

(Attach ment E.)

MONTGOMERY COUNTY FARM BUREAU

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March 10, 2011

Tree Trimming Concerns of the Montgomery County Farm Bureau

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive
101 Monroe Street 2nd floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear County Executive Isiah Leggett,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Montgomery County Farm Bureau to discuss the recent spate of power outages during this years winter storms which shows the status of tree trimming in this county is horrible. Several roads were completely impassable due to fallen and bent over trees in the roadway. We have long pressed for greater efforts to maintain our rural roads by trimming the trees that line long portions of these roads. As the situation grows ever worse and more urgent, some of the impediments become clearer. What is particularly frustrating is that the environment we have in Montgomery County does not exist on the same scale in other jurisdictions.

While we understand budget concerns, that seems to be only one of several factors contributing to this problem. The MNCPPC (Chapter 50-Subdivisions) and local governments are contributing to the problem by guiding the planting of trees near the roads and, in many cases underneath power and phone lines. This short sighted approach leads to no good, as the trees ultimately grow into the roadway and lines above. They are then either trimmed, resulting in undesirable shapes, or if neglected they cause interference with the service lines and roadway.

Another significant problem is the unrealistic defense by some of the vegetation that grows beside the road. We must not lose sight of the fact that roads are for the safe passage of vehicles. For those who wish the vegetation to grow into the road to impede and slow traffic, the message must be clear, "Trees cannot inhibit roads." Farmers moving large equipment are especially aware of the danger that extremely narrow traffic lanes pose. Large equipment can't get over and is forced to obstruct the oncoming lane. This is an impractical and dangerous situation. As further justification for maintaining these "hedges", some suggest that this is habitat for wild animals. Anyone frequently driving these roads sees the result of allowing habitat directly adjacent to the road. Hundreds, if not thousands, of wild animals are killed annually on our rural and suburban roads.

Much of this difficulty stems from the view that any vegetation growing beside the road is desirable. Many miles of these "Hedges" beside rural roads are, in fact, long

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neglected fencerows that did not have any growth more than grass for years. Historic photos will corroborate this fact. It was mostly with the decline of dairy and animal farming that these fencerows became "hedgerows." Although the fences were not too close to the road, trees allowed to grow from these fencerows do grow into the traffic lanes. Additionally, these wild trees often are growing into phone and power lines above. In these cases the message must be clear, "Trees and utility lines do not go together."

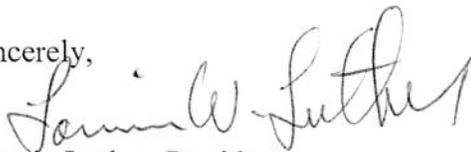
Simply put, we are not against trees, but recognize the impossibility of having trees maintained so close to the roads and suggest that in many cases the vegetation growing in the old fencerows should be removed completely. We suggest that an incentive program (Property Tax Credit) be created for landowners to have authority to remove trees, brush and other vegetation along roads. This outcome will result in public service which will save the county significant money in the long run. If the landowner wishes to plant trees, it should be done 30 feet or more from the travel lanes and never under or near power and phone lines. An exception to this approach may be made when the road passes through a forest with a fully developed canopy.

As a further impediment to prudent clearing/grubbing and trimming policy, SB 581 passed in 2009, adds confusion, bureaucracy and expense to proper maintenance procedures. The County Government needs to evaluate this legislation to see if it represents another reason for the current environment.

There is no longer any question that the trees along our roads are in need of aggressive trimming or, in many cases, removal to maintain a safe situation for school buses, emergency equipment, farm machinery and all other users of our roads.

As an elected official it is your duty to address this on going issue and demonstrate leadership to resolve it. It is in the best interest of all residents that we achieve this outcome and we offer our assistance.

Sincerely,



Lonnie Luther, President
Montgomery County Farm Bureau

Cc: Montgomery County Council Members
Jack E. Strausman, Deputy General Council
Pepco