

Testimony for Increased Funding Allocations for Native Tree Planting in Montgomery County and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Name: Reba Carruth

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Testimony Topic: Request for equitable use of water quality protection charge funds for native tree planting to;

(1) protect universal access to clean drinking water from stormwater runoff pollution

(2) expand and accelerate targeted investment for native tree planting to manage stormwater runoff pollution in Montgomery County

(3) and to protect water quality with targeted funds for native tree planting and buffer forests for restoration of the Chesapeake Bay watershed

Amendment Request: Resolution to Establish FY23 Water Quality Protection Charge

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/col/2022/20220322/20220322_6G.pdf

The Water Quality Protection Charge (WQPC) is a part of Montgomery County property tax bills. The WQPC raises funds to improve the water quality of our streams and reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff.

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/water/wqpc/about.html>

I. Introduction: Climate Change, Clean Drinking Water and Stormwater Runoff Pollution

As the decade unfolds, the issue of clean drinking water is a growing concern - in Montgomery County, Maryland and across the country.ⁱ This is due to water quality threats from environmental pollution, climate change, global warming, increasing rain, inadequate infrastructure, stormwater runoff, agriculture nutrient runoff and flooding.ⁱⁱ In Montgomery County, Maryland, climate change and stormwater runoff now threaten public and private access to safe drinking water. The source of this threat to clean drinking water are as follows; stormwater and agriculture runoff pollution of local streams and waterways, the concentration of urban and suburban buildings, hard surfaces for homes and roads, environmental deterioration, the loss of native trees, plants and forests in Montgomery County and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.ⁱⁱⁱ

“ Most of the stormwater runoff from roads, driveways, rooftops, and parking lots is not treated before it reaches our waterways. In Montgomery County Maryland, urban stormwater runoff is now a major source of pollution, and poses a growing threat to clean safe drinking water for citizens.”

Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/water/stormwater/about.html>

In the case of stormwater runoff, Montgomery County, Maryland is facing growing water quality and drinking water pollution due to climate change – and environmental degradation. Overtime, new buildings and concentration of buildings without sufficient native trees, forests and green space are causing more stormwater pollution and flooding threats. To be more specific, native plants, trees, forests and natural landscapes are being replaced with the following hard surface materials; asphalt, concrete, buildings and roadways. Unfortunately, these hard surfaces are now major sources of stormwater runoff pollution into local streams and the Chesapeake Bay watershed system. In fact, soil erosion and ground degradation result in the pollution of streams and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. While the WWSC-Water sanitation utility company is working to protect public health and to provide clean drinking water to residents and businesses in Montgomery County and Prince Georges County Maryland - stronger climate resilience is needed. For this reason, water quality protection must increase the focus, expansion and funding of native tree planting, forestry and sustainable environmental development to protect and provide clean drinking water in Montgomery County, Maryland.

For these reasons, the protection of water quality and clean drinking water in Montgomery County requires increased and targeted funding from FY23 water quality protection charges. The increased charges can be used for expanded native tree planting and forest restoration programs to absorb stormwater runoff pollution. The increased funding of community and county wide native tree planting and forest cover in Montgomery County will strengthen clean water protection, climate resilience and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. For in reality, it is the Chesapeake Bay watershed that provides clean drinking water for residents, families, communities and businesses in Montgomery County, and the State of Maryland.

II. Climate Change, Resilience and Stormwater Runoff Pollution in the Chesapeake Bay

At the present time, Montgomery County, Maryland is undergoing rapid and concentrated multi-use residential and commercial building construction and land use. However, long standing values and agreed upon community goals and government policies for the protection of water quality- as a public good - is now threatened by climate change, stormwater runoff and environmental pollution. Overtime, climate change, increasing land use for concentrated housing and commercial building developments are weakening the natural environment and clean water sourced from the Chesapeake Bay watershed. But more important, the threat of stormwater runoff pollution and flooding must be addressed in the context of climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience.

The Montgomery County Council is to be commended for the excellent Climate Plan in place for Montgomery County, Maryland!^{iv} The Climate Plan is ambitious, and is based on moral agreement for government policy and public, private and civil society stakeholder cooperation to achieve the goals of the UN Paris Climate Agreement. In the Montgomery County Climate Plan climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience rely on clean renewable energy transition, energy efficiency, sustainable environments and equitable access for all residents and communities in Montgomery County are the main goals.

However, climate change and global warming combine with existing environmental threats which accelerate stormwater runoff pollution and flooding. As a result, stormwater runoff, floods and pollution threaten our public health, safety and the sustainability of clean water in Montgomery County, Maryland. In turn, the residents and entire community are now threatened by stormwater runoff pollution and reduced access to clean drinking water from the Chesapeake Bay.

Native Species of Trees and Forest Buffers: Stormwater Protection of Water Quality of Streams and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

In spite of clean water challenges, native species of plants, trees and forest buffers are the oldest - and now - the last line of defense against stormwater and agriculture runoff pollution.^v The climate resilience and sustainable environment benefits of native species of plants, trees and buffer forests include the capture of carbon, and water pollution from stormwater and agriculture runoff that contaminate rivers and local streams in Montgomery County and the State of Maryland. Native species of plants and trees also absorb carbon and nutrients that contaminate and pollute the Chesapeake waters, wetland and marine ecosystems.^{vi}

For these reasons, native trees and forest buffers are increasingly now used to provide streamside protection, with coast line trees and shrubs, to prevent pollution from entering the Chesapeake Bay streams and waterways.^{vii} The forest buffer can stabilize stream banks, provide food and habitat to wildlife and keep streams cool during hot weather. In this Chesapeake Bay wetland ecosystem, forest buffers provide the following essential functions for water quality protection in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and wetland ecosystems; sediment and nutrient pollution filters, prevention of soil erosion and provision of wildlife habitats.^{viii}

III. My Clean Water Threat Story

Over the last few years, I received periodic notices of water safety threats and instructions “not to drink or use the water” in my Grosvenor Park I condo/apartment building. We were instructed that water would be shut off for several hours, and to only drink and cook with filtered water. Explanations were vague and disturbing since water is used for drinking, food preparation and cooking, personal hygiene, cleaning and laundry. On each occasion, the color of the water was unclear and dark in color. In each case, when the clearance to start using the water was given, the water remained unclear and dark in color “as it cleared the pipes”.

As a single person, it is becoming clear that my access to clean drinking water cannot be taken for granted. I am concerned over the need to store bottles of clean filtered water for drinking and cooking. The access to clean water is also important for hygiene, health and safety. In fact, my access to clean drinking water requires regulation and maintenance of private and public water systems in my building – Montgomery County, the State of Maryland and the nation.

The issue of stormwater contamination threats was recently highlighted on the evening news a few weeks ago. In the Gaithersburg, Maryland, the issue of stormwater pollution and water contamination led to calls for more action to restore the Chesapeake Bay Watershed – the ultimate source of clean drinking water for humans, animal livestock, agriculture, aquaculture, plants, trees, forests and wildlife.

Recently, I was made aware of the growing concern and threats of compromised water sanitation during a townhall meeting with an executive from WSSC-Water, which provides clean drinking water and sanitation for Montgomery County and Prince Georges County. In Montgomery County, the source of the public drinking water is from the Potomac River or the Patuxent River. However, in the western and northern parts of Montgomery County, many people rely on private wells for their drinking water. In this case, residents must test their water to make sure that it is safe to drink – there is no government regulation or policy to address the threat of stormwater contamination of their drinking water.

Unfortunately, Montgomery County residents who live in apartments and condominium buildings rely on government regulation and HOA management boards for the maintenance of shared water systems and infrastructure. Therefore, my personal concern, and civic responsibility in my community leads me to advocate for stronger Montgomery County and State of Maryland government policy and collective action for climate resilience through native tree planting, reforestation, nature conservation and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay Watersheds.

IV. Policy Advocacy Issue: FY23 Water Quality Protection Charge Amendment for Native Tree Planting and Forest Restoration for Local Stream and the Chesapeake Bay Waters

In conclusion, my Montgomery County policy advocacy issue request is for stronger collective action and increased funding for water quality protection/ clean drinking water as a public good. The requested increase and use of FY23 Water Quality Protection charges for expanded native tree planting and forest restoration is required for stronger climate resilience against stormwater runoff pollution.^{ix} To achieve this goal, the FY23 Water Quality Protection Charge should be increased and directly used to plant native species of trees and restore forests to protect water quality for Montgomery County residents.^x In turn, the increased water quality charges can be targeted on native tree planting and forest restoration programs and equitable community native tree planting projects in cooperation with local climate resilience and Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration programs. The increased water quality protection charges will strengthen civic and community engagement for climate resilience and native tree planting to protect universal access to clean drinking water from stormwater runoff pollution of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.^{xi}

Thank You for Your Consideration of This Request!!!!

Endnotes

ⁱ **U.S. EPA NPDES Stormwater Program**

<https://www.epa.gov/npdes/npdes-stormwater-program>

ⁱⁱ **Stormwater Runoff**

https://www.chesapeakebay.net/issues/stormwater_runoff

ⁱⁱⁱ **Chesapeake Bay Restoration: Background and Issues for Congress, Eva Lipiec, Analyst in Natural Resources Policy**, August 3, 2018, Congressional Research Service, 7-5700 www.crs.gov R45278, <https://www.cbf.org/document-library/non-cbf-documents/crs-report-bay-restoration-background-congress.pdf>

History of Chesapeake Bay Clean Up Efforts

<https://www.cbf.org/how-we-save-the-bay/chesapeake-clean-water-blueprint/the-history-of-bay-cleanup-efforts.html>

Chesapeake Watershed Agreement 2014 – As Amended January 24, 2020

https://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/FINAL_Ches_Bay_Watershed_Agreement.withsignatures-Hires.pdf

^{iv} **Montgomery County Climate Action Plan: Building an Equitable and Resilient Community**, June 2021

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/green/Resources/Files/climate/climate-action-plan.pdf>

Climate Home Page

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/green/climate/index.html>

^v **Forest Buffers**

https://www.chesapeakebay.net/issues/forest_buffers

^{vi} **Md. Could Reach Bay Health Goal by 2025, But Success Hinges on Curbing Runoff**, Elizabeth Shwe, December 3, 2020, Energy & Environment, **Maryland Matters**

<https://www.marylandmatters.org/2020/12/03/md-could-reach-bay-health-goal-by-2025-but-success-hinges-on-curbing-runoff/>

^{vii} **Montgomery County Watershed Restoration Home**

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/water/>

^{viii} **Riparian Forest Buffer Strategic Plan for 2021-2025**

https://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/22043/2018-2019_forest_buffer_management_strategy.pdf

^{ix} **Maryland’s 5 Million Trees Program Will Help Protect the Shore**

<https://www.cbf.org/blogs/save-the-bay/2021/07/marylands-5-million-tree-program-will-help-protect-the-shore.html>

^x **Mature Forests Hold the Key to Mitigating Climate Change**

<https://www.marylandmatters.org/2022/01/22/opinion-mature-forests-hold-the-key-to-mitigating-climate-change/>

^{xi} **The Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint**

<https://www.cbf.org/how-we-save-the-bay/chesapeake-clean-water-blueprint/>

Climate Resiliency Workgroup

https://www.chesapeakebay.net/who/group/climate_change_workgroup