

Howard County Council Public Hearing  
July 21, 2021  
7:00 pm  
Virtual



Members of the county council, the Progressive Democrats of Howard County strongly support CB 56-2021 and CB57-2021. Thank you to councilmember Liz Walsh who continues to be a model public servant and a tireless advocate for our community.

CB56 improves forest retention by reducing the minimum criteria of 30 inches to trees 24 inches in diameter. It also establishes a 5-year “look-back” period to prevent the clearing of trees before the project officially starts and subsequently activates the Forest Conservation ordinance. In 2019 the County Council passed into law a revision of the Forest Conservation Act for Howard County that brought about greater protection for our forests. This act offers more protection than the state law mandates.

The current requirements of the Forest Conservation Act do not require retention of any trees removed up to the time the developer submits a site-specific forest conservation plan. Since developers start planning for future developments long in advance, they can avoid the requirements by removing the trees. The addition of a 5-year look-back rule, would require the DPZ to review the property for any tree removal or land disturbance that occurred in the 5 years before the plan is submitted.

The bill also expands the areas designated as on-site forest retention priorities to include the newly defined area of the Green Cultural Trail and Targeted Ecological Areas (TEAs). The Green Cultural Trail as defined in the Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan and warrants protection within the Forest Conservation ordinance. TEAs are defined and mapped by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and equally important to afford the highest protection. This bill adds protection to trees within cemeteries and historical areas as well that are 12 inches or larger in diameter in to the on-site forest retention priorities

CB57 strengthens the penalties for non-compliance with the Forest Conservation ordinance of the County. By changing the legal obligation by the county from “may assess a fine” to “shall” the assessment of a fine is no longer optional. Furthermore, would impose penalties of per inch circumference of tree cleared. This bill further gives authority to suspend plans in progress and revoke any approved forest conservation plan upon willful or repeated violations. The law also requires public notice of any such suspension. Noncompliance may also result in the suspension of waivers for necessary disturbance, variance, alternative compliance, off-site compliance, or any other exception of the requirements of the Forest Conservation Act.

We ask that you pass both pieces of legislation without any amendments to weaken them