



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

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

Testimony in Support of CB57-2021

Susan Garber North Laurel speaking for HCCA, the People's Voice, and the Savage Community Association

No law, any law, is effective unless there is a means and a will to enforce it. Enforcement is necessary to provide a deterrent to offenders. Importantly, penalties necessary to serve as a true deterrent should be consistent with the severity of the offense.

The persons for whom I speak and many others grasp these concepts. You need to convince us that all of you do also. Council Chair Walsh clearly does, as demonstrated by her introduction of CB 57-2021.

This bill provides a better, stronger deterrent to the removal of mature trees by clarifying and enhancing the array of penalties available to Planning and Zoning. Most importantly, the DPZ will be empowered to revoke any approved forest conservation plan and suspend processing of any other plans submitted by a property owner who willfully or repeatedly violates forest conservation law.

Additionally, monetary penalties will be calculated per inch of (unlawfully removed) tree circumference and per day that any violations continue unabated. This combination can make it unprofitable to try to get away with something. Only in this manner can those developers unwilling to play by the rules be stopped.

To truly make a difference YOU must pass CB 57 and insist that the DPZ apply it regularly and equitably. This will let the word go out that there will be NO more overlooking or forgiveness of questionable "ooooops." It will reinforce that no trees should be cut down before final plans are approved.

In my opening statement I commented that penalties should be consistent with the severity of an offense. In other words the consequence of stealing a loaf of bread should be different than the consequence of committing manslaughter or murder. An analogy may help illustrate that the consequences set out in CB57 are justifiable, as it relates to willfully breaking the Forest Conservation laws, whether a first or repeat offense.

Is the offense more analogous to stealing a loaf of bread because one is hungry? NO. If developers were starving as a result of Howard County's laws they wouldn't be clamoring to build here.

Is the offense more analogous to manslaughter or murder? YES. **The trees have been killed.** Planting new ones won't replace the ones removed for a long time. Some are simply irreplaceable. The human race has lost a source of life-sustaining oxygen. Wildlife has lost its

habitat. And residents downhill, as we have seen repeatedly in Ellicott City, have to live in a constant state of fear that their luck may run out the next time an event traceable to climate change occurs: they may lose their own life, the life of their family or friends, their home, their business.....their tolerance for those who allowed this to happen, who looked the other way, who prioritized a need for more housing for new residents over protection of existing ones, who literally are willing to **flush** them down the valleys on the water generated from bald acres and impervious pavement of development permitted above.

The consequences of not strengthening our forest conservation laws as in CB56 and enforcing them as in CB57 disproportionately negatively affects our low income neighborhoods and communities of color according to an article in the Washington Post just yesterday. Those areas are more likely to suffer from the urban heat island effect caused by a lack of shade and an abundance of heat absorbing asphalt, With significantly less tree canopy temperatures are up to 10 degrees hotter than surrounding neighborhoods.

We have the opportunity with legislation such as this to reverse the effects of racist policies such as redlining and declining urban green space, which are important for public health. Trees are nature's air conditioners. It's important that we provide equal access throughout our county to the large trees which can **actually help save lives, not just look beautiful.**

Certainly both laws create some challenges for some development. It may require more creative placement and design for buildings and may prevent a development from being maximally profitable However, forest conservation is an important environmental goal that is **strongly supported by the vast majority of our citizens.**

As elected officials charged with creating our laws and providing enforcement mechanisms for those laws YOU have an obligation to do the right thing by your constituents, to support CB 57 as we're requesting. You'll sleep better for it and so will we.

Thank you.