**Talking points about Baltimore City’s 2014 Bag Fee—Trash Free Maryland**

* The average useful life of a plastic bag is 12 minutes, but they never really biodegrade and they are frequently littered.
* Litter costs a tremendous amount of money to clean up ($10 million in Baltimore City's annual budget) and degrades quality of life. High litter levels directly correlate to higher crime--blight implies neglect. It's the Broken Window Theory for those who have read Malcolm Gladwell.
* By making the cost of the bag transparent, we can dramatically shift consumer behavior away from disposable bags to reusable bags. Plastic bags cost stores 1-3 cents each; paper costs 5-7 cents. (This is why we include paper; the shift is disposable to reusable, not just away from plastic.)
* Recycling is not a sustainable solution. Only a small fraction of bags and film are recycled, and where they are accepted at curbside they cause more problems than they solve because they get tangled in machinery. Also they are only downcycled into material like lumber, not truly recycled into new bags.
* The DC bag fee is tremendously popular. Only 16% of residents and 8% of businesses are bothered by the law. Residents report two-thirds less plastic bag litter in their neighborhoods and stores say they are buying half as many bags as they were before--saving money. (No studies exist yet for Montgomery County.)
* The revenue from the fee is probably going to be $2-2.5 million annually in Baltimore. This will ultimately be directed to the Green Fund where it will benefit parks and environmental restoration. There is an opportunity to create new jobs with this money, depending on the program.

The opposition is primarily the plastic bag industry, which is afraid of losing business. Here are most of their claims:

* That this is a tax on poor people and raises grocery bills. Remember that the fee is a deterrent, not a revenue generator. We don't want anyone paying the fee because we don't want anyone using disposable bags. Lower-income neighborhoods also tend to have more litter problems because of inadequate city services--reducing litter will help them. Also, the program should apply some of the revenue to buying and distributing reusable bags for free to those who cannot afford them.
* That the law will kill jobs. 200 Marylanders are employed manufacturing plastic bags, almost all at a factory in Elkridge. This factory is owned by a company in Texas, and it sells bags to companies all over the place, not just in Maryland. These jobs are extremely low paying and most of the employees are refugees from Southeast Asia (according to the Washington Post). Plus, plastic bags are becoming obsolete, as more than 200 jurisdictions around the country have passed bag bans or fees. It's time for these factories to start looking at new manufacturing opportunities to meet new market demands.

They also claim that reusable bags mostly come from China. Yes, many do, but there are opportunities for domestic growth in that industry. Also, most plastic bags also come from China.

* That reusable bags are dirty and spread germs. Just wash them. Think about how many other things we touch that are covered in germs. Also, the studies they base this claim on are completely without scientific merit.
* That 90% of people reuse their disposable bags. Yes, for dog poop or trash can liners, for the most part. Then they are thrown away--or even littered. It doesn't actually reduce the amount of bags in circulation.
* That recycling is enough. There is only one real domestic marketplace for plastic bag recycling, which is the Trex lumber factory in Winchester, Virginia. They are neutral on these proposals because, frankly, even if the whole country banned plastic shopping bags, it wouldn't really hurt their business. There is more than enough film and other types of plastic out there for them to use.
* That plastic bags aren't a substantial component of litter. Studies in DC showed that bags were half the visible trash in tributaries, and a quarter of the visible trash in the main stem of the Anacostia River. A viable, sustainable alternative exists, so let's push for the behavior change.