



House Bill 723 – Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention

Position: Support with Amendments

Maryland REALTORS® supports efforts to conserve forest land in the state and to provide additional options for developers to meet their forest retention requirements. However, given the severe housing shortage in Maryland, those efforts must also be balanced against the need for additional housing and housing affordability.

In order to protect both of those goals, Maryland must maintain a robust off-site forest banking program. This is particularly true for areas designated for higher-density development, like those near transit areas and in priority funding districts. If off-site forest banking is not readily available or is severely restricted, housing developers will be subject to higher in lieu fee payments, which will raise the costs for any homes that result. We also have concerns that the increased mitigation ratios for forest clearing will have a similar impact on housing affordability.

Finally, REALTORS® recommend that projects within the existing development pipeline be grandfathered into any new forest retention requirements. Requiring these changes on developers which have already incurred substantial time and expense in meeting the current requirements should not be faced with changing standards in the middle of their projects.

With the above amendments, Maryland REALTORS® requests support for HB 723.

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