

# Huntington Beach becomes the first to toss bag ban

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**Huntington Beach, Calif.** — Huntington Beach is exactly what everyone who doesn't live in California thinks all of California is like: miles of sandy beaches, ocean breezes, surfer types in flip flops, cruiser-style bikes, Craftsman-era bungalows and Spanish-style haciendas where palms, hibiscus and fruit tress flourish in the yards.

Every other business on every commercial block has some kind of green or eco-friendly angle (Green dry cleaning! Recyclable coffee cups!). Every Tuesday night, Main Street becomes a farmers-market-cum-street-fair, a weekly party by the pier for neighbors and visitors alike and recycle bins dot the rows of kiosks.

It's also the first city in the United States to repeal a plastic

bag ban that was already in effect. And it made that move while the rest of the state of California is in the middle of a tug-of-war over a statewide ban on plastic bags that will be settled by voters in a 2016 referendum.

So how did Surf City USA, an inspiration to Beach Boys and California Dreamers everywhere, become a plastic bag battleground?

Most of the answers can be provided by one man: City Councilman Mike Posey.

"The plastic bag ban was in many ways my stimulus to run for City Council," he said. "Because that was the first step of the slippery slope of our nanny government encroaching and trying to micromanage our lives."

On the heels of the city's ban on plastic bags — which came with a 10-cent fee for paper ones — came a two-year ban on fireworks and an

attempt to ban polystyrene foam in Huntington Beach. Those ordinances were repealed and beaten back, respectively.

In other words, don't let the chill surfer haven exterior fool you: Huntington Beach residents don't like to be told what to do by the government. And it's not the only coastal California town that perhaps doesn't fit the rest of the country's idea of traditional West Coast liberal voters.

"We're pretty diverse out here politically," Posey said. Even the original passage of the bag ban in 2013 was on a slim, one-vote margin.

In April, the City Council voted 6-1 to repeal Huntington Beach's 2-year-old bag ordinance, making the seaside community of about 200,000 the first in the United States to repeal a bag ban already in effect. The sole vote against the repeal

was from Mayor Jill Hardy, who said she opposed the change at that time because citizens did not have enough time to offer their input to the council.

Even the state at large may not have as much of a liberal bent as some outside the state think. And according to the state's most recent voter registration numbers, 43 percent of eligible California voters are registered as Democrats, 28 percent are registered as Republicans and 29 percent identify with another party or have no party preference.

Posey, who campaigned for his current City Council seat in part on repealing the local bag ban and is a registered Republican, says the statewide referendum is the best move for the state: letting Californians decide for themselves. Though he is personally opposed to bag bans and the slippery slope he says

they represent; Posey also says he is at the ready to help fend off an approval of the referendum on SB 270.

"If the voters, the majority of the California voters, conclude that they need parenting in their shopping habits, then so be it. But it's not government's decision to make. It wasn't even the state assembly, the state senate, or the governor's decision to make because it certainly got on the ballot," Posey said.

"And if the voters decide they want to ban plastic bags, what's the next referendum for something they want to ban? I mean, if we want to talk about banning materials or products that represent a threat to public safety, that's one thing. But if you want to micromanage something, how come we're only talking about plastic bags? It's environmental symbolism over substance is really what it is."