MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PARKS
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

25 January 2021

Ms. Amy Lindsey
Area 3 Division
M-NCPPC
8787 Georgia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Re: Tree Removal Variance for North Branch Hiker-Biker Trail
Pre-Forest Conservation Plan

Dear Ms. Lindsey,

The Park Development Division of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission respectfully requests a variance from Section 22A-21 of the Montgomery County Code for 55 trees having a diameter at breast height (DBH) of greater than 30" or within 75% of the County Champion. This request is being made as part of the plans to build the North Branch Hiker-Biker Trail.

The North Branch Hiker-Biker trail is proposed to be located within both the Rock Creek Regional Park and the North Branch Stream Valley Park Unit 4. The trail is proposed to be approximately 2.2 miles in length. The North Branch Trail is one segment of a continuous regional park trail system that would extend from the District of Columbia to Olney. The hiker-biker trail system through Lake Frank and the North Branch of Rock Creek has been recommended in multiple master plans including the 1978 Master Plan of Bikeways, the 2005 Olney Master Plan, the 1985 and 2004 Upper Rock Creek Area Master Plan, the 1998 and 2008 Countywide Park Trails Plan, the 2000 Rock Creek Regional Park Master Plan, and the 2008 Upper Rock Creek Trail Corridor Plan.

The trail is being designed to be located along previously disturbed areas. Beginning at the southern end of the trail, the connection from the Lakeside Trail will utilized the road between two abandoned parking lots. The road was closed to public vehicular access in the 1980's. The road will be narrowed to a width of 10 feet and the area of removed pavement will be restored. The next section of trail moving north is along a natural surface trail. Steep slopes exist on either side of the trail. Next, the trail will utilize a WSSC access road. Because these cleared areas exist, it was determined that they should be utilized instead of clearing undisturbed areas. The area of the trail near the ICC is located in areas previously impacted by the construction of the highway. A short segment then connects this section to the proposed Preserve at Rock Creek developer trail. Where possible, the trail is located along an old roadbed and people's choice trails.

This is a linear project. The trail corridor contains a total of one (1) Champion Tree and 15 trees within 75% of a Champion Tree. Every effort was made to configure the trail to minimize tree loss and disturbance while still providing a safe and accessible trail. The Final Forest Conservation Plan (FCP) proposes to impact 55 variance trees and of those trees, 14 (in **bold)** are proposed for removal. The following table provides details of the 55 trees.

Variance Trees Impacts

ID	Common Name	Scientific Name	DBH	%CRZ Impacted	Condition	Status
13	Red Oak	*Quercus rubra*	32	20	Poor	Save
54	Korean Pine	*Pinus koraiensis*	35	30	Excellent	Save
55	Korean Pine	*Pinus koraiensis*	31	10	Excellent	Save
57	Red Oak	*Quercus rubra*	36	30	Excellent	Save
61	Southern Red Oak	*Quercus falcata*	38	25	Good	Save
70	Mockernut Hickory	*Carya tomentosa*	27	15	Excellent	Save
72	Pignut Hickory	*Carya glabra*	29	10	Excellent	Save
76	Red Oak	*Quercus rubra*	35	40	Good	Save
78	Red Oak	*Quercus rubra*	37	12	Good	Save
87	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	44	20	Fair	Save
88	Red Oak	*Quercus rubra*	33	10	Good	Save
110	Red Oak	*Quercus rubra*	30	3	Good	Save
111	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	38	20	Good	Save
122	**Sycamore**	***Platanus occidentalis***	**39**	**38**	**Fair**	**Remove***
125	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	33	24	Good	Save
129	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	37	5	Good	Save
132	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	35	27	Fair	Save
133	Red Oak	*Quercus rubra*	31	22	Excellent	Save
141	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	32	34	Fair	Save
161	**Red Oak**	***Quercus rubra***	**31**	**27**	**Poor**	**Remove**
162	Red Oak	*Quercus rubra*	41	13	Fair	Save
181	Red Oak	*Quercus rubra*	97	12	Good	Save
201	**Tulip Poplar**	***Liriodendron tulipifera***	**30**	**40**	**Good**	**Remove***
213	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	35	10	Good	Save
219	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	35	8	Good	Save
221	Sycamore	*Platanus occidentalis*	33	5	Fair	Save
224	Sycamore	*Platanus occidentalis*	40	5	Fair	Save
225	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	38	21	Fair	Save
226	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	32	18	Good	Save
228	**White Oak**	***Quercus alba***	**31**	**70**	**Fair**	**Remove**
242	**Green Ash**	***Fraxinus pennsylvanica***	**35**	**34**	**Fair**	**Remove**
260	**Tulip Poplar**	***Liriodendron tulipifera***	**39**	**40**	**Good**	**Remove***
261	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	33	30	Good	Save
274	Silver Maple	*Acer saccharinum*	32	25	Fair	Save
278	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	31	30	Fair	Save
284	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	30	10	Fair	Save
367	Red maple	*Acer rubrum*	42	2	Poor	Save
369	**Mockernut Hickory**	***Carya tomentosa***	**25**	**5**	**Mostly Dead**	**Remove**
370	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	47	36	Good	Save
372	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	30	10	Good	Save
375	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	34	12	Good	Save
380	Sycamore	*Platanus occidentalis*	21	25	Good	Save
385	**Green Ash**	***Fraxinus pennsylvanica***	**33**	**30**	**Good**	**Remove**
391	**Sycamore**	***Platanus occidentalis***	**39**	**42**	**Excellent**	**Remove***
392	**Sycamore**	***Platanus occidentalis***	**45**	**33**	**Fair**	**Remove***
407	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	33	10	Good	Save
409	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	39	30	Good	Save
410	**Shingle Oak**	***Quercus imbricaria***	**31**	**48**	**Poor**	**Remove**
411	**Sycamore**	***Platanus occidentalis***	**37**	**38**	**Poor**	**Remove**
416	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	40	31	Good	Save
417	**Sycamore**	***Platanus occidentalis***	**62**	**100**	**Poor**	**Remove**
420	White Oak	*Quercus alba*	37	21	Fair	Save
442	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	42	4	Good	Save
R565	Tulip Poplar	*Liriodendron tulipifera*	36	15	Good	Save
L	**Red Maple**	***Acer rubrum***	**36**	**17**	**Poor**	**Remove**

*Final decision on removal to be made at the time of construction.

This variance would not confer any special privileges. A number of techniques will be utilized to minimize impact to these trees. In areas where the grade will be lowered near significant trees, an air spade will be used to determine the exact location of the existing roots. If possible, the major roots will be left intact and protected by the use of fabric. If it is necessary to remove the roots, the roots will be cut using a hand saw. In areas where the elevation is increased, root aeration matting will be placed between the ground and the fill. In addition, the trees will be pruned to remove any dead or damaged limbs.

The following trees are proposed for removal:

Tree ID #122 will have 38% of its Critical Root Zone (CRZ) impacted. The tree is in fair condition and is leaning toward the future trail. The phototropic lean is not a hazard for the trail at this time, however it could be if significant structural damage to the root zone occurs. If at the time of construction, it is determined that there is minimal root disturbance and the tree is not a hazard, it will be saved with the approval of the Forest Conservation Inspector.

Tree ID #161 will have 27% CRZ impact and the tree is in poor condition and would pose a safety hazard to the trail users.

Tree ID #201 will have 40% CRZ impact. Tulip poplars have poor construction tolerance. If at the time of construction, it is determined that there is minimal root disturbance and the tree is not a hazard, it will be saved with the approval of the Forest Conservation Inspector.

Tree ID #228 will have 60% CRZ impact. The trail is located on a steep slope that will need to be graded to provide trail stabilization.

Tree ID #242 will have 34% CRZ impact. This is a green ash that is in fair condition and should be removed as part of the Commission's efforts to combat Emerald Ash Borer.

Tree ID #260 will have 40% CRZ impact. The tree is recommended for removal but is in good condition. It is located 14 feet upslope of the trail. If at the time of construction, it is determined that there is minimal root disturbance, it will be saved with the approval of the Forest Conservation Inspector.

Tree ID #369, although only having a 5% CRZ impact, is mostly dead and recommended to be removed to eliminate a potential hazard to trail users.

Tree ID #385 will have no CRZ impact. This is a green ash that is in fair condition and should be removed as part of the Commission's efforts to combat Emerald Ash Borer.

Tree ID #391 and 392 will have respectively 42% and 33% CRZ impact. These trees are located along the connector to Meadowside Lane. To have the trail accessible, it was necessary to have this section of trail located on fill. Root aeration matting will be used to protect the tree roots. If at the time of construction, it is determined that there is minimal root disturbance and the trees are in good health, they will be saved with the approval of the Forest Conservation Inspector.

Trees ID #410 and 411 will have respectively 48% and 38% CRZ impact. These trees are located next to the disturbed area of construction for the ICC. It was determined that since these trees were previously impacted the alignment next to them was preferable to avoiding them and having to go through an existing wetland.

Tree ID #417 will have a 100% CRZ impact. The trail could not be moved because it needed to be located on a shelf with a steep slope above and a wetland below.

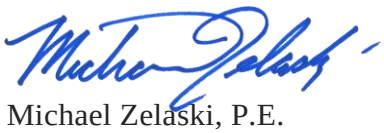
Tree ID #L is a red maple in poor condition and should be removed to eliminate a potential hazard to trail users.

To mitigate for the removal of trees #122, 161, 201, 228, 242, 260, 369, 385, 391, 392, 410, 411, 417, and L, the final forest conservation plan will include planting of 54 trees that are 3-inch caliper. A total of 513 inches of tree DBH are being removed and replaced at a 25 percent amount. Therefore, an equivalent of 128 inches of tree caliper needs to be replanted.

Not impacting these trees would cause an unwarranted hardship because of the need to provide the facilities that are shown in the Facility Plan. This trail is recommended in numerous planning documents and is an important link in the Countywide Trail System. It is anticipated to be a heavily used trail.

If you have any other questions or need additional information, please contact me at 301-495-2488 or via email at michael.zelaski@montgomeryparks.org.

Sincerely,



Michael Zelaski, P.E.
Project Manager
M-NCPPC Park Development Division