

Our Forests Need Better Protection

A special message for Alliance organizations and guests...



Support is needed for the new Forest Conservation bill

Forests reduce air pollution, soak up stormwater runoff, provide wildlife habitat and help fight climate change. But for decades, Anne Arundel County made it too easy to cut down our forests. The best available data on forest loss is from the federal Chesapeake Bay Program. It is consistent with data reported by Office of Planning and Zoning and the Chesapeake Conservancy, and it shows that Anne Arundel County has lost 2,775 acres of forest since 2010 – the most of any county in Maryland and more than all of our neighboring counties combined.

Recently, the Administration introduced County Council bill 68-19 to strengthen the Anne Arundel County forest conservation law and better protect our remaining forests.

Bill 68-19:

- increases the “conservation thresholds” that determine how much of a site developers may clear without having to replant or pay a fee;
- adds protections for the largest and most ecologically important forests;
- increases tree replanting requirements from ¼ acre to ½ acre per acre cleared;
- increases the fee-in-lieu of planting amount from \$0.40 to \$2.50 per square foot;
- brings county code into compliance with the most recent state forest conservation code.

Strong push-back from the developers has resulted from their profit-focused lens. For builders, there is profit in clearing the trees to provide room for more construction and to maximize their efficiency in construction and associated profits. Not surprisingly then, the development community has unleashed a significant lobbying effort focused on the County Council. Reports and lists of talking points have been circulated that reflect developers' concerns that increased protection for forests will negatively impact the profitability of their projects and result in less development activity.

This ignores key facts such as:

- Voters have clearly expressed a desire to reduce development and protect the environment;
- New residential development costs more in expanded services than it generates in

- new fees and taxes, even with impact fees;
- Anne Arundel County development is in high demand. This legislation will direct development to more desirable, less environmentally sensitive areas of our county. It will NOT prevent growth but, rather, encourage Smart Growth in Town Centers and Transit Oriented Developments, as well as redevelopment;
- Forest conservation promotes clean rivers and streams and may result in corresponding savings if taxpayers don't have to fund costly restoration projects

An inconvenient truth for opponents of Bill 68-19 is that voters in the County, through the many listening sessions associated with GDP visioning and a follow-up survey, have made it clear that two of their top priorities for the County in the future are protection of the environment and reduction of the rate of new development. This was found to be true in nearly every community polled. Bill 68-19 supports both of these objectives and is therefore very likely to find favor with the majority of citizens. However, it is expected that development interests will continue efforts to derail the bill or weaken it through multiple amendments.

With the Forest Bill, the County Executive continues his efforts to plan and govern for the people who repeatedly voiced concerns about uncontrolled development and continuing damage to our waterways. In the words of CE Pittman, "This bill will transform our county from the clear cutting capital of Maryland to a leader in forest conservation."

Take Action

There is no more important time than now to fight for Anne Arundel's forests. **Please ask your Alliance organization members to contact their County Council representatives to urge their support of this important legislation**

Upcoming Council meeting

October 7, 7 pm. Bill 68-19, Forest Conservation, is opened for public comment

About the Alliance

The Anne Arundel Alliance for Livable Communities is a non-partisan coalition of 25 local and state organizations advocating for sustainable growth and environmental protections to safeguard and enhance residents' quality of life.

Anne Arundel Alliance for Livable Communities



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