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Issaquah Council Approves Plastic Bag Ban

Businesses with over 7,500 square feet of space will have to phase out plastic bags by March of next year, while smaller businesses will have until March 2014 to make the switch.

By [Jeanne Gustafson](#) | [Email the author](#) | June 5, 2012



After extensive public comment and council discussion, punctuated by an equally long public hearing on the proposed Forest Heights development agreement, the Issaquah City Council made it official--plastic bags will be banned at all retail establishments in Issaquah.

Numerous residents and environmental concerns, along with representatives from the Washington Restaurant Association and the Northwest Grocery Association, made their support for the ban known during public comment at the start of the Issaquah City Council meeting Monday night, June 4. On the flip side, plastics industry [representatives restated their case that paper bags use more energy to produce and create more waste](#).

In the end, however, the council majority approved a plastic bag ban in Issaquah, on a 5-2 majority. The bill will become effective in two phases, with businesses over 7,500 square feet required to eliminate plastic bags by March 1, 2013, while smaller businesses have an extra 12 months to comply with the new city regulation.

Proponents of the ban included Willie Elliott of Save Lake Sammamish, business owner Connie Marsh, Issaquah Environmental Council member and owner of Doubletake Vintage Consignment, and numerous citizens.

After all of the discussion, Councilman Mark Mullet moved to adopt the ban.

"We have to trust the science and the math, and a nickel seems like a good place to start," Mullet said, while addressing the concerns of some that the ban, which will still allow plastic bags used for produce, meat, and other specific uses, doesn't go far enough. "You don't want to do nothing with the hope of doing everything. You have to start incrementally."

Councilwoman Eileen Barber vocally opposed the limited ban, saying, "I want something that addresses all plastic films" such as newspaper bags, the plastic that packages water bottles, and goes farther than what was proposed in the bill.

Meanwhile, Councilman Tola Marts said, "Moderation is not really exciting," but the council's job is to moderate and craft solutions that address competing interests.

In the end, the "ayes" had it, with Barber and Councilman Joshua Schaer dissenting. Schaer said he preferred imposing a higher fee on plastic bags--under the ban, consumers will [pay a fee of at least 5 cents](#) each for paper bags, though stores can charge more.

"A ban removes customer choice," Schaer said. "I believe a user fee on plastic, and a lesser fee on paper, would be preferable."

The meeting began at 7:30 p.m., with a packed house, full of both residents who wished to speak to the bag ban, and residents who wished to comment at a public hearing on the proposed Forest Hills development, to consist of 24-26 new clustered houses above the Talus development. The meeting concluded about four hours later with the finalization of a [phased ban on plastic shopping bags at city retailers](#).

After the public hearing, the Forest Hills development agreement issue has been referred back to the Land and Shore Committee for further discussion at its June 12 meeting, but the bag issue is settled, after months of discussion and public hearings.

