

Forest Conservation Ordinance Update Roundtable

Meeting Notes 3/18/2020

Attendees

Jessica Andritz	Ken Hastings
Lynn Knaggs	Bonnie Bick
Charles Rice	Tim Lessner
Heather Kelley	Marcus Jackson
Aimee Dailey	Mark Imlay
Kyle Redden	Nancy Schertler
Michael Jurkovic	Ann Stark
Doug Meeker	Cathy Flerlage

This meeting will be discussing the March 9th memo given to participants in order to “noodle” solutions to language in the Comprehensive Plan.

Natural Resources Policy, 5.11, and related Action Item No. 4: Retain as much of the forest and tree cover as practical within urban areas

Staff agrees we need to evaluate our urban forest canopy before we can make a goal.

Concerned Citizens:

- Bonnie: Urban canopy is important to everyone, but should not be factored into the Forest Conservation Ordinance.
- Nancy: We need to expand RPZ to top of slope. The goal is no net loss of trees; target RPZ for reforestation. Add forest to the stream valley in development district.
- Mark: Sierra Club, Bryans Road. It is important to maintain forest available to the Community for recreational purposes. There are strict standards for Conservation Easements. Because of strict standards 5-10% that is called urban forest would not count as urban forest.
- Ken 2013, 2019 defined no net loss of forest requirement, our two senators from Charles County sponsored this bill. Level of forest at 41% for entire State coverage in the 2013 law. Charles County failed to incorporate this in the Code along with other jurisdictions. 2019 referred to forests not canopy. Canopy verses development. Cut some down, plant some more. Goal of General Assembly – No Net Loss
- Ann: Tree Canopy –There has been a change in the County. Trees are disappearing at an alarming rate. Quit allowing development to go into areas and not replace trees. The problem is that trees already there do so much more for green house emissions, filtering water. Keep the existing trees. State level has very strict guidelines as to what counts as urban forests in the Forest Conservation Act.

Nancy: What are urban areas? **Development Community:**

- Doug: It could be if you have the data to support the goals (when asked if urban canopy goal could be addressed by FC Ordinance. FC and urban tree canopy are two different issues. Should

not be factored in the FC update. Most tree canopy doesn't qualify. Not one in the same and doesn't have to be in the update.

- Tim: Concur. If we are looking to enhance urban areas, priority forests, wetlands, RPZ, nice trees, and steep slopes should be identified by the County for retention rather than taking off-site. Most of our forests are mitigated for. Nice to have map, predesignated priority areas in Comp Plan or ordinance. Protection for buyer to be aware of important green space when purchasing property.
- Cathy: Disagrees. Tree canopy goals are intimately related to FCO. DNR has mapping of canopy. Charles County has more than 40% coverage even in development district. 298-13 states how to pick them, how you rank them. Add a definition for urban tree/forest. Establish a baseline first.

Question: Does the County need to provide incentives or just lose development rights? Suggested options include property tax deductions, off-sets...

- Tim: potential buyer would want to know up front (about protected tree canopy). Not necessarily losing development rights. Developers want to develop in the development district rather than receiving a tax deduction.

Natural Resources Policy, 5.11, and related Action Item No. 5. Limit Forest Fragmentation

Question: Is the County already addressing this in our Ordinance? Charles Rice: Yes, but we can do more.

Concerned Citizens:

- Bonnie: We are in a Climate crises. Would like to see climate crises declared; improved conservation to maximum extent to protect FIDs habitat and forest hubs. Not currently protected as shown in Georgetown Solar project. All stream valleys should be prioritized. Priority forests should be identified for buyers and all forests protected in Charles County.
- Nancy: Forest Conservation Ordinance prohibits fragmentation that is FIDs habitat. Need to provide stewardship to prevent invasive species takeover in afforestation, reforestation or regeneration areas. Invasives prevention stewardship: so what grows up is not invasives. Actions: 5 years maintained area will prevent invasives.

Development Community:

- Doug: 100+ acre forest hubs must be identified – only general discussion in comp plan.

Tim: FIDS and hubs, only one FIDs mitigation bank in the County and state. Hard to get approval from State, it took us 5 years to get approval. Establish tree hubs, high priority areas, plantings. County wants to create hubs, it's a lot of work up front; a lot of work, 100+ acre FIDs hub map needs to be created.

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Action Item No. 11. Explore methods to retain large contiguous forests and discourage their fragmentation

- **Concerned Citizens:** Nancy: I agree we need to preserve existing forests and explore methods to retain large tracts. Charles Rice: We are addressing this action item in land preservation programs.
- Bonnie: RE:Fisheries. Charles County needs a fishery board. The Mattawoman is the most productive fishery. A lot of attention is given to farms but fisheries needs to be strengthened.

Jessica: Projected timeline (very tentative).

- 1) This discussion today
- 2) Have an internal meeting to discuss any items with the first draft
- 3) Bring a draft forward to April PGM roundtable. Ken had the idea of email feedback but not everyone can chime in and discuss together
- 4) Target a briefing to the Planning Commission in May, Draft to State, Draft to County Attorney's office
- 5) July public hearing with Board of Commissioners

A request was made to upload notes from today's roundtable to the website.