

# Smarter Growth Alliance For Howard County

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June 21, 2021

The Honorable Howard County Council  
George Howard Building  
3430 Court House Drive  
Ellicott City, MD 21043

**RE: CB42-2021** – AN ACT requiring the Department of Planning and Zoning, in collaboration with specified County agencies, to establish a system of data collection; requiring the Department of Planning and Zoning, in collaboration with specified County agencies, to recommend actions to improve the retention of existing forest areas and effectiveness of mitigation measures; and generally relating to the Forest Conservation Act.

Dear Council Members:

The Smarter Growth Alliance for Howard County (SGAHC) is an alliance of local and state organizations collaborating to foster healthy, equitable, and sustainable communities through smarter development and transportation decisions and improved protections for the county's natural, historic and cultural resources.

**While we applaud the Howard County Council for passing CB42-2021 to provide a feedback loop to ensure ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of Howard County's Forest conservation laws, we are disappointed that the council rejected an amendment that would have made the data timelier.**

Timely data is critical when we are dealing with the continued march of forests in Howard County to the west, and as we are dealing with increasing polluted stormwater runoff blowing out our streambeds.

Six years is a long time to wait to act on a problem, especially when forests are in question. It will take decades to reverse the damage of losing a mature stand of trees.

Many of the problems in Forest Conservation laws are not limited to the language of the legislation, but how it is implemented. What types of waivers are granted, how forest stands are delineated, and how replacement trees are maintained will all impact the health of our forests?

*Chesapeake Bay Foundation • Clean Water Action • Coalition for Smarter Growth • Community Ecology Institute  
Earth Forum of Howard County • HARP • Horizon Foundation • Howard County Citizens Association  
Howard County Conservancy • Howard County Sierra Club • Maryland Conservation Council  
Maryland League of Conservation Voters • Maryland Ornithological Society • Patapsco Heritage Greenway  
Preservation Maryland • Safe Skies Maryland • Savage Community Association • The People's Voice • Transition Howard County*

Furthermore, the majority of the information on how the law is being implemented is already contained within the Howard County government. A six-year delay is unreasonable given the availability of data, the irreplaceability of mature forests, and the impacts of the law on flooding, habitat, and local air quality.

CB42-2021 sets up a feedback loop, which is great moving forward for forest conservation in Howard County. But unfortunately, it only sets it up after a sizable delay during the early implementation of changes to Howard County's Forest conservation law, a disturbing decision that seems to allow problems to go unrecognized for too long.

Additionally, this amendment would have implemented both a qualitative and quantitative assessment which also called for the inclusion of new data points as needed. Strengthening this review process is critical to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the forest conservation act.

Sincerely,

Smart Growth Alliance of Howard County

cc: The Honorable Calvin Ball, County Executive

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