**DC Committee on Transportation and the Environment**

**Hearing on the Tree Canopy Protection Amendment Act of 2015**

**October 2**

**By Mary Beth Ray**

Chairperson Cheh and fellow members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment,

I am Mary Beth Ray, ANC Commissioner for 3F, which includes most of Forest Hills and Soapstone Valley Park, and a large part of Rock Creek Park. I am also President of the Board of Directors of Van Ness Main Streets, Inc., the successor to the Van Ness Vision Committee. Today I am testifying as a resident in support of this legislation.

Saving trees and beautifying our streetscape are priorities to our ANC, our Main Street vision, our neighborhood and our community. In addition to today’s Act, I ask that you consider strengthening today’s legislation by addressing the following points:

1. **Enforcement Mechanism:** The Tree and Slope Overlay zoning in Forest Hills provides our extraordinary tree canopy with special protection, yet due to a lack of enforcement, our trees are still often in danger. I receive calls several times per month from constituents who are concerned that neighbors or their contractors are improperly removing healthy, large-growth trees. Some of the work occurs on weekends, or too late in the weekday for City offices to be contacted. And frankly, it’s not always clear whom to call to report the destruction, and what can be done to stop it. Legislation should address enforcement, and define a clear method for neighbors to alert officials to inappropriate tree removal before it’s too late.
2. **Roots:** The tree canopy is only as good as the health of the roots, which cannot survive in unhealthy soil. Our location in the Rock Creek watershed means that our trees are especially vulnerable to stormwater damage and erosion. Our ‘concrete canyon’ along Connecticut Avenue which bears the weight of 37,000 cars per day, plus vast amounts of underground infrastructure including the Metro, DC Water pipes, PEPCO and communications cabling, presents even more challenges to healthy tree growth. Legislation should address not only tree protection, but healthy structured soil to allow roots an opportunity to grow and thrive, thus bolstering a healthy tree canopy. DDOT’s guidelines for structured soil in tree boxes (“Sustainable DC Plan” and “Greening DC Streets” see <http://ddot.dc.gov/GreenInfrastructure>) should be mandated and enforced.
3. **Communication and Engagement:** Residents need to be better informed about the value of a tree’s cooling effects, cutting energy bills, stormwater runoff and air pollution, as well as serving our larger ecosystem. They need to know who is responsible for the care and watering of trees, how they can help care for our trees, and whom to call if they believe abuse or neglect is occurring. We need a system in place to respond early, easily and quickly. Public education and engagement are key, perhaps working in tandem with Casey Trees.
4. **Street Trees in Public Space:** In Van Ness, like other designated areas of our city, we have Clean Teams in place to help with litter removal and pull weeds and mulch. These organizations often have access to water trucks, but no access to water. Legislation should address a way to make water available to the Clean Teams so that watering street trees becomes part of their routine. For example, Van Ness Main Streets has reached out to University of the District of Columbia to make water from their green roof and cistern available to our Clean Team to water street trees along the Connecticut corridor at Van Ness.
5. **Coordinating Council:** As my colleague and neighbor David Bardin has testified, numerous organizations are often involved in the life of a tree, and I support the formation of a coordinating council to ensure more efficient and effective citywide planting programs. This council should include representatives of relevant stakeholders such as citizens, the Urban Forestry Administration, National Park Service, Rock Creek Conservancy, and perhaps even utilities such as PEPCO so we can foster a closer connection between those groups often doing the pruning, with those who care passionately about preserving our trees. This council could play a key role in further defining enforcement, communication and community engagement.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Sincerely,

Mary Beth Ray

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