

Testimony on SB320—for Jan. 21, 2014, Hearing of the Senate Finance Committee

My name is Betsy Martin, and I live in the Mount Vernon district of Fairfax County, next to Little Hunting Creek, a tributary of the Potomac River, just west of the Mount Vernon Estate.

As a founder of the Friends of Little Hunting Creek, I've been organizing annual creek cleanups for 11 years. Last year, a total of 191 volunteers picked up 474 bags of trash and recyclables, 43 tires, 19 shopping carts, and other stuff at 14 locations along the creek. We picked up twice as many bags of trash in 2013 as we did the year before. Unfortunately, the trash and litter just keep on coming, because there is nothing in the current law or policy to prevent it by motivating people to change their behavior.

As shown in the images below, the trash we pick up includes thousands of plastic bags that become snagged on roots and branches, buried in mud, trapped in trash dams and on other debris, such as the shopping cart graveyard made famous by Delegate Surovell. It despoils commercial corridors and tourist attractions. Disposable plastic shopping bags account for nearly half of litter items in local streams, according to a study of Anacostia tributaries, and virtually all of Fairfax County's streams are despoiled by them.

We'd like your help to address this situation and prevent bag litter from clogging our streams, storm drains, and streets. Other local jurisdictions have implemented 5 cent fees on disposable bags, including DC, Montgomery County, and PG County. After DC adopted a bag fee, plastic bag use dropped dramatically, and there was a big drop in the amount of plastic bag litter picked up in cleanups of the Anacostia River.

I have attached a resolution passed in July 2013 by the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens' Associations (representing civic and homeowners' associations in the Mount Vernon magisterial

district of Fairfax County to support enabling legislation that would allow Fairfax County and other localities to adopt a bag fee. Fairfax County residents are bothered by the litter, and we would like you to help do something about it.

Please support Senator Ebbin's bill (SB320) that would allow localities in planning district 8 to impose a 5 cent disposable bag fee. We believe that a fee on disposable bags will greatly reduce their use, increase the use of recyclable bags, and would go far toward helping reduce our litter problem in Fairfax County.



Little Hunting Creek

Photo: Scott Surovell



Little Hunting Creek near Richmond Hwy

Photo: Betsy Martin



Route 1 and Sherwood Hall Lane, adjacent to Walmart

Photo: Betsy Martin



Potomac River at Jones Point, bottle and bag litter after a storm

Photo: Diana Handy



Accotink Creek

Photo: Philip Latasa



Turkeycock Run

Photo: Betsy Martin

Resolution E&R-2013-02
ENABLING LEGISLATION TO AUTHORIZE LOCALITIES TO ADOPT
A SINGLE USE BAG FEE

Passed by Mount Vernon Council of Citizens' Associations July 24, 2013

1. WHEREAS, litter is a blight that degrades property values, the environment, and the quality of residents' lives in the Mount Vernon district, and that impedes the revitalization of the Route 1 corridor and nearby neighborhoods; and
2. WHEREAS, single use plastic shopping bags are a major component of litter in local rivers and streams (e.g., nearly 50% of litter items in tributaries of the Anacostia River, according to a 2008 study¹); and
3. WHEREAS, the District of Columbia (in Jan. 2010) and Montgomery County, Maryland, (in 2012) have adopted a tax of 5 cents on single use plastic and paper shopping bags in order to reduce litter in their jurisdictions; and
4. WHEREAS, in the first year after implementation of the DC bag tax, actual plastic bag use was cut dramatically²; 75% of residents reported using fewer plastic bags; three quarters of businesses reported no impact, or a positive impact, of the bag tax on their businesses³; volunteers reported a 50% drop in bags collected during cleanups of the Anacostia River⁴; and \$2 million was raised by the City; and
5. WHEREAS, residents would benefit from education about the harm of plastic bag litter in the environment, about the value of recycling and reusing shopping bags, and about common sense actions to keep reusable bags clean; and
6. WHEREAS, the Virginia Department of Taxation estimates that statewide implementation of a 5 cent bag fee would cost the Commonwealth \$125,000 in the first year and \$8,000 per year subsequently, and "could generate as much as \$26 million in revenue annually"⁵; and
7. WHEREAS, on October 26, 2011, the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens' Associations adopted a resolution in support of the *Citizens' Action Plan for Litter Prevention*, that

¹ *Anacostia River Trash Reduction Plan*. Prepared by the Anacostia Watershed Society for the District of Columbia Department of the Environment. Dec. 2008. <http://ddoe.dc.gov/publication/anacostia-river-trash-reduction-plan>

² *Report: Bag Tax Brought in \$2 Million Last Year*. By Aaron Morrissey, DCist, 5 Jan. 2011. http://dcist.com/2011/01/report_bag_tax_brought_in_2_million.php

³ *Public Perceptions and Willingness to Address Litter in the District of Columbia*. Memorandum from Steve Raabe, OpinionWorks, to Tracy Bowen, Executive Director, Alice Ferguson Foundation. 15 Feb 2011. <http://fergusonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/AFF-DC-Research-Memo-2-15-11.pdf>

⁴ *Potomac Cleanup Collects 286,500 Pounds of Litter*, by Rona Kobell. *The Bay Journal* 30 April 2013. www.bayjournal.com/article/cleanup_potomac_cleanup_collects_286500_pounds_of_litter. *The DC Bag Fee Is Cleaning Up the Anacostia River*. Bradley Kennedy, Anacostia Watershed Society. 25 Feb. 2013. www.anacostiaaws.org/news/blog/dc-bag-fee-cleaning-anacostia-river

⁵ *2013 Fiscal Impact Statement for SB 970*. <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?131+oth+SB970F161+PDF>

(among 9 other actions) asks the Virginia General Assembly to adopt and the Governor to sign a law that imposes a fee on single-use plastic or paper shopping bags, or that authorizes localities to do so; and

8. WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors included as a legislative priority for 2013 (and previous years) “reducing environmental contamination from plastic and paper bags,” and supported legislation to encourage the use of reusable shopping bags, consistent with the County’s waste reduction goals and environmental stewardship efforts⁶;
- A. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens’ Associations requests our representatives to the Virginia General Assembly to introduce and support enabling legislation which would authorize localities to impose up to a 5 cent fee on single-use shopping bags and develop guidelines for implementation based on efficiency, cost and ease of administration;
- B. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the aforesaid enabling legislation should provide that a portion of the fee should be retained by business to offset recordkeeping expenses, with a majority of the fee devoted to cleaning up and restoring the locality’s rivers and streams, improving water quality, repaying the costs of implementation, educating the public, and monitoring the effectiveness of implementation;
- C. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the enabling legislation should provide consumers an incentive to bring reusable shopping bags;
- D. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the MVCCA requests that the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors include enabling legislation for a bag fee in the county’s legislative agenda and lobby vigorously on its behalf in the next legislative session.

⁶ *Fairfax County VA 2013 Legislative Program*, adopted 4 Dec 2012.
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/legislation/2013/2013-legislative-program.pdf