



To: Montgomery County Council

Re: **M-83 Highway - Remove from Master Plan of Highways and Transitways**

M-83 is a relic of another era before we knew the real value of forests vital to both climate and human health. Conservation Montgomery has long supported removal of this 5 mile stretch of proposed highway. It's importance to our environment far outweighs the use for which it was intended. We can't afford to lose what it will take.

The proposed extension will cause irreparable damage to two of our parks. Great Seneca SVP and North Germantown Greenway SVP would lose vital forests, wetlands and further fragmentation of needed habitat.

The county does not own a reserved right-of-way across these two parks. They do own some reserved right of way at the west border of Great Seneca Park and elsewhere adjacent to some neighborhoods but it is piecemeal and incomplete.

Several other parks are jeopardized including South Valley Park (Montgomery Village Foundation), Blohm Park (City of Gaithersburg) and Wildcat Branch SVP (M-NCPPC). Six streams would be crossed (listed from north to south): Wildcat Branch, Dayspring Creek, Brandermill Tributary, Great Seneca Creek, Whetstone Run and Watkins Run. Long bridge construction would be required over the floodplains of Great Seneca Creek and Brandermill Tributaries. All of these streams contribute to the public water supply intake downstream at the WSSC water filtration plant that provides drinking water to 3 jurisdictions and millions of citizens. A portion of the Agricultural Reserve will be impacted. Does the county have a mitigation plan for all that will be lost? The public has learned the hard way that obtaining mitigation can take years. When the County took part of North Chevy Chase Park for a new road. It was a battle to obtain the most basic local mitigation.

Given our growing knowledge, particularly regarding the value of forests and trees to mitigating co2 emissions and climate warming, the sum total of losses far outweigh any perceived benefit. We've lost too much forest already. Between 2008 and 2016, development in Montgomery County cleared over 1300 acres of forest and replanted only 768 acres, a net loss of 615 forest acres. Preserving forest should be **the top priority** in reversing climate degradation to our region. We know forest cover is the best form of protection in maintaining water quality for our streams and wetlands.

In County Park acquisition programs such as LOS, we've made a firm goal of adding and creating contiguous linked parkland. Why now would we endeavor to fragment some of our best ? This highway proposal is a boondoggle that should have been removed from consideration decades ago. We need what it would cost in environmental degradation much more than we need another highway.

Ginny Barnes, *Advocacy Committee*
Conservation Montgomery ~