



# HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

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

## Testimony in Support of CB30-2023

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I'm testifying for the Howard County Citizen Association (HCCA) and the Savage Community Association (SCA) who both deeply appreciate Councilmember Walsh's efforts to improve the HoCo Forest Conservation Act. In a world plagued by environmental degradation and climate change, it is vital that *someone* recognize the immense value that forests hold for our planet and the generations to come. CB 30 will bring the County into alignment with new (2023) State forest conservation regulations: numerically redefining a forest, doubling the current reforestation requirements, and halving the alternative allowances for mitigation of deforestation. More trees will be 'replaced' closer to the area from which they've been removed—but ultimately 2 small trees won't begin to do the work of one mature one for over multiple generations. There is no more effective and economical approach to combatting climate change than to **retain existing forests**.

**Most significantly, CB30 aligns the purpose of the Forest Conservation Act to increasing forest areas, not to just maintaining what we have left.**

**'Increasing' is the single word that brought me here tonight.**

You see I have a *history* with HoCo's forest conservation legislation. In 2017 I was among those actively publicizing information to citizens and county government alike that according to the MD Department of Natural Resources, Howard County ranked **Number One for Forest Destruction** and **near the bottom for reforestation** for the previous 10 years.

While the DPZ would try to blame these rankings on the way the County reported their numbers, Any Citizens with Eyes were all too familiar with the disappearance of wooded areas in their communities. Leave home with a forest across the street...come home to land totally denuded..... except for a sign announcing the next development.....ironically and poetically named for the type of trees removed or previous land features bulldozed.

HoCo failed to adopt the State's 1991 Forest Con regulations for over 20 years necessitating a major overhaul in 2019. (Developers' pleas tonight to postpone approval of CB30 sounds like they intend to use the same stalling tactic again.)

Advocates wanting to see HoCo's 2019 regulations be more stringent were cautioned by the Office of Community Sustainability not to ask for more-- or risk getting nothing. But after the passage, advocates trying to strengthen the adopted legislation were then told to *give it a few years* before seeking changes-- as developers needed more time to understand and implement development under the new regulations.

Historically, anytime an effort *was* made, whether to protect specimen trees, or accelerate the collection of data to be sure the new Act achieved its intention, those members of this Council, who regularly and reliably represent the interests of developers rather than their constituents, defeated all such efforts. Only council members Walsh and Jung have shown they could be counted on to support residents' desire for the preservation of our dwindling forests.

During the time wasted defeating attempted legislation, senseless developments denuded acres from steep slopes above vulnerable Ellicott City. This further endangers residents, while filling the pockets of land owners and developers who shamelessly ask for, and too often receive, even more exceptions to laws already too lenient.

To the best of my knowledge, only two attempts to save HoCo forests from development have **ever** been successful. The first was the "Savage Mill Remainder" in 2020 and the second was GS Camp Ilchester in 2022. A great deal of broad community support was necessary in both cases for the County to acquire the properties and add them to County parkland. I'm proud that John and I spearheaded the ultimately successful effort in Savage for 7 long years. Given our current family situation since John's devastating hemorrhagic stroke I do often wish that we'd spent more of our time together enjoying the things that retired people usually do. However, using the 5-acre parkland addition for authentic learning experiences and demonstrating to our youth the importance of advocacy to 'Savagely protect the environment' brings joy to my heart.

I can only hope I won't regret time spent preparing and presenting this testimony before some who I suspect aren't even listening. Labeling themselves as environmentalists in campaign materials isn't sufficient. Actions, like supporting CB30 speak louder than words.

Forests are not merely a collection of trees; they are life-sustaining ecosystems that provide countless benefits to both humans and nature. If our children and grandchildren are to 'experience' the benefits provided by forests, we must begin NOW to add to our inventory of forested land.

Experience has shown that the advice **to wait and wait to propose changes is not fruitful**. Tomorrow is guaranteed to no one.

We therefore offer the following thoughts for consideration as topics for amendments to CB30 and/or for improvements in HoCoBuyDesign's environmental sections:

- Prohibit ANY development on land identified by MD DNR as a Targeted Ecological Area. Prioritize purchase of TEAs for preservation (using Program Open Space funding plus dedicated County funding).
- Transition transfer taxes identified for funding of Agricultural Preservation in the West to Forest Preservation in the East (i.e. pay land owners not to develop or clear their forested land for any purpose.)
- HoCo prides itself on being a leader for things like erecting public buildings to LEED standards. They should set the same kind of modeling of good practices relative to minimizing tree removal. Currently they set a very poor example in both design and citing of schools, parks, fire stations, parking lots, etc.
- Developers/owners with forested land should prioritize mature tree retention. DPZ should no longer accept computer generated plans whose objective is to maximize yield (number of units). Return to principles of “Designing WITH nature” rather than permitting land to be denuded and flattened to present a blank canvas on which to layout ‘barracks’- style communities.
- Incentivize not asking for any exceptions (alternate compliances) by speeding up approval processing of the development plans in return.
- Stop overlooking the recommendations of the Soil Conservation Service.
- They best understand the role of tree roots for retention of steep slopes.
- Reintroduce all former bills supported by Walsh/Jung—annually if necessary, until passed.