



June 24, 2013

The Honorable Nancy Navarro
President
Montgomery County Council
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Ms. Navarro:

The Montgomery County Water Quality Advisory Group (WQAG) has unanimously agreed to send this letter regarding the County Council's consideration of a partial repeal of the bag fee, Bill 10-17, that would exempt restaurants and all businesses where food is less than 2% of the gross sales.

The Council passed the bag fee because bags, in large numbers, end up as trash on the sides of our roads and are washed by rain into our streams and creeks. Bag trash has a serious deleterious effect on the water quality of our streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. The Anacostia River, with headwaters in Montgomery County, is a major river with impaired water quality. Much of this impaired quality is from trash (including discarded bags) that has found its way into the environment.

In addition to having a negative effect on water quality, improperly discarded bags are eyesores in streams all over the County. Trash in our environment – along roads, on private property, on County sidewalks and particularly in our streams – reduces public enjoyment of our parks and recreation areas, reduces property values and impairs water quality. Cleaning up improperly discarded bags also costs County taxpayers more than addressing the source of the problem (i.e., reducing bag use, which is exactly what the bag fee tax is designed to do).

The WQAG supports the bag fee and congratulates the Council for having passed this environmentally friendly bill last year. We believe that it would be counter-productive to now exempt some businesses from the fee. The bag fee has been very helpful in reminding citizens to bring reusable bags to all the stores in which County residents shop, including department stores hardware store, boutiques, and so on.

Montgomery County currently treats all bags equally. The current bag law is working! Anecdotal evidence suggests that we are seeing fewer bags every month in creek and

WATER QUALITY ADVISORY GROUP

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Ms. Nancy Navarro
President
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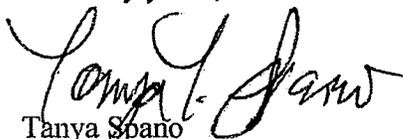
parkway clean-ups. Small businesses are winning because they are spending less for bags. It's good for the environment and it's good for businesses. This small fee has gotten people to think about the environment when paying for a bag. The five-cent fee makes consumers stop and consider -- Do we really need a bag? Do we really need to add more trash to the environment?

The reduction of bags discharged into the environment is also cost effective. The net cost to Montgomery County residents is lower by reducing the number of bags that must be removed from our streams pursuant to the County's MS-4 stormwater permit.

Moreover, the WQAG believes that the proposed amendment to the bag fee policy would be difficult to enforce and has the potential to exempt some critical businesses and could lead to public misunderstanding of what is (and is not) subject to the fee, thus creating confusion and a lack of understanding of the policy. Many on the WQAG have volunteered to pick up trash from roadsides and from our streams, and as we believe the County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) can confirm, we consider all types of plastic bags litter. In other words, our water quality is not harmed by bags from only certain types of establishments.

We strongly urge the Council to vote against this unwise retreat from environmental protection.

Sincerely yours,



Tanya Spano
Co-Chair, Water Quality Advisory Group



Beth Forbes
Co-Chair, Water Quality Advisory Group