



The Fairfax County Tree Commission
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Fairfax, Virginia 22035
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April 6, 2023

Jeffrey McKay, Chairman
Dan Storck, Environmental Committee Chairman
Members, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
12000 Government Center Parkway
Fairfax, VA 22035

Sent by email to: clerktothebos@fairfaxcounty.gov

RE: Site Specific Plan Amendment (SSPA) process

Dear members of the Board of Supervisors:

The Tree Commission believes that the Planning Commission, Department of Planning staff who develop the Comprehensive Plan Work Program (CPWP), and the Board of Supervisors **has a responsibility to focus on preserving our urban forest at all stages** of this newly expedited amendment process. We have learned that assessment priorities include whether the nomination addresses emerging community interests or changed circumstance, aligns with the Comprehensive Plan concept for future development, and whether it also aligns with the county's Strategic Plan, One Fairfax policy and other BOS adopted policies. We believe that those "other" policies should be openly and specifically prioritized, such as those that protect trees in Environmental Quality Corridors, Resource Protection Areas, designated floodplains, and in the 2019 Tree Action Plan. Additionally, the county has adopted both a County-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP) and a Resilient Fairfax plan (Climate Adaptation and Resilience) which also contain significant goals and strategies involving our urban forest and tree equity. If a SSPA application is non-compliant with those policies, it should not move forward to the rezoning process.

The Tree Commission recommends that during the SSPA review, the Planning Commission and the BOS require staff to:

- determine whether there are valuable environmental, ecological, and wildlife conservation benefits associated with the site that would be affected by a zoning change;
- determine whether a requested change in the Comprehensive Plan would increase or decrease the percentage of urban forest that must be preserved or planted. If less urban forest would be protected under the proposed change, the request should be flagged for problems and possible denial at the next step;
- add up the total estimated tree loss across all the nominations being reviewed during the same time period in order to give the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors and the public a complete picture of the potential urban forest loss as a whole;
- assess how tree equity is affected, including whether the project will increase heat island conditions, stormwater runoff, household energy costs, and greenhouse gas emissions, decrease shade for nearby sidewalks and trails, and/or decrease current screening of developed infrastructure or transportation corridors; and
- extend the required notification of an SSPA nomination to a wider neighborhood area than only those whose land touches the affected property or who is signed up on a specific county list serve.

If these concerns are answered in the SSPA process, it will save time and money for everyone, from applicant, to staff, and from the Planning Commission and BOS.

In summary, the Tree Commission asks that only those applications that will support and increase the county's climate sustainability and adaptation goals, all of which include a healthy, sustainable and expanding tree canopy, be allowed to move forward into the official rezoning process.

Sincerely,

Please email TreeCommission@fairfaxcounty.gov for official signed version of letter

Cindy Speas, Chair

The Fairfax County Tree Commission

cc: Members of the Fairfax County Planning Commission
 Bryan Hill, Fairfax County Executive
 Rachel Flynn, Deputy County Executive
 Larry Zargoza, Environmental Quality Advisory Council Chair