



Editor [Craig Clough craig.clough@patch.com](mailto:craig.clough@patch.com)

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Government

Update: L.A. City Council Approves Plastic Bags Ban, 10-Cent Fee for Paper Bags

Los Angeles becomes the largest city in the country to approve a ban on plastic bags.

By [Paul Chavez](#) | [Email the author](#) | May 23, 2012



A standing-room-only crowd packed City Hall on Wednesday as the Los Angeles City Council voted 13-1 to approve a ban on plastic bags and impose a 10-cent charge on paper bags at convenience stores and supermarkets in the nation's second-largest city.

With the council's action, Los Angeles and its 3.8 million residents became the largest city in the United States to formally endorse a sweeping ban on single-use plastic shopping bags.

"Today, the Los Angeles City Council took a prudent step to protect our environment and bolster our economy," said Kirsten James, director of water quality for the Santa Monica-based nonprofit group Heal the Bay. "The vote further emphasizes the fact that the days are numbered for single-use bags in California."

Nearly 50 other municipalities in California have adopted ordinances in the state banning single-use plastic bags and most also ban or impose fees for paper bags. Other municipalities in California that have passed single-use plastic bag bans include San Francisco, [Santa Monica](#), [Malibu](#), [Manhattan Beach](#), [Calabasas](#), Long Beach and Carpinteria. Environmentalists hope the move by the Los Angeles City Council will provide momentum for a statewide ban.

"I'm deliriously excited about the passage of this measure. Ever since I first heard about the floating plastic island in the Pacific, while I was still in the state legislature, I have been trying to move the ball forward on banning plastic bags in this state," said Councilman Paul Koretz, a chief sponsor of the measure, in a statement.

It is estimated that 1.2 to 2.3 billion single-use plastic carryout bags and 400 million single-use paper bags are used annually in Los Angeles. A report by the Board of Public Works cited studies showing that single-use paper bags have greater greenhouse gas emissions through their production and use than a single-use plastic bag, prompting paper bags to also be targeted.

The city's [Board of Public Works voted 4-0 in October to endorse a ban on both single-use plastic and paper bags](#) and the City Council in December approved a self-imposed end of March deadline to approve a bag ban.

City Councilman Eric Garcetti co-introduced a motion Wednesday that imposed a 10-cent fee on paper bags instead of an outright ban. The council voted nearly unanimously to endorse the substitute motion that calls for a six-month grace period for large retailers to phase-out single-use plastic bags before

their banishment, with a one-year grace period for smaller retailers. All retailers would be required to charge 10 cents for a paper bag as an incentive for shoppers to bring reusable bags to the market beginning one year after the program's enactment.

City Councilman Bernard Parks cast the lone vote against the motion.

The council's action Wednesday will initiate an environmental impact review on the bag ban that should take about four months to complete and will be followed by the crafting of an ordinance that likely will be approved before the end of the year, officials said.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has advocated for the elimination of plastic bags in Los Angeles. He praised the vote in a statement released Wednesday.

"Today, City Council approved a motion that will move us one step closer to making Los Angeles a greener, cleaner, more sustainable city," Villaraigosa said in a statement. "The little things matter—removing plastic bags that clutter our streets and damage our waterways will go a long way towards protecting Angelenos and Los Angeles wildlife for generations."

The City Council and the Board of Public Works previously heard lengthy testimony on the pros and cons of a bag ban and City Council President Herb Wesson on Wednesday limited comments to 15 minutes for each side with one minute per speaker.

Supporters of the ban brought a little star power with actress Julia Louis-Dreyfus, a Los Angeles resident and board member of the nonprofit group Heal the Bay, and actress Amy Smart, a Los Angeles native, urging the council to support the ban.

Dreyfus, best known for playing Elaine on the hit television comedy "*Seinfeld*," told the council that 90 percent of customers in Calabasas, which approved a plastic bag ban in 2011, bring their own bags to shop.

"Does L.A. really want to lose to Calabasas and Oklahoma City in the same week?" Dreyfus said in reference to the Los Angeles Lakers being bounced out of the playoffs Monday by the Oklahoma City Thunder.

The winsome Smart said she has participated in Heal the Bay beach cleanups for 18 years and concluded her brief remarks by simply stating, "It's time to ban plastic bags."

Opponents of the motion included Donna Dempsey of the American Progressive Bag Alliance, who said 30,000 American families depend on jobs in the plastic bag industry. Dempsey said the council was relying on inaccurate information regarding the impact of plastic pollution and said the Bureau of Sanitation's information was "junk science."

"Basically, the dough is uncooked and you are feeding it to your constituents," Dempsey said.

Cathy Browne, general manager of plastic bag maker Crown Poly in Huntington Park, said the council shouldn't be mandating consumer behavior and should let the market dictate consumer choice.

Other opponents raised concerns about bacteria and viruses from re-usable bags creating public health hazards, while several Crown Poly workers said approving a bag ban would cost them their jobs.

A plastic bag ban has been simmering at City Hall since 2004, when a task force was created to fight the amount of single-use plastic bags in the city's waterways. In 2008, the City Council adopted a policy statement with the goal of banning plastic carryout bags by January 2010. The move to ban single-use plastic bags stalled as the city hoped the state Legislature would approve a state-wide ban, but picked up steam again last fall.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in November 2010 approved a plastic bag ban in unincorporated areas that went into effect July 1, 2011, at large stores and on Jan. 1, 2012, at smaller retailers. A lawsuit claimed the 10-cent fee on paper bags imposed by the county was an illegal tax under Proposition 26, but Los Angeles Superior Court Judge James Chalfant in March rejected the argument in a tentative ruling.

(Editor's Note: Updated at 5:05 p.m. to add more details, comments and reaction.)