

SUPPORT HB2630

Topic: Providing localities with the authority to establish a tree canopy fund

Bill Patron: Delegate Rodney Willett

OVERVIEW:

Virginia is home to millions of acres of protected forestland, but along the rapidly developing corridors of I-95, I-64 and I-81, we are losing tree canopy at an astounding rate. Maintaining Virginia's tree canopy is essential to reducing stormwater pollution, mitigating flooding, and improving air and water quality – all vital to meeting Chesapeake Bay restoration goals and supporting the health and well-being of our communities.

This bill authorizes local governments to establish a tree fund. Builders pay into the fund when they cannot meet canopy requirements on the parcel being developed; they would pay a fee into the fund in lieu of planting on site. Once established by ordinance, the local government would collect, manage, and disburse fees collected from developers. The tree fund can be used to plant and maintain trees on public or private properties, or grant the money to a non-profit community-based organization dedicated to tree stewardship. The amount the developer pays into the fund will be based on the average cost of two-inch caliper nursery stock trees and the associated costs to plant them. Any funds collected by the localities must be spent within five years. Arlington and Fairfax County have used the fund successfully to help maintain canopy.

REASONS TO SUPPORT:

- This bill makes it easier for local governments to replace canopy that's lost during development while giving builders more flexibility to meet tree canopy requirements.
- Localities that are currently considering adopting ordinances authorized by 961.3 include Stafford County, Fredericksburg, and Richmond. Each of these localities and the building community would benefit from having the flexibility provided by a tree fund.
- Currently this code section authorizes local governments to establish a "tree bank", but local governments don't have land set aside for a tree bank, nor the resources to establish and administer one.
- Localities can help prepare their communities for the anticipated, future impacts of climate change, including hotter and wetter urban and suburban centers. Trees cool our cities, shrinking dangerous urban heat islands, absorb water to reduce flooding, and filter pollutants out of our air and water. This bill makes it easier to strengthen these critical climate defenses.



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Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Ann Jurczyk
ajurczyk@cbf.org
(757) 645-6809



VIRGINIA
CONSERVATION
NETWORK

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

This position was taken by Virginia Conservation Network (VCN)'s Legislative Committee and Board of Directors and is supported by Virginia's conservation community. For a complete list of VCN positions, visit www.vcnva.org/bill-tracker. VCN is committed to building a powerful, diverse, and highly-coordinated conservation movement focused on protecting our Commonwealth's natural resources today and for tomorrow.