

SUPPORT HB529

Topic: Providing localities more authority to replace tree canopy

Bill Patron: Delegate Patrick Hope

OVERVIEW:

Virginia continues to lose both intact forest and urban tree canopy at an alarming rate, suffering a net loss of 9,548 acres between 2014 and 2018. More recent imagery reveals substantial loss after 2018 with the widening of interstates, more wildfires, more invasive species, and increased energy infrastructure and development. This loss of tree canopy, particularly in urban and suburban localities, hinders Virginia's efforts to slow the impacts of climate change, manage stormwater, and reduce inland and coastal flooding.

Many local governments have expressed the desire to expand their tree canopy as a way to cost-effectively reduce flooding, manage stormwater, and reduce the health impacts of urban heat islands and air pollution to their residents.

Unfortunately, localities have limited authority to require developers to replace a higher percentage of trees that are cleared for construction. HB529 provides the additional local authority needed for localities to establish a floor, not a ceiling, on tree replacement percentages.

REASONS TO SUPPORT HB529

Gives additional authority to Virginia localities to increase the percentage of tree canopy that is lost to construction if they local government is battling urban heat islands, stormwater runoff, flooding or air pollution.



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Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Ann Jurczyk
ajurczyk@cbf.org
757.645.6809



Virginia Conservation Network
Pat Calvert, Director of Land Conservation & Clean Water
Programs
pat@vcnva.org
Pat: (434) 484-0804

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