

July 22, 2025

Written Testimony for Montgomery County Council Session, July 22, 2025

- Bill 26-25, Vegetation - Invasive Plants
- Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 25-10, Landscaping Requirements - Native Plants

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First, I would like to speak in favor of the bill on invasive bamboo.

Invasive species have been identified as one of the five principal drivers of biodiversity loss around the world.¹ In other words, invasive species are right up there with climate change as a force driving the destruction of nature.

It's therefore unacceptable that invasive plants continue to be sold.

I urge the council to pass this bill in order to speed up action against the spread of invasive plants, starting with bamboo.

Second, I would like to speak in favor of the amendment concerning native plants and suggest a change that would make implementation easier.

I fully support this amendment. Climate change and biodiversity loss are two sides of the same coin. Getting more native plants planted is a way to protect biodiversity in our county.

The amendment defines a native plant as a plant that is native to D.C. or any of the eight states between North Carolina and New York.

A definition of native plant is very important for ensuring that the purpose behind the amendment is achieved once implementation begins. I worked my entire career on government programs and saw repeatedly how the intention behind a program could get derailed during implementation. That has also been the experience of my community group in working with the

¹ IPBES. Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. summary for policy makers, 25 Nov. 2019, <https://zenodo.org/records/3553579>. The report was a massive international review of the scientific literature carried out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

City of Takoma Park to implement a goal adopted by our city council to increase biodiversity through a focus on native trees.

So, while I very much appreciate that the amendment includes a definition, I find that it isn't quite practical enough to protect the intention behind the amendment once implementation begins.

The main shortcoming is that the amendment doesn't specify how developers, county staff, and all the hundreds of people who will be working with this new regulation are supposed to determine what is native in eight different states and the District of Columbia.

There needs to be an easy-to-find, easy-to-use, authoritative list of the species that qualify as native for the 50% requirement.

I would like to suggest the solution is at hand.

The amendment should specify that [the native species list developed by the Maryland Native Plants Program](#) should be used in determining which species qualify to fulfill the 50% requirement. [This is a state program](#) that started up mid-last year.

The list developed by the program is online, it's searchable, it already includes 650 native plant species, and there is a protocol in place for adding more. The list also provides basic information on each plant.

This list provides exactly what developers, regulators, and landscapers need:

- clarity and consistency as to what qualifies,
- ease of access and ease of use in searching the database, and
- basic plant information to help in developing a landscape plan.

Furthermore, the Maryland Native Plants Program is also certifying and promoting business that supply the plants on the list.² To achieve the 50% requirement, developers will not only need to submit a plan for doing so, their contractors will also have to be able to source the plant material.

² The state program has published this initial [searchable list of state certified native plant growers](#).

In short, there are good practical reasons for the county and state to work hand in glove on native plants.

There's one catch, though. Using the state program's species list would mean also using the state's definition of native plant in order for the definition and the species list to be mutually consistent.

The state program defines native as any plant occurring naturally in Maryland and the surrounding region, ecosystem, and habitat.³

I assure you that from an ecological perspective, this definition is better than the 8 states plus DC one.

If the state definition seems a little vague as to boundaries, remember that the definition works in concert with the species list, and that has been put together by Department of Natural Resources and University of Maryland Extension staff who are quite familiar with ecoregion boundaries and habitat locations.

If the definition seems a bit too restrictive to you, it's really not because of Maryland's rather unique location. We are at the southern end of the range for many northern species and at the northern end of the range for many southern species. In other words, Maryland has a huge number of native plant species.

Still, I have no doubt that at least one landscaper will come to you complaining that he wants to buy some native plants from his long-time supplier in North Carolina or West Virginia, or wherever but that those species aren't on the species list.

Well, those plants can still be planted on the other 50% of the landscape.

And it's not a bad thing if the MoCo amendment helps develop certified growers and retailers of Maryland native plants. Some of the suppliers that have already been certified are in Montgomery County. Why not use the amendment to help promote our county's native plant growers and retailers?

³ See [Subtitle 4.C in HB0950 Maryland Native Plants Program](#).

In short, I recommend that the amendment be revised

- first, to adopt the Maryland Native Plants Program definition of native plant, and
- second, to specify the program's native species list as the authoritative source on which species count toward the 50% native planting requirement.