

Loss of Trees is a Tragedy

By Mount Vernon District Supervisor Dan Storck

It hurts, it's wrong and it must change. You may have seen the start of construction and removal of large, established trees at the former Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church at 6510 Fort Hunt Road. The Church closed its doors on May 2021, after serving the Mount Vernon community for 67 years, and the site was subsequently sold to Evergreen Homes. The proceeds from the sale of the church were donated to many local charities that serve the Mount Vernon community.

Unfortunately, **this project is by-right per the zoning ordinance**, with the developer building 7 homes on 7 parcels zoned R-4. **The developer does not need approval from the County to build these homes, nor does the County have the legal right to stop or restrict that property's development.** The County does review the site plans for the project to ensure that the development meets County, state, and federal regulations. However, these regulations are not enough to protect our trees, stormwater management and older communities. You can learn more about the zoning ordinance and what is permissible in an R4 district here:

<https://online.encodeplus.com/regs/fairfaxcounty-va/doc-viewer.aspx?secid=490#secid-490>

Most communities in Mount Vernon District are established. We are continuing to see more by-right re-development as people want to move here and undeveloped land is generally no longer available. After seeing the results of other projects and hearing from many of you, in January I established an Infill Development Task Force composed of community leaders, builders, State Delegate Paul Krizek and State Senator Scott Surovell, with technical support from County Staff, to review our processes, options and needed changes. You can find out more information about the Task Force here: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mountvernon/infill-development-task-force-idtf>

Before the development of this site began in mid-April, the developer held a meeting with adjacent property owners on March 30 to review the plans and answer community questions. During the meeting, the developer advised that they would be replanting 8-10 trees per lot, per their approved "Tree Preservation Plan". This meeting recording is available to view on the Infill Development Task Force website noted above.

As a long time Mount Vernon resident, tree hugger, nature lover, outdoor enthusiast and the Chair of the County's Environmental Committee, I absolutely understand that we must find a way to preserve our trees and the character of our established communities regardless of the development. And, if it were simple, my predecessor and I would have found a way to address it a long time ago, as we know the impacts it has and has had on our neighborhoods for decades. I will continue to work with you to address these challenges. To learn more, I encourage you to participate in the IDTF meetings, which are open to the public.