



Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961... The Voice of the People of Howard County

Susan Garber, Board member of HCCA and Board Chair of the Savage Community Association, suggesting amendments to CR12-2021 on behalf of the two organizations

For over 20 years, HoCo was out of compliance with the state's regulations on Forest Conservation. As a result of the rapid development which occurred here during this period, the County was declared by the MD DNR to be Number One in forest removal!

Three minutes isn't adequate to suggest amendments *AND* thank everyone involved in the passage of the Act or the production of this manual so I'll have to concentrate on the two amendments to CR12 here.

We truly appreciate all of the effort involved in this critical endeavor and recognize that CR-12 shows many improvements over the previous version. We were pleased that the new Forest Conservation Act offered a chance for improvement, a greater respect for forest preservation and the role established trees play in our life. They create the very oxygen we breathe, stabilize the soil, (especially valuable on steep slopes), reduce air conditioning costs, provide habitat, and, as this pandemic has shown, are greatly beneficial to our mental health. Clearly the new act, and hence. **The manual clearly does much to assure reforestation will occur on or near parcels which lose trees to development.**

However, it is much harder to judge if there will be any less removal of mature trees and tree cover. *HCCA & the SCA firmly believe citizens are particularly interested in the preservation of existing trees and if polled would actually prioritize preservation over replanting.*

Therefore we would strongly urge the Council to consider these suggested amendments:

1. Declare this resolution an emergency matter for immediate adoption.

So much loss of mature forest occurred while the County ignored the State Regulations that we need to take action 'yesterday' to begin turning this around. It should take effect immediately upon the Executive's signature to avoid the additional loss of mature trees that may have occurred since the Act became effective almost a year ago (2/5/2020) and which could occur while waiting another 60 days for the application of these changes.

[Note that we were pleased to learn that as a Resolution the effective date would be immediately upon passage by the Council, rather than 61 days beyond, and therefore doesn't need this amendment.]

2. The Second Amendment suggested involves measuring forest conservation outcomes resulting from the new Act/Manual. All too often legislation is passed with the best of intentions, but is almost never revisited to determine whether the actions implemented actually accomplished the goal of that legislation.

We recommend that for one year following adoption of the revised Forest Conservation Manual, the three entities responsible for implementation, [the DPZ, the DRP, and the Office of Community Sustainability] work collaboratively to directly compare the outcome scenarios for all newly submitted development projects (both residential and non-residential, both new construction and revitalization projects) in regards to the preservation of mature trees and tree cover using the forms and formulas reflected in applications from both the new and previous manuals. Within one month of completion of the comparison, the information will be shared with the Council and the County Executive to judge whether further adjustments to the Manual and/or Act are necessitated to achieve the desired outcome.

Why? To his credit, the County Executive called for an update to the Forest Con. Act that would both bring the county into compliance with state law and go beyond it, demonstrating leadership and a commitment to fighting climate change. Making a direct comparison between the outcomes under the new plan versus what would have happened under the old is the only way to objectively measure the impact of the changes. [Did the effort produce positive forest conservation outcomes?]

Those who labored long and hard on establishing the new Act and Manual admitted that they didn't have time to look back on the Forest Conservation Plans of current or previous development projects and recalculate what the outcome would be using the new regulation formulas. **This important missed step needs to occur NOW.** Staff need to compare the preservation outcome of development projects that will be subject to the new regulations/formulas by also calculating what the outcome would have been under the terms of the previous manual.

A final thought on why preservation of mature trees (not just 'specimen trees') is necessary:

Two mature trees can produce enough oxygen to support a family of four for a year. The scientifically supported facts that a mature tree produces more oxygen and sequesters more carbon than a small, newly planted one is common knowledge. But the Development Community shrugs this off, arguing falsely that trees will grow in 20+ years to provide the same benefits as a mature tree. But we'd ask them, and we ask you-- who among you is willing to give up breathing for the next 20+ years?

Tree equity is becoming a real issue for consideration. Should we strip mature stands of trees in the east to concentrate greater and greater population increases when the presence of fewer mature trees can be correlated to more respiratory and other health issues??? We think not.