

9 July 2020

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. McKay Jenkins, PhD. I would like to add my voice to the many advocating that you vote yes on Council Bill 20-0545, supporting Natural Resources Forest and Tree Conservation.

I am a Baltimore resident; a certified Maryland Master Naturalist; a tenured professor of Environmental Humanities at the University of Delaware; and a committed long-term volunteer in many Baltimore city forests, parks, and community green spaces.

There is an old expression that says the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, and the second-best time is today. For many, many reasons, this is an excellent time for Baltimore to invest in its forests and its people, because the two always go together. I know from deep personal experience that the city has tremendous strength and capacity to repair many decades of environmental and community neglect. This bill could be a big part of that.

It's important to understand the historical reasons that Baltimore, like many American cities, has lost so many trees. As you know, structural racist policies, like redlining practices in community zoning, for example, have meant that many traditionally African-American neighborhoods have been denied the capacity to accumulate both personal and community wealth. This has led to a decline in community capacity to invest in shared spaces, including parks, street trees, community gardens, and open spaces. The decline in tree cover has also contributed to a wide variety of public health and economic problems, including epidemic levels of asthma in our children caused by air pollution; significantly hotter streets because of a lack of shade; increased flooding; a decline in community mental health caused by increased levels of stress and a lack of peaceful places for rest and play; an ongoing decline in personal home values; and a reluctance for small businesses to invest in our communities. A recent [study](#) showed that poor (and historically red-lined) neighborhoods in Baltimore are fully six degrees hotter than the city's average temperature. This represents the second greatest temperature difference in the United States.

It is also important to understand Baltimore's place in the regional, national, and global collapse of ecosystems. For example, the United States has 40 percent fewer birds than it did just 40 years ago, largely due to the national decline in trees and native plants; and estimates are that the world needs to plant 1.5 trillion more trees to effectively combat climate change.

But there is tremendous hope. I do volunteer forest restoration work in community gardens in East Baltimore; in parks like Herring Run and Lake Roland; and in community redevelopment projects like the Stillmeadow Peace Park in West Baltimore, where – along with a community church; local nonprofits like Blue Water Baltimore; and the U.S. Forest Service, I am helping coordinate a 10-acre forest restoration project that also seeks to create jobs for local residents, by training Baltimore residents for careers in the growing field of forest management and care.

These projects, among many others going on in the city, show how much energy there is for restoring Baltimore's neighborhoods through caring for its trees. I hope you will support this bill. I would be happy to be part of this ongoing conversation.

Sincerely,

  
McKay Jenkins

Baltimore, MD

