

SUPPORT HB459 and SB121

Topic: Strengthening Tree Conservation to add incentives to preserve stands of healthy mature trees and expand how they can use their tree fund.

Bill Patrons: Delegate Rip Sullivan and Senator Suhas Subramanyam

OVERVIEW:

Some localities within Planning District 8 that are eligible to adopt tree conservation and preservation ordinances under 15.2-961.1 have not done so because they've found it too limiting. Two changes they'd like to see are 1) greater flexibility in how they can use their tree fund and 2) increased incentives to preserve healthy mature trees on a site. These changes would entice localities in Planning District 8 to adopt tree conservation ordinances.

Climate-ready communities are prepared for the potentially life-threatening impacts of climate change, including flash floods, urban heat and increased air pollution. These bills help the locality conserve more of their healthy mature trees and help to maintain newly planted trees until they become well established. A healthy urban tree canopy reduces flooding, cools our cities, encourages people to walk, reduces stress and asthma.

Reasons to support

- Virginia continues to lose tree canopy at an astounding rate, which limits the state's ability to improve water quality, reduce flooding and mitigate the impact of climate change on its most vulnerable communities.
- HB HB459 and SB121:
 - Increase the canopy credits a developer receives if they preserve high-value mature trees or stands of trees. Developers who provide a stand assessment prior to submitting a site plan and who take the necessary precautions to protect those trees during construction would receive additional canopy credit.
 - Expands how the tree fund can be used. Currently the fund is limited to non-profits for planting on municipal property; however, some municipalities have limited available planting space. Also, after the initial planting, trees need additional pruning, mulching and watering in the first 3 years to ensure they're structurally sound and to become well established. Changes to the conservation language would allow a locality to plant on both public AND private property as well as use the funds to help maintain newly planted trees.
- Virginia has signed on to the Bay Agreement and is far behind in meeting its urban tree canopy goals. By passing statewide legislation, localities are better prepared to achieve this important goal to help improve water quality in our local rivers and streams as well as the Chesapeake Bay.



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