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HOUSE BILL NO. 494

Offered January 10, 2018

Prefiled January 8, 2018

A BILL to amend and reenact § 15.2-961 of the Code of Virginia, relating to development projects; replacement of trees.

Patrons—Hodges and Keam

Referred to Committee on Counties, Cities and Towns

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 15.2-961 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 15.2-961. Replacement of trees during development process in certain localities.**

A. Any locality with a population density of at least 75 persons per square mile or any locality within the Chesapeake Bay watershed may adopt an ordinance providing for the planting and replacement of trees during the development process pursuant to the provisions of this section. Population density shall be based upon the latest population estimates of the Cooper Center for Public Service of the University of Virginia.

B. The ordinance shall require that the site plan for any subdivision or development include the planting or replacement of trees on the site to the extent that, at 20 years, minimum tree canopies or covers will be provided in areas to be designated in the ordinance, as follows:

1. Ten percent tree canopy for a site zoned business, commercial, or industrial;
2. Ten percent tree canopy for a residential site zoned 20 or more units per acre;
3. Fifteen percent tree canopy for a residential site zoned more than 10 but less than 20 units per acre;
4. Twenty percent tree canopy for a residential site zoned 10 units or less per acre; and
5. Ten percent tree canopy for a cemetery as defined in § 54.1-2310, notwithstanding any other provision of this subsection.

However, the City of Williamsburg may require at 10 years the minimum tree canopies or covers set out above.

C. The ordinance shall provide for reasonable provisions for reducing the tree canopy requirements or granting tree cover credit in consideration of the preservation of existing tree cover or for preservation of trees of outstanding age, size or physical characteristics.

D. The ordinance shall provide for reasonable exceptions to or deviations from these requirements to allow for the reasonable development of farm land or other areas devoid of healthy or suitable woody materials, for the preservation of wetlands, or otherwise when the strict application of the requirements would result in unnecessary or unreasonable hardship to the developer. In such instances, the ordinance may provide for a tree canopy bank whereby a portion of a development's tree canopy requirement may be met from off-site planting or replacement of trees at the direction of the locality. The following shall be exempt from the requirements of any tree replacement or planting ordinance promulgated under this section: dedicated school sites, playing fields and other nonwooded recreation areas, and other facilities and uses of a similar nature.

E. The ordinance may designate tree species that cannot be planted to meet minimum tree canopy requirements due to tendencies of such species to (i) negatively impact native plant communities, (ii) cause damage to nearby structures and infrastructure, or (iii) possess inherent physiological traits that cause such trees to structurally fail. All trees to be planted shall meet the specifications of the American Association of Nurserymen. The planting of trees shall be done in accordance with either the standardized landscape specifications jointly adopted by the Virginia Nurserymen's Association, the Virginia Society of Landscape Designers and the Virginia Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, or the road and bridge specifications of the Virginia Department of Transportation.

F. Existing trees which are to be preserved may be included to meet all or part of the canopy requirements, and may include wooded preserves, if the site plan identifies such trees and the trees meet standards of desirability and life-year expectancy which the locality may establish.

G. For purposes of this section:

"Tree canopy" or "tree cover" includes all areas of coverage by plant material exceeding five feet in height, and the extent of planted tree canopy at 10 or 20 years maturity. Planted canopy at 10 or 20 years maturity shall be based on published reference texts generally accepted by landscape architects, nurserymen, and arborists in the community, and the texts shall be specified in the ordinance.

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59 H. Penalties for violations of ordinances adopted pursuant to this section shall be the same as those
60 applicable to violations of zoning ordinances of the locality.

61 I. In no event shall any local tree replacement or planting ordinance adopted pursuant to this section
62 exceed the requirements set forth herein.

63 J. Nothing in this section shall invalidate any local ordinance adopted pursuant to the provisions of
64 this section prior to July 1, 1990, which imposes standards for tree replacement or planting during the
65 development process.

66 K. Nothing in this section shall invalidate any local ordinance adopted by the City of Williamsburg
67 that imposes standards for 10-year-minimum tree cover replacement or planting during the development
68 process.

69 L. Nothing in this section shall invalidate any local ordinance adopted pursuant to the provisions of
70 this section after July 1, 1990, which imposes standards for 20-year-minimum tree cover replacement or
71 planting during the development process.