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## Brownsville passes plastic bag ban

By [Lynn Brezosky](#) - Express-News

BROWNSVILLE — Officials are hoping a unanimously passed ban on plastic grocery bags will make the city the first in Texas to rid the landscape of the so-called “urban tumbleweeds.”

City commissioners approved the ban Tuesday night. It will start with a yearlong voluntary ban and become mandatory — with exceptions for bagging fish, meat and poultry — in 2011.

Paper bags, which some consider as bad for the environment as plastic, are not being offered as the alternative.

“There's lots of communities that have tried to do what we did, and it hasn't always worked out,” said Commissioner Edward Camarillo, who carried the ordinance. “In the state of Texas, it looks like we're the only ones to have the ordinance passed and will be able to sustain it.”

Cities including Laredo and Austin have gotten close, Camarillo said, but opposition groups argued there were ways to reduce bag pollution that wouldn't hurt industries or retail sales.

San Francisco in 2007 became the first U.S. city to ban the bags, and cities around the world have passed or debated similar laws.

Camarillo said the ordinance would start with an educational campaign involving area retailers. He said state officials would be asked to allow the Lone Star food assistance card to cover the cost of reusable bags.

Dya Campos, director of public affairs for H-E-B, said the supermarket chain planned to work with the city and continue giving away reusable bags during Earth Day and other events.

She noted its stores have bins to collect plastics such as grocery and dry-cleaning bags, an initiative that in 2009 recycled more than 3 million pounds of plastic.

Rose Timmer, a retiree who heads Healthy Communities of Brownsville, said the ban followed two years of surveying residents and making presentations to civic groups as well as Camarillo and fellow commissioners.

“We had facts and figures to show that, yeah, Brownsville was sick of litter, and the biggest thing we litter are plastic bags,” she said.

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