



Arlington Tree Action Group

Advocating for Trees in Arlington Virginia

February 25, 2024

Arlington County Board
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Garvey,

ATAG has a long record of advocating for immediate and meaningful steps to **preserve our mature trees** and to **increase plantings** on public and private land that might achieve the 40% canopy goal in the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan. We want the County Board to take decisive steps that reflect the reality of our disappearing urban forest, the impacts of climate change, and the deleterious effects development is having on our environment.

ATAG supports the February 17, 2024 letter from nine civic association presidents requesting the County to “initiate a study looking at reform of the lot coverage provisions of the Zoning Ordinance.” ATAG joins in to echo the following comments/requests for County Board action:

- *“We ask that the Board specifically direct CPHD to prioritize this study, to make that direction very clear at the March 14 [2024] budget work session with CPHD, and to fund the study adequately in preparing the FY 2025 budget over the course of the next two months.”*
- *“...staff recognized the need to revisit the lot coverage issue ten years ago.”*
- *“Two years ago, a majority of the Board Members provided guidance to CPHD that it should initiate a study of potential lot coverage reform.”*
- *“Last December, the Board approved the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan, which specifically pointed to the need for this study, following public comment emphasizing the need to address this issue. In supporting that Plan, the Forestry and Natural Resources Commission also emphasized the need to prioritize this study.”*

During a [Board Work Session](#) with the Community Planning Housing and Development staff in February 2022, three Board members (de Ferranti, Garvey, and Karantonis) acknowledged that they wanted to change lot coverage for all single-family development in residential zones. By setting lower limits, it would help unwind the harm to tree canopy that comes from teardowns and redevelopment.

Further, ATAG’s comments on climate change (attached), were presented to the Board at the January 2024 meeting by former Forestry and Natural Resources commissioner Kit Norland. She emphasized how climate change has become an existential threat here and

now. The Board needs to take aggressive leadership in areas where current authority is documented, such as zoning. The County has taken some positive steps, but more must be done.

The [2023 Arlington Tree Canopy Assessment](#), a privately funded study that you have been briefed on and which is based on 2021 data, showed that Arlington has a tree canopy coverage of 33% and could reach a maximum goal of 39% **only** if all currently plantable areas of the County are used strictly for trees rather than new development. ATAG believes this makes the 40% canopy goal unattainable, and we therefore promote lot coverage reductions as a critical tool for saving us from the worst climate outcomes, as were also projected recently at the Arlington 2050 Visioning event.

As ATAG said in January, “We can’t pave and build our way out of this crisis. We’re losing natural resources and expanding impervious surfaces, turning Arlington ever-faster into a vast urban heat island.” Addressing lot coverage as an urgent need is a small step in the right direction.

Thank you for your consideration and for moving forward on the lot coverage changes that were endorsed by three current board members in the 2022 Work Session.

Sincerely,

Susan Land
President
Arlington Tree Action Group