



City of Omaha  
Jean Stothert, Mayor

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Mr. President and City Council Members,

Since the plastic bag discussion first started over a year ago, I have studied research on both sides of the issue. I watched all testimony at both City Council public hearings, reviewed feedback from citizens and retail owners and representatives, and suggested alternatives. Last week, I attended the Community Leaders of America Conference and discussed the effectiveness of bans with Mayors and City Council members from around the country.

Reducing the use of plastic bags is certainly important, however an ordinance to ban plastic bags does not solve the problem of plastic debris in our landfills, parks and right of way. Research shows that 90% of plastic bag litter comes from convenience stores which are exempt in this ordinance due to their square footage (10,000 square feet or less).

My position on Ordinance 41807 has been consistent. In letters sent to you April 22 and May 20, I wrote that I would not support a ban on plastic bags, but would support a resolution to require retailers to phase out the use of plastic bags by 2025. Therefore, I am returning Ordinance 41807 with a veto.

Last year, when a plastic bag fee was first suggested, I said I would not support a fee and would continue to work with the grocers and other area businesses to reduce the use of plastic bags and encourage use of recyclable bags and/or reusable bags. Given a choice between a fee for every plastic grocery bag or a ban, I said I would prefer a ban at that time. Consumers should not have to pay an additional fee for groceries. A 10-cent fee would also not eliminate the problem. (April 3, 2018)

As recently as Monday, I shared research and surveys with you that show a ban on plastic bags will have no significant effect on plastic waste. EPA data shows plastic bags make up 0.3% of municipal plastic waste in landfills. Retail plastic bags are one of the most reused products in America. Research published in January, 2019 in the Journal of Environmental Economics and Management shows California's plastic bag ban has resulted in skyrocketing plastic trash bag sales.

I also remain supportive of a broader study of litter and debris to determine a comprehensive litter reduction strategy for Omaha and have already discussed a partnership with Keep Omaha Beautiful to begin this process.

Sincerely,

Jean Stothert  
Mayor, City of Omaha