

THE FOREST HILLS TREE AND SLOPE OVERLAY, ZC CASE NO. 02-19  
TESTIMONY OF CATHY WISS, COMMISSIONER, ANC 3F06  
JULY 22, 2004, HEARING

The Forest Hills “forest” is special. Very tall oaks and other canopy trees give Forest Hills its unique ambience. Many of these trees – like white oaks, beeches, and tulip poplars -- are quite slow growing, but can live for hundreds of years. Many are relicts of the Piedmont forest that once covered this area, but has now disappeared from most of the District of Columbia. These majestic trees are worth saving.

These trees are not like canopy trees in other neighborhoods. In my neighborhood of Tenleytown, the “wild” trees, those that seeded in on their own and have persisted through reseeding, are the types one would find in hedgerows between cultivated fields – black locusts, wild cherry, mulberry, silver maple, catalpa. Indeed, Tenleytown was farmed intensively throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The only places one can find species similar to those of Forest Hills is in areas where Soapstone Creek flowed before it was diverted to sewers. Presumably, the stream banks were not cleared for cultivation.

Many species of trees in Forest Hills are similar to tree species in adjacent Rock Creek Park. My constituent Gail Spilsbury recently published a book entitled *Rock Creek Park*, which lists several types of forests in the park and gives a map of their locations, prepared by Sue Salmons, Rock Creek Park’s Resource Management Specialist for Vegetation Management in Natural Areas. The similarities between trees in the Park and Forest Hills are obvious. I have appended Ms. Spilsbury’s list of park flora and the map at Attachment A.

The overlay as set down sought to protect adjacent parkland. If the similarity in species between Forest Hills and Rock Creek Park is maintained, the overlay will do just that. Forest Hills would remain a suitable and complementary buffer for the Park. Trees seeding into the park from Forest Hills will be compatible with the Rock Creek Park forest. The canopy in both areas will remain similar in height and value to wildlife, thereby extending the habitat for birds and other creatures in the park. On the other hand, if trees that are foreign to the park are planted in Forest Hills and seed into it, the park’s forest will change over time. This has happened in some places. Sue Salmons has developed a list of trees she asks park neighbors not to plant. The list includes Norway maples, widely planted as street trees during the Barry administration but now removed from the list because they are extremely invasive, and Chinese elms, which are still on UFA’s list of street trees. See Attachment B.

Section 1406.5(a)(5) of the DC Comprehensive Plan provides in part that “[d]evelopment of border areas [to Rock Creek Park and its tributaries] must avoid any adverse effect (known or plausibly suspected) on these stream valley parks, including the water quality, flora, and fauna” (emphasis added). Using the UFA list of street trees, developed for a wholly different purpose, as the guide for replanting Forest Hills could have a devastating

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effect on the flora of Rock Creek Park. The list contains many trees not indigenous to the Washington area, let alone to the United States. The list does not include trees found in Forest Hills and Rock Creek Park, like beech trees, which may not be suitable to plant by the street, but which would be desirable to preserve and plant in people's yards. The list includes only one evergreen, Dawn redwood, a pretty tree with sparse canopy not indigenous to this area, but it excludes hollies, pines, and spruces -- trees found in many yards in Forest Hills. Would residents not be able to plant these as canopy replacement trees?

Having a replacement tree list is a good thing, but it should be tailored to maintaining an appropriate mix of trees for Forest Hills and Rock Creek Park. The New York City zoning ordinance I submitted for this case on September 26, 2002, does just that. It gives lists of plants for replanting in "natural area" zones in order to maintain or reestablish the indigenous plant community.

Finally, requiring a percentage of canopy coverage within ten years of construction could encourage homeowners to plant only those trees that grow quickly and to ignore other trees that grow slowly but may provide greater benefit over time. Care should be taken to devise a scheme that will allow homeowners to enjoy the benefits of some canopy now but also to provide for the best forest for the future.

From: Gail Spilsbury, *Rock Creek Park* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 53-55.

## Park Flora

Hundreds of plant species grow in Rock Creek Park, the majority indigenous and the rest introduced, many during the era of Joshua Peirce, Washington's leading horticulturist in the nineteenth century. Eighty-five percent of Rock Creek Park is natural forest, much of it second growth, partly resulting from heavy land clearing during the Civil War, when a wide swath of land connected the city's forts; Fort DeRussy stood at the highest point in the park.

Today, the National Park Service aims to protect the park from further non-indigenous plant invasion. The park's flora has been classified according to plant associations, or species that grow in groups. Of the park's top four plant groupings, listed below, the beech—white oak/mayapple group predominates. The map on page 55 shows the location of all of the park's plant associations.<sup>24</sup>

### Beech—White Oak/Mayapple Forest

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Canopy               | white oak, beech, and tulip poplar                                                                                                                                 |
| Subcanopy            | white oak, beech, tulip poplar, other oaks, hickories, black gum, flowering dogwood, and sparse American holly                                                     |
| Shrub layer          | maple-leaved viburnum                                                                                                                                              |
| Herbaceous           | mayapple, jack-in-the-pulpit, poison ivy, Christmas fern, cucumber root, squawroot, sweet cicely, false Solomon's seal, wild yam, tick-trefoil, and partridgeberry |
| Exotics (nonnatives) | garlic mustard, Japanese honeysuckle, and Asiatic bittersweet                                                                                                      |

### Tulip Poplar Forest

|                      |                                                        |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Canopy               | tulip poplar                                           |
| Subcanopy            | tulip poplar and/or box elder                          |
| Shrub layer          | spice bush and blackberry                              |
| Herbaceous           | absent                                                 |
| Exotics (nonnatives) | multiflora rose, porcelain berry, and lesser celandine |

### Chesnut Oak—Black Oak/Huckleberry Forest (on dry ridges)

|                      |                                                                                        |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Canopy               | chestnut oak and black gum; sparse red and black oak and red maple                     |
| Subcanopy            | sassafras, serviceberry, greenbrier, and grape vine                                    |
| Shrub layer          | heaths including azalea, blueberry, mountain laurel ( <i>kalmia</i> ), and huckleberry |
| Herbaceous           | sparse or absent                                                                       |
| Exotics (nonnatives) | few species                                                                            |

### Sycamore—Green Ash Forest (on flood plains)

|                      |                                                                                                         |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Canopy               | sycamore and box elder; red maple and tulip poplar often co-dominant                                    |
| Subcanopy            | green and white ash and hickory frequent associates; bladder-nut and river birch occasional associates  |
| Shrub layer          | spicebush and occasional black haw                                                                      |
| Herbaceous           | jewelweed, mild water-pepper, jack-in-the-pulpit, enchanter's nightshade, skunk cabbage, and poison ivy |
| Exotics (nonnatives) | garlic mustard, lesser celandine, English ivy, stilt grass, multiflora rose, and Japanese honeysuckle   |

# Plant Associations

## Rock Creek Park



### Map Location



National Park Service  
Rock Creek Park  
Natural Resources

0.25 0 0.25 0.5 Miles

1 : 47,520 1 inch = 0.75 miles



Plot date: September 5, 2002  
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**These are invasive non-native species in the DC area.**

**Please do not plant near natural areas.**

**TREES**

|                             |                                      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Acer palmatum et al.</i> | Japanese maples                      |
| <i>Acer platanoides</i>     | Norway maple                         |
| <i>Ailanthus altissima</i>  | Tree of heaven                       |
| <i>Albizia julibrissin</i>  | Mimosa                               |
| <i>Paulownia tomentosa</i>  | Paulownia                            |
| <i>Prunus yedoensis</i>     | Yoshino cherry                       |
| <i>Sophora japonica</i>     | Japanese Pagodatree<br>/Scholar-tree |
| <i>Ulmus parvifolia</i>     | Chinese elm                          |

**SHRUBS**

|                                  |                                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Acanthopanax sieboldianus</i> | Fiveleaf aralia                  |
| <i>Bamboo spp</i>                | Bamboo                           |
| <i>Berberis thunbergii</i>       | Japanese barberry                |
| <i>Deutzia spp</i>               | Deutzia                          |
| <i>Elaeagnus umbellata</i>       | Autumn olive                     |
| <i>Euonymus alatus</i>           | Winged euonymus<br>/Burning bush |
| <i>Ilex crenata</i>              | Bush holly                       |
| <i>Ligustrum spp.</i>            | Privet                           |
| <i>Lonicera spp.</i>             | Bush honeysuckles                |
| <i>Rhodotypos scandens</i>       | Jetbead                          |
| <i>Rubus phoenicolasius</i>      | Wineberry                        |
| <i>Viburnum dilatatum</i>        | Linden viburnum                  |
| <i>Viburnum plicatum</i>         | Doublefile viburnum              |

**VINES**

|                                    |                                            |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <i>Akebia quinata</i>              | Fiveleaf akebia                            |
| <i>Ampelopsis brevipedunculata</i> | Porcelain berry                            |
| <i>Celastrus orbiculatus</i>       | Asiatic bittersweet                        |
| <i>Clematis terniflora</i>         | Japanese clematis                          |
| <i>Euonymus fortunei</i>           | Creeping Euonymus<br>/Wintercreeper        |
| <i>Hedera helix</i>                | English ivy                                |
| <i>Humulus japonicus</i>           | Japanese hop (annual)                      |
| <i>Lonicera japonica</i>           | Japanese honeysuckle                       |
| <i>Polygonum perfoliatum</i>       | Devil's tear thumb /Mile-a-minute (annual) |
| <i>Vinca minor</i>                 | Periwinkle                                 |
| <i>Wisteria sinensis</i>           | Wisteria                                   |

**HERBS**

|                               |                     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Alliaria petiolata</i>     | Garlic mustard      |
| <i>Arthraxon hispidus</i>     | Purpleheart grass   |
| <i>Hemerocallis fulva</i>     | Day lily            |
| <i>Lespedeza cuneata</i>      | Bush clovers        |
| <i>Lythrum salicaria</i>      | Purple loosestrife  |
| <i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>    | Miscanthus grass    |
| <i>Microstegium vimineum</i>  | Japanese stiltgrass |
| <i>Pachysandra terminalis</i> | Pachysandra         |
| <i>Perilla frutescens</i>     | Beefstake plant     |
| <i>Polygonum cuspidatum</i>   | Japanese knotweed   |
| <i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>     | Lesser celandine    |