To: Arundel Rivers Federation
From: Steve Raabe, President
        OpinionWorks LLC
Date: October 6, 2019
Subject: Anne Arundel County Poll on the Forest Conservation Act

According to our new poll of 539 Anne Arundel County registered voters, there is overwhelming voter support for the proposed Anne Arundel County Forest Conservation Act. More than four out of five voters (81%) favor legislation “which would require developers to replant more trees, or if they don’t want to replant the trees to pay a higher fee so the County can replant them.” Almost two-thirds (63%) of the county’s voters support this proposal strongly. Meanwhile, only about one voter in ten (9%) opposes the legislation.

Support for County Forest Conservation Act

*9% Oppose*

- 63% Favor
- 18% Somewhat favor
- 5% Strongly favor
- 5% Somewhat oppose
- 10% Neutral/Not sure

*Numbers may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.

Current law allows a developer to remove 68 acres of a 100-acre forest without replacing a single tree. When a developer cuts down more than the allotted “free clearing” amount, they are only required to replant a quarter of the trees beyond that threshold. If they don’t want to replant trees, developers can pay a fee of 40 cents per square foot of tree cover, an amount that does not cover the cost of replanting trees.

Now there is a proposal before the Anne Arundel County Council called the Forest Conservation Act, which would require developers to replant more trees, or if they don’t want to replant the trees to pay a higher fee so the County can replant them. In light of this information, would you (rotate low to high and high to low): [strongly favor, somewhat favor, are neutral, somewhat oppose, (or) strongly oppose] the Anne Arundel County Forest Conservation Act?

Support for the concept of this bill can almost be described as a consensus. In one of the poll’s more significant findings, despite today’s hyper-partisan atmosphere nationally, support for the forest conservation legislation reaches across all party lines and is just as strong among Republicans as it is among Democrats or Independents, with 84% of Republicans in support of this proposal, compared to only 11% opposed. The table on the following page shows this bipartisan support.
Support is strong across all seven County Council districts, never dropping below 74% in any district. Regardless of district, support for this legislation is slightly strongly among more active voters, reaching a level of 83% among those who actually voted in the 2018 general election.

In a follow-up question, voters were given additional details about the bill. They were told, “It would raise the conservation thresholds for projects on sites 2 acres or larger, double the tree replacement rate, and increase the fee from 40 cents to $2.50 per square foot of tree cover.” When these additional details are described, support remains strong at three-quarters (76%) of voters, with a 52% strongly in favor. Opposition remains very low at 8%.

**Support for County Forest Conservation Act**
*After Providing Additional Details about the Bill*

Here are a few more facts about the Forest Conservation Act. It would raise the conservation thresholds for projects on sites 2 acres or larger, double the tree replacement rate, and increase the fee from 40 cents to $2.50 per square foot of tree cover. Knowing those facts, would you [rotate low to high and high to low]: [strongly favor, somewhat favor, are neutral, somewhat oppose, (or) strongly oppose] the Anne Arundel County Forest Conservation Act?
Several other findings in the poll help to explain this very high level of support for the legislation.

- More than nine out of ten voters (91%) say having trees close to where they live matters to them. Almost six in ten (58%) say it matters “a lot” to them.

![Having Trees Close to Where You Live](image)

- Meanwhile, six out of ten voters (60%) say they have noticed a loss in forest cover in the County, with 27% seeing “much less forest” and 33% “somewhat less.” This sense of loss is particularly acute in Council District 3 (67%), District 4 (62%), District 5 (75%), and District 6 (73%).

![Noticed Changes in Forest Cover](image)

- A majority of 53% say the pace of growth and development in Anne Arundel County is too fast, with 28% saying growth is a little too fast and 25% saying it is much too fast. By contrast, 35% say the pace of growth is “about right,” and 9% say it is too slow. The remainder are not sure.

![Pace of Growth and Development](image)
Key Voter Attitudes

Four other questions tested voters’ general attitudes about trees, and the responsibility they feel people who develop land have to protect or replace those trees. In all four cases, voters expressed a strong mandate to protect trees, and expect developers to replant or pay the full cost.

- Eighty-four percent (84%) of County voters agree with the statement “When developers cut down trees, they should be required to pay the full cost needed to replant those trees.” More than six voters in ten (61%) strongly agree with that statement, while only 5% disagree.

- Seventy-eight percent (78%) agree, and 57% strongly agree, with the statement, “For too long, developers in Anne Arundel County have been allowed to get away with whatever they want to do. We need to do a better job protecting forested area.” Only 5% disagree with that statement.

- More than three-quarters (77%) of voters agree with the principle that, “Every tree that is taken down when land is developed should be replanted.” About half (49%) of voters strongly agree with this idea, while only 14% disagree with it.

- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of voters believe that “Trees increase your property value.”

Conclusions

There is a compelling level of voter support for legislation to strengthen the forest conservation law in Anne Arundel County. This support crosses all party lines, and exists in all seven County Council Districts. Moreover, most voters say they favor the legislation strongly.

This near consensus among voters is driven by several factors. A large majority of voters have observed a loss of trees in the County, and an overwhelming number say it “matters” to them to have trees close to where they live. Voters are strongly convinced that developers need to do more to protect forested areas, including replanting every tree that is taken down and paying the full cost of replanting trees.
The full, unedited questionnaire is available. Details of how the poll was conducted follow.

**How This Poll was Conducted**

A total of 539 interviews were conducted countywide September 30-October 4, 2019 among randomly selected Anne Arundel County registered voters. Live interviewers reached voters on both wireless and landline telephones, and an additional voter sample group were given the option of responding online to ensure the poll best represented all segments of the electorate. Sampling targets were adhered to throughout the interviewing process to ensure that the sample represented the countywide electorate geographically, by political party, and for key demographic indicators such as gender, age, and race or ethnicity. Following interviewing, statistical weights were applied to ensure the sample most closely mirrored the characteristics of the County’s electorate. This poll produces a margin of sampling error no greater than ±4.2% at the 95% confidence level, meaning that at least 19 times out of 20 the actual results would differ by no more than that margin if every registered voter in the County had been interviewed.

**Brief Background on OpinionWorks**

Annapolis-based OpinionWorks conducts frequent opinion studies at the state and local level across the country. Since 2007 we have been the polling organization for *The Baltimore Sun* newspaper in Maryland, and have polled for numerous other media and advocates throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. We are engaged by state and local government agencies from Delaware to Oregon to assess public needs and preferences. Our recently released Citizen Stewardship Indicator, conducted for the Chesapeake Bay Program, is a model nationally for measuring behavior adoption and potential behavior change on behalf of water restoration. We measure health attitudes and practices for public health departments, assess alumni engagement and prospective student expectations for colleges and universities, evaluate donor and volunteer relationships for non-profit organizations, and have a growing body of work in Latin America.