 206-464-8305 or lthompson@seattletimes.com. On Twitter @lthompsontimes.