



August 17, 2020

RE: Council Bill 20-0546 Natural Resources - Forest and Tree Conservation

Dear Councilmembers,

I writing to you as the Executive Director of Baltimore Green Space, and a member of the Baltimore City Forestry Board. I also write to you on behalf of the forest stewards. Under their charge I ask for your support of this forest conservation bill which is the first of several that will come out of the tree ordinance committee.

The request of these neighborhood leaders for protection of community forests caused Baltimore Green Space to launch the forest patch program in 2012. I believe you have already reviewed the images of the impacts that resulted from the clearing of the Wilson Woods lots. Loss of forest natural areas result not only in loss of wildlife, quality soil, native vegetation, and trees but also increases stormwater impacts such as flooding basements, increases the temperatures in neighborhoods exacerbating heat island effects and decreases the air quality of neighborhoods.

While we knew from our initial analysis of 2007 data, that 20% of the urban forest are outside of parks, a city colleague asked just how many of these forested spaces greater than 5,000 sf exist. So our partner scientist from UMBC, Dr. Matthew Baker, completed another analysis of the more recent 2015 tree canopy data to get at this answer. Of the nearly 225,000 parcels in the city database, 6679 contain close to 4,000 acres of forest patch canopy, over half (54%) of which are owned by the city. Of those 6679 parcels contain some portion of a forest patch, and 2388 contain forested areas 5,000sf or greater. These patches are not only located in wealthy neighborhoods but more distributed than one might think. Each one of those patches cools their neighborhood, improves air quality, and provides a place where the community might access nature and have peaceful places to play.

This bill will provide for greater protections of these essential spaces. I urge you to support this bill as by protecting forests you protect community health and access to the relief forest patches provide. During this Covid-19 pandemic neighbors need access to nature more than ever. I also encourage you to approve it without Amendment 5 as Parks & Rec would be encouraged to plant more trees if they are not exempt from this portion of the bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katie Lautar, Executive Director