

February 5, 2003

District of Columbia Zoning Commission
Suite 210 South
441 Fourth St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

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RE: Case No. 02-19 Forest Hills Tree & Slope Overlay Proposal
Members of the Commission,

I am writing to you in opposition to the Forest Hills Tree and Slope Overlay, which I continue to believe is an unnecessary, unwelcome and unwarranted intrusion into the private affairs of the citizens of Forest Hills. It is an attempt restrict denser development and to keep the neighborhood from changing into anything other than what it is now. These are not laudable goals at a time when many planners and citizens have concluded that there should be more people living closer to cities and therefore closer to public transportation, work, services and amenities. The undesirable alternative is all around us: endless suburban sprawl, long commutes, traffic and air-pollution. The Overlay imposes zoning changes that should only be enacted as a result of a thorough, open debate and detailed consultation between citizens and their elected leaders. These features are decidedly absent from the process under which these changes in the law have been brought forward.

Furthermore, my belief is that these provisions will do little to preserve the tree canopy, the preservation and encouragement of which is a very complex issue in a densely populated, urban context. In fact an unintended consequence of the Overlay and the Urban Forest Preservation Act may be the loss of trees, particularly the smaller, younger ones. Instead of property owners regarding their trees as unqualified assets, under the Overlay's restrictions, property owners will have to manage their trees as potential liabilities. This is likely to mean that some trees, and especially young ones, will be cut down before they become a problem and thus before they can significantly contribute to the overall canopy. This is likely to be particularly the case on vacant land.

The political issue aside, I would also encourage the Commission not to impose the Overlay on Forest Hills before there is available a more complete assessment of the tree canopy and its problems. To my mind too many scientific questions remain unanswered to warrant proceeding so aggressively. For example, what has been the effect on public street trees of past neglect, disease and old age? Replanting and improved maintenance on public land and encouraging re-planting on private land could better

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address this problem than interfering in the lives of private citizens. If automobile pollution and storm runoff are a problem, are there not more direct and effective means of addressing these problems than zoning restrictions? By necessity land has to be cleared for people to build their homes, businesses and institutions. City dwellers should be willing to accept that as population centers become denser, there are likely to be more buildings and somewhat fewer trees. Even so, Washington can still be a great place to live.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew K. Stevenson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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