

Forest Preservation

For: October 4, 2022

To: Montgomery County Council

In re: Bill 25-22, Forest Conservation Law

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County strongly supports the county's new efforts to protect our forests and hopes you will go beyond the original bill to make the bill stronger in accord with recommendations of several local organizations (e.g., the MoCo Forest Coalition). It has been 30 years since our previous forest legislation and it is time to do more to help ameliorate the problems being brought on by climate change.

Areas for additional emphasis include the following:

- All remaining pre-existing Forests in MoCo are to be designated & treated as priority forest ecosystems.
- Prioritize all remaining forest cover and remove only for valid reasons.
- Require a variance by the Planning Board or Planning Director for any removals.

Types of forests and trees that would receive a stronger level of protection and require a variance to be removed include forested: Floodplains; Stream Buffers; Forested Stream Buffers along Ephemeral Streams; Steep Slopes; Critical Habitats; Contiguous Forests; Forest Connective Corridors; Rare, Threatened, & Endangered Species; Historic Site trees; Champion Trees and other exceptionally large trees; areas designated as "Priority Save Areas" in Master Plan or any Functional Plan.

- Forest removal subject to a variance must be replaced with forest ecosystem at a 2:1 ratio.

This fits with strengthening replanting ratios to ensure no-net-loss, and strengthens the re-planting requirement from ¼ acre planted for every 1 acre removed to 2 acres forest ecosystem planted for every 1 acre removed (others have gone into more detail on this).

- Strengthen Watershed Considerations.* This includes requiring a higher ratio of acreage for afforestation and reforestation if dealing with areas outside the county or outside the specific sub-watershed bank shall be at a 4:1 ratio, or replanting of forest ecosystem shall be done at a 2:1 ratio.
- When what's being removed is forest ecosystem, what's being replaced should be forest ecosystem as well.

Nancy Bliss and Vicky Strella, co-presidents; Linda Silversmith, chair, environmental committee