



MY TURN By Lisa Markovitz

Ellicott City watershed protection update

The Howard County Council recently voted on Council Bill 54, sponsored by Liz Walsh, to stop the allowance of forest conservation waivers in the Tiber Branch Watershed. Public hearings and passionate pleas on social media took place, with much emphasis on protecting this vulnerable area.

Walsh had publicized concern regarding several residential building projects with County granted waivers, including Taylor Highlands, that Walsh noted had cut 72 trees without authorization, and sought to bank 2.1 acres of plantings off site, in lieu of replacement on site.

The Council Members agreed that the waiver process itself needed updating especially with regard to enforcement of forest conservation rules, and more appropriate fines for noncompliance. Those sentiments were not included in the final Bill though.

Agreed upon amendment issues included allowing public project waivers, dead tree certifications, and commercial

project exemptions. Walsh indicated frustration that current waivers were not disallowed for the projects of concern.

It is commendable that the Council worked together to get something passed regarding allowing waivers of tree removal rules. It will take further legislative remedies to address inadequate fines that do not lead to greater incentives to comply with forest conservation laws. Without penalties that would affect a project getting further considerations from the County, preservation requirements can be thwarted.

Coming out of an election year, heading toward the County's once per 10 year update of zoning land use growth plans and regulations updates, we should all hope that the Council continues to work on community issues together, and keep their promises.

To weigh in on these issues, give the County Council feedback via email to COUNCILMAIL@HowardCountyMD.gov.