



# City of Flagstaff

## Sustainability Commission

November 7, 2012

Honorable Mayor and City Council,

Last June, the City Council requested an official recommendation from the Sustainability Commission regarding strategies for addressing single use plastic bag problems currently facing the Flagstaff community and municipal organization. Of specific concern are community litter issues and negative impacts to Cinder Lake Landfill operations. Plastic bag debris directly costs the City of Flagstaff approximately \$150,000 annually while the indirect costs are unknown. Some progress was made to remedy this problem in 2007 after the Sustainability Commission helped establish Bag Central Station - Where Plastic Bags Belong recycling program in Flagstaff. However, this recycling campaign only addressed about 1% of the plastic bag use within the community. The impact of plastic bags is far from solved.

Cities across the nation have successfully established plastic bag bans or bag fees as a means of addressing unwanted plastic litter and processing; the Sustainability Commission believes a ban or fee on plastic bag use in Flagstaff could resolve this problem. However, the Commission also believes that further research needs to be conducted in order to provide the Mayor and City Council with a policy decision and reasons for action to complement an official recommendation. Therefore, in response to Council's request, we recommend additional research and community conversation to ensure the best solution for the Flagstaff community.

The commission's recommendation is based on:

*Economic impact* – A reduction in plastic bags would reduce expenses for landfill operations and cleanup of the surrounding forest, and the Materials Recovery Facility operations.

*Environmental impact* – Eliminating plastic bags would significantly improve community litter problems by eradicating unsightly debris. Plastic bags litter our landscape by getting caught in trees, storm drains, and waterways. They negatively impact wildlife who mistake plastic bag litter as food. Single use plastic bags are derived mainly from diminishing non-renewable resources.

*promoting sustainable practices in all spheres of life and educating the public*

*Research needed* – There are many questions that need to be answered to objectively move forward:

- What is the best and most cost effective solution for the City of Flagstaff to consider?
- How do community members feel about single use plastic bags?
- How do business members feel about single use plastic bags?
- Would a single use plastic bag ban or fee benefit the City of Flagstaff and the business community?
- Who would be impacted and how?
- Who supports this type of measure and who opposes it?
- What are other alternatives that may solve the problems?

In closing, the Sustainability Commission will analyze a variety of solutions that may address single use plastic bag problems in Flagstaff. We look forward to presenting the City Council with a more formal recommendation.

Sincerely,

Kim Lucy, Chair  
Kathy Farretta, Vice Chair  
Carlton Johnson  
Bryan McLaren  
Jamie Quisenberry  
Aregai Tecele  
Jack Welch