

SUPPORT HB2638

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 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. HB2638 provides additional local authority localities need to manage their canopy.

REASONS TO SUPPORT:

- Increases the canopy replacement percentage to twenty-five percent tree canopy for a residential site zoned more than two but not more than five units per acre and thirty percent tree canopy for a residential site zoned two or fewer units per acre.
- Enables the locality to require that approved higher density redevelopment projects meet the tree canopy percentages applicable to the site in its predevelopment state.
- Tightens the language whereby a developer could be granted a waiver/exception to the ordinance, now taking into account neighborhood environmental and natural resource considerations such as stormwater management and preservation of trees of outstanding age, size, or physical characteristics.
- Enables the locality to monitor and assess the condition and coverage of tree canopies at development sites approved pursuant to the ordinance during the time period up to 20 years' maturity of the planted trees.



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