

Palm Springs OKs bag ban, delays food trucks

Mar. 19, 2014

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PALM SPRINGS — In six months to a year, the shopping and dining experiences in Palm Springs will be slightly different than they are today.

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For one, those little, thin plastic bags that are so ubiquitous in grocery stores will be gone. And food trucks will very likely be a part of the Palm Springs dining scene, serving everyone from pedestrians out on a stroll, to office workers.

Palm Desert City Council

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The move was strongly supported by the council and the few residents who spoke on the proposed ordinance. Though Steve Rosenberg opposed some of the requirements, such as requiring the paper bags be constructed of at least 40 percent post-consumer waste.

“Prohibitions on plastic bags are fun, but it’s the mandates,” said Rosenberg, as he tossed aside numerous bags, which he said did not state how much post-consumer waste was part of the bags’ makeup. “I’m suggesting we have some problems with the ordinance.”

The ordinance — which is modeled on the same bag-ban language passed in roughly 100 California cities and counties — has the support of the California Grocers Association.

“The model that Palm Springs has, it follows in line with the ones our industry can work with,” said Dave Hylan, a spokesman for the CGA, adding the association’s top priority is consistency from one municipality to the next. “I think for both the business community and for consumers, we think that it’s more effective to be consistent with whatever the model is.”

And the council placed a temporary six-month hold on food trucks, until the city drafts an ordinance permitting the businesses. A Riverside County ordinance enabling food truck businesses goes into effect April 8.

“I think we are just taking our time to get it right,” said Mayor Steve Pougnet. “We are not ‘anti-food trucks.’ ”

The ban on the trucks will not prevent their participation in special events or serving on private property.

The regulations the city will likely consider will have to do with what streets the vendors will be allowed to operate on and how close they can be to existing brick-and-mortar restaurants or institutions like schools.

However, the city ought only consider public safety when drafting its regulations, said Matt Geller, president of the Southern California Mobile Food Vendors Association.

“What doesn’t make sense is saying, ‘You can’t park 500 feet from a restaurant,’” said Geller. “What’s the public safety concern there?”

Last week, the Palm Desert City Council passed the desert’s first set of regulations, which prevent a food truck from parking within 750 feet of a conventional restaurant.

The trucks are also not allowed on streets with a speed limit of more than 35 mph and must be at least 1,500 feet from K-12 schools.

“Of course, you’re going to get places like Palm Desert say, ‘Oh, 750 (feet) is fair,’” said Geller. “It’s not right. It’s not fair. And it’s not legal in the state of California. And it’s ripe for challenge.”