

October 12, 2022

To: Montgomery County Council President, Gabe Albornoz, and the County Council Members

From: Debra Street, Montgomery County Resident, County Council District 5

Regarding: Written Testimony on Forest Conservation Bill 25-22

Thank you for introducing the proposed Forest Conservation Bill 25-22. I appreciate the Planning Staff, the Staff in the Office of Legislative Oversight and others in the Council offices for their work on developing this proposal. I also appreciate the work of others outside the government who provided input for this bill. There is much to support in this proposed bill, but there is also additional amendment needed to further strengthen the bill and better protect the County's forests.

My reason for writing is that as a retired person with a long career as an Epidemiologist who worked on public health concerns, I view forests as an integral part of factors that provide ongoing protection of the physical and mental health of the people of Montgomery county. Forests provide for better public health by maintaining and improving the quality of the water that we drink and the quality of the air we breathe, as well as helping to reduce floods, some of which have resulted in loss of life in our county.

Also, to look at the larger picture, we must think about the cumulative effects of losing forests with their complex ecosystems by "a thousand cuts," bit by bit, and to see this effect not only on our county but on our neighboring counties and the watershed to the Potomac and the Chesapeake Bay.

With all of this in mind, I fully support the Montgomery County Forest Coalition's recommendations listed below. This list suggests where the bill could be strengthened and where the Forest Coalition is in agreement with what has been recommended by the Planning Staff/Planning Department.

1. Protect existing forest Ecosystems – existing forests are much stronger protections against excess stormwater, flooding, and climate change in general. Implement stronger protections for them. [Stronger than Planning recommends]
2. Strengthen replanting ratios to ensure no-net-loss – require replanting to 2 acres of a forest ecosystem for every 1 acre removed. [Stronger than Planning recommends]
3. Strengthen Watershed Considerations – prioritize afforestation and reforestation requirements to maximize planting within the watershed where forest is removed or development done. [Stronger than Planning recommends]
4. Strengthen replanting requirements to require planting a forest ecosystem, not trees alone. [Stronger than Planning recommends]

5. Forest stand delineation must be evaluated and submitted to Planning prior to an application plan for development of a site (NRI/FSD). [Agrees with Planning]
6. Eliminate certain Commercial/Residential zone classification from qualifying for the (s)(1) and (s)(2) FCP exemptions from requiring forest mitigation. [Agrees with Planning]
7. Expand mitigation requirements for 'variance trees' to include mitigation for those within a forest. [Agrees with Planning]
8. Tighten requirements around forest conservation easements so they may not be easily extinguished or relocated. [New recommendation by MoCo Forest Coalition]
9. Allow landscaping to meet requirement in limited circumstances – rights of way, equity focus areas. [Agrees with Planning]
10. Increase resources for Forest Conservation Staff. [Agrees with Planning]
11. Consider tax incentives and/or subsidy programs to facilitate forest conservation. [Agrees with Planning]

Thank you for your attention to this testimony.