

September 27, 2024

Honorable Chair Libby Garvey
Arlington County Board
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Summary: *Continue to push for legislation allowing local jurisdictions to increase their tree canopy coverage requirements, while also increasing funding for existing programs and discouraging the sale of invasive species*

Dear Chair Garvey:

As Arlington works to preserve its invaluable urban forest and tree canopy, it faces a formidable legislative barrier: state laws that bar local jurisdictions from increasing their tree canopy coverage requirements for new development.

That’s why the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission—along with our local representatives and many environmental groups—have been pushing hard for years for legislation that would allow Arlington County and other local jurisdictions to require greater canopy coverage for new single-family developments than is permitted under the current tree replacement ordinance, which has an upper limit of 20% tree cover in 20 years (section § 61-10 of the County code).

Such legislation did pass in 2024, along with another bill aimed at protecting existing trees from being cut during development. Unfortunately, both were vetoed by Virginia’s governor, and the vetoes were sustained by the Virginia House.

The FNRC strongly believes, however, that perseverance will eventually bring rewards. The Commission urges the County and the environmental community to support and pass those (or similar) bills again. There’s always a possibility that, even if vetoed by the governor, the new Virginia House (after the November election) could enact the laws by overriding the veto.

Beyond that, the FNRC believes that there are other, less controversial, measures that Arlington County should support in the next legislative session. Those include:

- Increasing funding for the [Virginia Trees for Clean Water program](#) from the Virginia Dept of Forestry, which supports “tree-planting efforts that raise public awareness of the benefits of trees and impacts on water quality.” The program also should be expanded to include tree maintenance for underserved communities.

Commission Members

Phil Klingelhofer, Chair
John Carey
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- Directing the Virginia Department of Transportation to incorporate trees and other native vegetation, including pollinator plants, into their designs and budgeting processes for roads and highways, helping to reverse the alarming losses of trees during such recent construction as the HOT lanes on I-66.
- Tackling the problem of invasive species by prohibiting the sale of the most noxious plants or by requiring plant labels describing invasive species and their harm.

Such legislative efforts should be viewed as crucial for Arlington's future. The FNRC does not need to remind the County Board that the urban forest is one of Arlington County's more precious resources. A vibrant, healthy tree canopy is a powerful tool for reducing air pollution and energy bills, for intercepting rainfall and slowing the flow of stormwater, for improving health and quality of life. Increasing tree canopy coverage can reduce outdoor temperatures by as much as 15°F degrees, which can be especially important for reducing the social inequities that still persist in Arlington County.

Yet the trends are rapidly moving in the wrong direction. Independent survey data show that Arlington's tree canopy coverage has declined alarmingly, from 41% in 2016 to 33% in 2021. We all need to work together, including pushing for new legislation, to slow and reverse this decline.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,



Phil Klingelhofer, Chair
Forestry and Natural Resources Commission

Cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager