

## Wells to Introduce Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Initiative

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### Councilmember Wells to Introduce Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009

Councilmember Tommy Wells today announced that he will introduce the "Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009" next Tuesday and that a majority of his Council colleagues will join him. The legislation puts a new focus on reducing the amount of trash that enters the Anacostia River and creates a new fund dedicated to the cleanup and restoration of the Anacostia River. Wells joined representatives from the Council, environmental groups, and businesses on the banks of the River to launch the initiative. DC Councilmembers were joined by Maryland Delegate Alfred Carr (D-Montgomery County) who is introducing similar legislation in the Maryland House of Delegates and working together with Mr. Wells to create a shared strategy to improve the health of the Anacostia River.

"Every year, 20,000 tons of trash enters the Anacostia River leaving a polluted, dirty and neglected river bordering our neighborhoods," said Wells. "Working with Delegate Carr, we're creating shared stewardship for the health of the entire Anacostia watershed."

According to a recent report by the DC Department of the Environment, plastic bags, bottles, wrappers and Styrofoam make up 85% of the trash in the Anacostia River. In the river's tributaries, such as Watts Branch, nearly 50% of the trash is plastic bags. According to the report, placing a small fee on "free" bags could eliminate up to 47% of the trash in the tributaries and 21% from the river's main stem.

The Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009 will place a small 5-cent fee on all single-use plastic and paper carryout bags from Retail Food Establishment license holders (which includes grocery stores, food vendors, convenience stores, drug stores, and others) and Class A and B liquor stores. In addition, the legislation requires that these plastic and paper carryout bags be recyclable.

Before the new initiative would take effect, the city would be required to conduct an intensive public information campaign and outreach including providing reusable carryout bags to residents for free or low-cost, and work with service providers to distribute multiple reusable bags to seniors and low-income households.

"While the majority of our businesses already use recyclable plastic and paper carryout bags, the Anacostia River is still littered with bags and trash. To bring it back to health, we have to get people to see the impact of this trash and make the choice for a clean river," said Wells.

The 5-cent fee will be divided between the business and a newly created Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Fund. Businesses will retain either 1 or 2 cents of the fee, depending whether they offer customers a carryout bag credit program for reusable bags. The remaining amount of the fee will be deposited into the fund to target environmental cleanup and restoration efforts on the Anacostia River, as well as continue a public education campaign and provide free reusable bags to DC residents, in particular the elderly and low income residents.

"DC taxpayers spend millions every year cleaning bags and trash out of the Anacostia River. And soon, the EPA will establish heavy fines for the District every time trash exceeds its limit in the River — just about every time we have a heavy rain because of the city's outdated sewer system. The District has a great recycling program, but even with this, every bag recycled costs taxpayers money and bags still litter the River," explained Wells.

Other cities are moving in this direction. New York, Seattle, and many European nations have already required, or plan to require, a small charge for plastic and paper bags. These initiatives have dramatically cut down on these single-use bags — by as much as 90% in some places. In addition, many businesses are already taking similar steps on their own in addition to selling low-cost durable, reusable bags. Discount food stores like ALDI and Save-A-Lot, and even IKEA, charge customers a nominal fee for every bag — greatly reducing the number of plastic and paper bags used and encouraging customers to bring reusable bags.

A website, [www.TrashFreeAnacostia.com](http://www.TrashFreeAnacostia.com), has been set up to support the Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Initiative and to be a resource for information about the effort to reduce the amount of bags that enter the River.