

Submitted by Robin L Bergman, Town Meeting Member, Precinct 12

As the founder and director of [Save Arlington Wildlife](#) (SAW), I am writing in support of warrant article 23, which would extend existing protections for trees to those on private property. As part of its mission, SAW educates the public about the critical role mature trees and other green spaces serve as wildlife habitat for an array of species. Such trees are especially vital in urbanized communities like Arlington where they are scarcer and so more valuable to wildlife. Considering a large bulk of our trees are in fact located on private property, we need more local laws to protect them.

Eastern Screech Owls, Barred Owls, American Kestrels, all local species of woodpeckers (downy, hairy, red-bellied, pileated, northern flickers), nuthatches, chickadees, titmice, wintering/hibernating bats, all species of squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, opossums, even fishers--all these species (which are all confirmed Arlington residents) nest inside cavities that only older trees can provide. Additionally, while larger raptor species such as Great Horned Owls, Red-tailed Hawks, and Cooper's Hawks do not nest inside cavities, they do breed and incubate eggs and young in built nests constructed in between the branches of taller, mature trees. This isn't even accounting for the insect life that resides in trees. When we take down mature trees, these species are evicted from the habitat with limited options in our highly developed community. Often trees are taken down during spring migration and nesting seasons, leading to the deaths of nestling chicks and baby animals, and even at times their parents.

It can take years--if not often decades--for a tree to mature into adequate wildlife habitat for these species. So the planting of sapling trees cannot compensate for these losses--especially considering global warming and attendant drought or flooding conditions is making it harder for young trees to even make it to maturity (In both summer/fall of 2022 and 2024, the area experienced record droughts while in the summer of 2023 in experience record precipitation). This isn't even considering that mature trees are far superior as carbon sinks. Cutting down trees leads to an increase in emissions that again, would take years if not decades to offset from planting sapling trees. We don't have that kind of time at our disposal to avoid catastrophic climate change and to preserve biodiversity in the midst of a great mass extinction event.

We are already experiencing an escalating diminishment of mature tree stock in our town. This has been exacerbated by global warming and the increasing frequency of severe weather events associated with it, such as microbursts. For instance, the 2012 microburst in Arlington, led to the destruction of over 100 trees in our town, most of them being mature trees. There will no doubt be more microbursts as Arlington is prone to them with the increased temperatures during the summer season. Trees offer shade and dampen noise and light pollution--as well as help contribute to cooler microclimates--something hedges and saplings cannot offer in a meaningful way in the interim.

For all of these reasons, I hope Town Meeting will vote favorably on Article 23.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura Kiesel  
Founder and Director, Save Arlington Wildlife