



Testimony in Support of CB42-2021 with suggested amendments
Council Legislative Session May 17, 2021

Good evening. Susan Garber, testifying this evening for both the Howard County Citizen Association (HCCA) and for the Savage Community Association, where *we work savagely to protect the environment*.

We want to start by thanking Councilwoman Jung for recognizing the importance of establishing a feedback loop for the very important updated Forest Conservation Act and Manual. Such important legislation demands periodic checkups on its effectiveness. CB-42 is a vital step in assuring the 2019 forest conservation legislation functions as it was intended.

Although both groups enthusiastically support the intention of Bill 42-2021 as written we do have two concerns and recommendations for CB42 which we think could make the bill even stronger. We do understand the need for Howard County agencies to have sufficient time to gather the information, but we would like for you to ask at a work session why it would actually take SEVEN years for the first report (that is seven years after the passage in 2019.)

We feel this way because while we were out of compliance with state regulations, ‘the dark days’ of forest loss, an awful lot of trees were cut down-- hundreds and hundreds of mature trees were cut down-- acres and acres.

It’s rather painful to think we’re going to have to wait another full 7 years since the passage, during which time there could be virtually no supervision of the results. We fear that if the rate and quantity of deforestation remains unchanged, there won’t be sufficient trees left to even attempt to protect them.

Deforestation has resulted in a decline in air quality due to a reduction in carbon sequestration, flooding due to inadequate storm water management, a loss of habitat and biodiversity, as well as a reduction of places where one can reconnect to nature for its restorative mental health effects.

These negative effects highlight the importance of revisiting such importance legislation, how such an important act demands periodic checkups on its effectiveness.

The benefits of the preservation of mature trees is **exponentially** more beneficial than newly planted ones. This isn't just us saying this; this is something all the authorities agree on. This "delayed start" in evaluation could negate the effort completely. We'd like to suggest that reporting in 2024 should be more than reasonable as a compromise.

We do realize that this makes additional work for DPZ, DRP, and OCS. But we can't help thinking that they too want to see, after all the time and effort, that the legislation truly **is** effective. That is why we make this request.

Our second thought or concern is that there is some lack of specificity in the kind of data to be collected. Acres lost and acres replanted (most commonly used now) is an insufficient tool for a quality evaluation and would not be ideal.

Despite identifying two items we'd like you to think about, we'd like to make it clear that we really think this is a wonderful idea to be able to check on the Forest Conservation Act periodically. We all **THINK** we have the greatest Forest Conservation Act out there. **BUT** we won't **KNOW** unless we do the data collection *and* the Council is provided with feedback in case changes do need to be made at any point. We thank everyone who was involved in bringing this bill forward and certainly hope it will be passed.

A great deal of administration effort and public involvement went into development of the new Forest Conservation Act and its Implementation Manual. This bill, if strengthened, can assure the effort invested produces the desired outcome now and will continue to do so in the future.