



Town of Garrett Park

Incorporated 1898

February 26, 2024

Dear Delegates:

I write in my personal capacity as Mayor of the Town of Garrett Park, Maryland, to support the 2024 Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act (HB979/SB915). In 1977, the Town made itself, by law, into an arboretum. To the best of our knowledge, no other town has made itself into an arboretum.

We are extremely proud of our Town tree canopy and our diverse variety of specimens as well as our nearly 50 years of work as a Town to maintain our Arboretum. Our Town ordinances specifically incorporate protections for trees and shrubs on Town property. We have an active Arboretum Committee to advise the Town Council, Mayor, and town administration on matters relating to Town trees. We employ a Town Arborist to provide expert guidance and undertake or direct our Arboretum-related efforts.

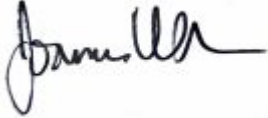
In 2019, the Town Council approved a professionally developed Comprehensive Arboretum Plan to guide future management of our Arboretum. Our consultants developed a comprehensive database of Town trees, available online to our residents and the general public, which we regularly update. We engage in Town tree-planting efforts twice annually to ensure our Arboretum remains resilient and vibrant. As a Town, we have dedicated significant resources to the planting, protection, maintenance, and replacement of trees planted in the Town right-of-way as well as Town public spaces. Our Arboretum provides not only significant aesthetic and recreational benefits to our residents and visitors, but also combats climate change and storm-related stormwater and siltation runoff, to name but a few critical ecosystem services.

In recent years, we have had to dedicate an increasing percentage of our Arboretum-related budgetary expenditures to the control and removal of non-native invasive plants on Town rights-of-way and other public property that threaten the health of our Arboretum plantings, including but not limited to bamboo, Japanese honeysuckle, English ivy, porcelain berry, and Japanese knotweed. It is clear that many if not most of these plants spread from residential plantings. None of these plants are currently prohibited for sale by Maryland commercial nurseries as Tier 1 invasive plants. As a general estimate of Town funds expended on invasive removal efforts just over the two most recent fiscal years, we have spent about \$48,000 (not including salary/benefits costs of Town employees assisting in removal efforts) and anticipate having to continue to expend Town funds on invasive control in the future to protect our Arboretum.

A significantly strengthened legal regime such as the 2024 Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act to expand the State's program for prohibiting non-native invasive plants will significantly benefit the Town of Garrett Park's interests in conserving our Arboretum (and our fiscal resources) for our residents and the general public to enjoy now and into the future. I urge you to support this Act and to work to enact it into law this legislative session.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joanna Welch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joanna" being more prominent than the last name "Welch".

Joanna Welch
Mayor, Town of Garrett Park