

Progressive Democrats of Howard County
CB30-2023
Testimony In Favor (including amendments)
July 2023



Once upon a time the Earth had 6 trillion trees. Due to a variety of reasons (mostly human) we now have 3 trillion, and continue to lose billions of trees every year.

Plant for the Planet, the UN's reforestation campaign, planted 12 billion trees across over 190 countries in its first five years to offset the atmospheric carbon and stabilize degraded landscapes. Sounds great until you realize that our current annual loss is 15 billion. We cannot solve a problem by opening the door at the backend and letting the solution slip away. We have to figure out how to stem the loss of our current forest cover, increase that forest cover AND work around mature trees if we are going to stabilize our climate and landscapes globally. In an effort to do this, the state of Maryland passed the Tree Solutions Now Act of 2021 that calls for the planting of 5 million trees, but the meaning of that legislation is totally negated if we continue to remove more trees than we are planting.

A statewide [tree planting pledge](#) has been submitted to the Trillion Tree Project, a global initiative aimed at planting, restoring or protecting 1 trillion trees by 2030. If we are able to achieve this global goal, up to 1 trillion tons of CO₂ can be captured by these [future] healthy mature trees. To put it into perspective, we have emitted 2.2 trillion tons of CO₂ total up to this point. But we cannot achieve this if we aren't net gaining trees. We can't pledge to plant 5 million trees throughout the state then cut down an equal number or more. Without the protection & restoration, the plantings are meaningless. This is where local jurisdictions come into play. By not allowing the continued net loss, carbon goals can actually be reached. You as council members of a local county government have the responsibility to stop allowing forests to disappear faster than they are being replaced.

The current Howard County Forest Conservation manual allows, in some instances, for fewer trees to be planted above reforestation/afforestation thresholds: "For reforestation sites within the same watershed as the development site, 1/2 acre of reforestation is required for every acre cleared above the threshold..."[Section 3.3.1]. Some other instances call for equal or increased reforestation requirements, but in NO circumstance should fewer be required, especially within watersheds. So, by definition this potentially allows for net tree loss year over year depending on what developments are being planned on certain tracts. Allowing fewer trees as replantings (replacing more mature specimens) encapsulates the reason why we have almost 50% fewer trees on the planet than we once did, and regulations like this go against logic, reason, and responsible governance. Continued net tree loss will, among other things, lead to continued destabilization of ecosystems and destabilization of water run-off controls. Mature trees are the cornerstone to both of these critical needs; an average 100-ft tall tree can retain 11,000 gallons of water in just one growing season. That same tree can also absorb 55 pounds of carbon

dioxide annually. The purpose of government is to maintain stability and to serve the people, it isn't to kowtow to developers (who come into our county to profit) and allow them to destabilize our land systems.

CB30 aims at rectifying weaknesses in the current manual by increasing the required reforestation ratios in the Reforestation Calculation with: "(1) FOR REFORESTATION SITES WITHIN THE SAME WATERSHED, ONE ACRE SHALL BE REFORESTED FOR EACH ACRE CLEARED (1:1 RATIO). (2) FOR REFORESTATION SITES OUTSIDE THE SAME WATERSHED, TWO ACRES SHALL BE REFORESTED FOR EACH ACRE CLEARED (2:1 RATIO)." It also will no longer allow for all of a project's retention, reforestation or afforestation obligations to be met off-site, but rather only a portion- although again- the continued talk of allowed tree-clearing is generally not advisable if we hope to reach aggressive carbon off-set goals.

We also support both Amendments of this bill, Amendment 1 "Mitigation by County" actually helps put teeth in environmental compliance, a long-standing problem in many jurisdictions both within and outside the state. Violation of the reforestation obligations should be treated as any other serious property offense, and the work of the reforestation requirements should be carried out for the good of the county despite the irresponsible neglect of the developer.