



**Howard County Citizens Association**

*Since 1961...*

*The Voice Of The People of Howard County*

Date: November 18, 2019

Subject: **HCCA Testimony – CB-62-2019. Strong Support. Requesting Strengthening Amendments**

Good evening Council Members,

I'm Susan Garber testifying **in support** of CB-62 on behalf of the Howard County Citizen Association, HCCA, where I frequently 'speak for the trees'

This legislation needs to be supported because trees are our best single tool to fight climate change.

Trees serve many positive functions, including:

- sequestering carbon dioxide and producing oxygen needed to breathe.
- intercepting rainfall, slowing and allowing for absorption that prevents run-off and flooding.
- stabilizing the soil on steep slopes with their root structure.
- providing serene beauty
- creating a measurable positive effect on our physical and mental health
- providing habitat for the woodland animals and all manner of rare, threatened and endangered species.

Clearly we need to save the trees in order to save our planet.

And bottom line, most importantly,

**We need to save our trees to save our children.** Failure to pass this bill jeopardizes their future in measurable ways.

Trees are NOT just an inconvenient and expensive nuisance, to be removed in order to provide a blank slate on which a computer can generate an uninspiring site plan that looks pretty much like every other.

The lack of compliance with the State's Forest Conservation regulations for two decades, coupled with foolishly valuing unlimited development over our future well-being, has resulted in the steady decimation of our forested lands. It has increased flooding, reduced quality of life, and created the need, to construct ridiculously expensive 'shade shelters' in our school playgrounds and parks to protect our children from skin cancer.

We urge the Council to **emphasize prioritizing conservation** of existing mature trees because **all trees are not created equal** in terms of the benefits they deliver. While reforestation efforts are worthwhile, they can't compare with the retention of mature trees.

Nowhere is this more critical than in our densely populated east.

The statistics are astounding. One mature 100' tree produces the oxygen of 1000 little trees. (Nowak, David J.; Hoehn, Robert; Crane, Daniel E. Oxygen Production by Urban Trees in the United States. *Arboriculture & Urban Forestry* 2007.33(3):220–226.) Yet two 3" caliper trees are all developers have been required to plant to replace specimen trees 30 inches or more in diameter. [The 44,000 native trees replanted through the County Executive's laudable program this year will eventually produce benefits down the road and we sincerely applaud the effort. But it is none the less frightening to think that **these 44,000 trees, should every one survive, would replace only 44 specimen trees, trees which DPZ allowed to be removed –rather than requiring an adjustment in a site plan.**

Mature trees "intercept," or prevent from hitting the ground, far more rainwater per year than young ones. This allows more time for absorption. It reduces the amount of storm water that flows into sewers and rivers, which frequently causes flooding and carries pollutants. The amount of rainfall intercepted by a 40 year old tree vs. a 5 year old one can be forty times as great. (McPherson, et al. 2006. More about tree size and interception.)

Another little mentioned issue is TREE EQUITY. People of lower income typically have fewer trees to benefit them. In Howard County trees have migrated to the west. You should not worsen the tree equity situation by considering, as AA County did, **reducing** conservation standards in densely populated areas like Laurel. Those living in the eastern part of the county should demand tree equity.

There was a time when developers like Jim Rouse sought to preserve as many trees as possible ON a residential lot. He recognized that mature tree(s) would qualify an individual lot to command a premium price. I'm told that in Columbia's early days, signs were erected which said, "Other than you, this tree is the most valuable thing on this lot."

Much of what contributes to soulless treeless development today is the declaration by developers— embraced by the DPZ and DPW-- that "**this** is how we build today." "This" means we strip and regrade and go for maximum density over good design or even good marketing sense. (Real example: a proposed site plan for a parcel surrounded with forest on 3 sides and a river on two—with NO units facing either feature!)

Real estate and building representatives will say the proposed Forest Conservation Act could cause a housing shortage and sprawl with more people just working, but not

living, in Howard County. They ridiculously assert there will be a decline in air quality from longer commutes, when retaining and replanting trees is needed to clean the air for our very existence.

But the true priority issue to the development community is that forest conservation cuts down on the buildable space on a property. That correlates to fewer units in a residential development or less square feet to rent in a commercial one; thereby less profit margin. But just as developers were subsidized with ridiculously inadequate school impact fees for decades, so too has the county subsidized their profits by not having forest conservation regulations compliant with state law. Worse yet, former administrations failed to enforce the lesser ones we have.

It is our opinion that the development community already **owes** residents of Howard County, and their children in overcrowded schools, **a great debt. Now is not the time to subsidize them further at the sacrifice of our health and well being by watering down this legislation.** Previous administrations and department heads permitted—even encouraged-- the destruction of our forests with over use of waivers, administrative adjustments, etc. for the mythical profit from development property taxes

The HCCA was proud to sign on with 15 other organizations supporting this bill and suggesting additional means to strengthen it. We refer you to that joint letter from the Smarter Growth Alliance. Please pass this Bill and consider strengthening amendments, not ones which will weaken it

Susan Garber  
HCCA Board of Director