NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL – DISTRICT ONE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

June 6, 2023, Ellicott City, Maryland

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Howard County Councilmember Liz Walsh (D1) Introduces Strengthened Forest Protection Legislation at June 5th Legislative Meeting.

Councilmember Liz Walsh introduced CB30-2023 at the Legislative Meeting held on June 5th , 2023. CB30 provides the initial steps of bringing the County into compliance with SB 526 (Elfreth, et.al.) and HB 723 (Love, et.al.), which was signed into law by Governor Moore. The state law, *Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention, Chapter 541*, will take effect in 2 stages. CB30-2023 will address the provisions that take effect July 1, 2023. We will follow up with additional legislation once the 2nd stage of the state bill goes into effect in 2024.

CB30-2023 will:

- **Increase** the ratio for the watershed projects to 1:1. The reforestation ratio in watershed projects is currently ½:1.
- States that the purpose of the Forest Conservation Act is to **increase** forest areas (currently, it just maintains forests).
- Amend the definition of a forest to match new State law: area of 1 square acre and at least 120 feet in width (up from 10,000 square feet and at least 35 feet in width).
- Limit forest mitigation banking to only meet up to 50% of reforestation/afforestation obligations (currently there is no limit).

“I would like to thank the Maryland General Assembly, Governor Moore, and the lead sponsors of the state legislation, Senator Sarah Elfreth and Delegate Sara Love, for consistently pushing the State of Maryland further into not only protecting existing forests, but also ensuring that we expand our forest for the coming generations. CB30-2023 is in direct response to their “call to action”, and we hope to see Howard County become the first local government to implement Stage 1 of this law. Time is of the essence”, said Councilperson Walsh.

CB30-2023 will have a public hearing on June 20th, 2023, at 7:00pm and be voted on for final passage at the Howard County Council Legislative Session on July 1st , 2023, at 7:00pm. We encourage residents to sign up to testify in support of the legislation as well as email the Howard County Council at councilmail@howardcountymd.gov.

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