

## Water Protection Advisory Board Letter Calls on City Council To Keep Bag Ordinance

### Community Groups Concerned: 5 semi-truck loads of plastic bags are removed from Albuquerque Storm drains yearly

For Immediate Release:  
March 30th

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Albuquerque, N.M. – Community groups, favoring the elimination of disposable plastic bags, called attention to a [Water Protection Advisory Board](#) sent letter to City Councilors encouraging them to reconsider the repeal of Clean and Green Retail Ordinance (Enactment [No. O-2019-008](#)). Plastic bags, according to the Board, pose a significant threat to water quality and floating trash in the Rio Grande, in addition to a cost to the City and Water Authority.

“Plastic bags are clogging our storm drains and that represents a real cost, not just in terms of maintenance, but also to the Rio Grande and our water quality. The cost of cleaning storm drains may be hidden from the public eye and that’s why we hope the public and City Councilors will give this letter a close read, so that we may be better stewards of the land.”

**Anni Hanna, Director of New Mexico Climate Justice**

#### Key Points:

- The Rio Grande is the **primary drinking water source** for Albuquerque and the environment, benefiting residents of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County. **Plastics are pervasive** in the City’s natural environments and **degrade water quality**, including accumulation and release of sediment, contaminants, and microplastics.
- The City collects and disposes of approximately **five semi-truck loads** of plastic bags from storm drains. Additionally, each of the 18 other NPDES MS4 permittees must collect their own debris.

- **Plastic bags undermine the City's ability to comply with their federal EPA permit** under the National Pollutant Discharge and Elimination System
- Addressing plastic pollution is **costly for the City** -taking staff extra time and resources to clean.

On March 7, City Council voted 6 - 3 to repeal the Clean and Green Retail Ordinance. On March 25, Mayor Keller vetoed the repeal. The Council will vote to sustain or overturn the veto at the City Council meeting on Monday April 4th.

[Read Full Letter Here](#)



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March 16, 2022

FIRST LAST, TITLE

Address1

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Address3

**Subject:** Water Protection Advisory Board Request for the Albuquerque City Council to Reconsider the Repeal of the *Clean and Green Retail Ordinance*

Dear TITLE LAST:

The Water Protection Advisory Board (WPAB) is **tasked by ordinance to provide water quality advice** to the Albuquerque City Council, Bernalillo County Board of County Commissioners, and the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority Governing Board (Ordinance 36-1995). On March 7, 2022 the City Council voted to repeal the *Clean and Green Retail Ordinance* that prohibited most businesses from handing out single-use plastic bags. In response to this action, the WPAB offers advice to the City Council about the impacts of plastic bags and other waste to our water resources, specifically the Rio Grande which is the primary drinking water source for Albuquerque, and the environment, which benefit the residents of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County.

Plastics are a well-studied challenge when it comes to water quality and source water protection (Emeric et.al., 2020). **Plastics are pervasive** (Hassan, et.al., 2019) in the City's natural environments and **degrade water quality** (e.g., accumulation and release of sediment, contaminants, and microplastics). **Plastics also contribute to solid waste pollution** (e.g., collecting along the Rio Grande and urban waterways) (AMAFCA, 2005, 2017). Furthermore, **plastic decomposes when exposed to sunlight, forming microplastic particles** (Lear, et.al., 2022) and **hormone analog chemicals** (Segovia-Mendoza. et.al., 2020) that can potentially enter the drinking water supply and interfere with the life cycles of aquatic life, wildlife, and the ecosystem.

Additionally, **plastic bags undermine the City's ability to comply with their federal permit** with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the National Pollutant Discharge and Elimination System (NPDES) Middle Rio Grande Watershed Based Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) (EPA, 2014). The NPDES MS4 permit has specific requirements that all permittees, including the City, must meet, to control floatables (trash). The purpose of the MS4 permit is to prevent trash, including plastic bags, from ever entering the stormwater system and discharging into

the Rio Grande and other waterways (e.g., Tijeras Arroyo, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District laterals and drains). On an annual basis, **the City collects and disposes of approximately five semi-truck loads of plastic bags** from storm drains. Additionally, each of the 18 other NPDES MS4 permittees must collect their own debris. **Addressing plastic pollution is costly for the City** and other MS4 permittees and increases in magnitude if plastic pollution is not mitigated through Citywide efforts like the *Clean and Green Retail Ordinance*.

The WPAB requests that the City Council **reconsider their repeal** of the *Clean and Green Retail Ordinance* and the resultant consequences for our limited and valuable water resources.

Respectfully,



J. Steve Glass, Chair  
Water Protection Advisory Board

Cc: Councilor Louie Sanchez, District 1  
Councilor Isaac Benton, District 2  
Councilor Klarissa Peña, District 3  
Councilor Brook Bassan, District 4  
Councilor Dan Lewis, District 5  
Councilor Pat Davis, District 6  
Councilor Tammy Fiebelkorn, District 7  
Councilor Trudy Jones, District 8  
Councilor Renée Grout, District 9  
Mayor Timothy Keller  
Mark Sanchez, Executive Director, Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority  
Julie Morgas Baca, County Manager, Bernalillo County

#### *References*

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