



## **Statement on Behalf of the Planning Department & Planning Board on Proposed ‘No Net Loss of Forest’ Amendments to the Montgomery County Forest Conservation Law (Chapter 22A)**

February 7, 2023

Good afternoon Councilmembers, my name is Kristin Taddei. I am a Forest Conservation Planner with Montgomery Planning. I manage the department’s Reforest Montgomery program, which offers free trees and reforestation for County residents, and have been coordinating the ‘No Net Loss of Forest’ initiative since November of 2021.

‘No Net Loss of Forest’ is an effort by the Montgomery County Planning Department and Planning Board to review the impact of 3 decades of forest conservation efforts and identify opportunities to strengthen the Montgomery County Forest Conservation Law. The primary goal is to achieve an equal or greater area of forest planted compared to forest removed on a County-wide level, by projects subject to the law.

The county’s Forest Conservation Law is successful in many ways. For one, it has permanently protected over 15,000 acres of forest in the county since it took effect in 1992. The law ensures forests are protected, and in many cases planted, as part of the development approval process.

Planning Department data includes the amount of forest cleared, protected, and planted by projects that are required to comply with the law. In reviewing this data, the past 10 years show a trend towards less forest clearing and more forest protection by development projects. In fact, the recent statewide technical study released by the Hughes Center shows that only an estimated 21% of the forest lost in Montgomery County was cleared for development, while over 70% of forest lost was due to conversion to tree canopy or natural areas. We are close to achieving ‘no net loss of forest’ by projects subject to the law, but forests in the county are also facing competition from invasive species and a rapidly changing climate.

Bill 25-22 retains the requirements of the Forest Conservation Law that are working well for our county, and introduces changes that would achieve no net loss. The bill also presents an opportunity to address other causes of forest loss in the County and expand our forest conservation programs. Montgomery Planning collaborated with forest conservation experts and stakeholders to discuss ideas for modernizing the law, examine similar amendments introduced by nearby counties, test proposals on real projects, and consider financial obstacles to increasing planting requirements. After taking on these analyses, we are confident that this proposed legislation will achieve the goal of no net loss of forest county-wide while continuing to encourage much-needed developments like affordable housing and public transportation projects in Montgomery County.

The proposed amendment aligns well with the goals of the Climate Action Plan and has been thoroughly reviewed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources for compliance with Maryland’s Forest Conservation Act.

We look forward to discussing the four additional amendments requested by stakeholders, which we largely support, during the upcoming work session, and working with you to finalize this significant amendment to the county’s Forest Conservation Law.

Thank you.