



# Chesterbrook Woods Citizens Association

## *Environmental Committee* *Tree Canopy Conservation Advisory*

Dear Neighbor,

When you think of Chesterbrook Woods, what comes to mind? Perhaps it's our convenient location, great schools, beautiful towering trees and friendly neighbors who make this place “home.” Unfortunately, one of the things that makes our neighborhood special – our lovely tree canopy – is in peril. The towering oaks, majestic maples and stately spruces that add value both aesthetic and economic, are increasingly ending up as casualties of a home building boom.

### **What is happening?**

In the last few months, you have probably noticed several very large homes constructed on lots where builders have bulldozed or chain sawed virtually every large tree on the lot. No corner of the neighborhood remains untouched by this deforestation. The list of devastated properties is dishearteningly long and, if the current pace of deforestation goes unchecked, it won't be long before our beloved Chesterbrook Woods becomes known as “Chesterbrook Meadows.”

### **Why is this happening?**

Obviously, we live in a desirable area. Builders are making a lot of money buying lots with older homes on them, tearing down the existing homes and building much larger homes on those properties. The most expedient way to get a large house built quickly is to clear the entire lot and, unfortunately, most builders view trees merely as obstacles to their trucks, dumpsters, etc. As a result, even the healthiest, most majestic specimens are being taken down, leaving beautiful, heavily treed lots empty and out of character with their surroundings.

### **Is it legal? Aren't there state/county regulations?**

Unfortunately, county and state regulations are weak and enforcement is virtually non-existent and difficult. Inspections of the tree canopy compliance plans --- provided by the builder and their hired “arborists” -- are largely rubber stamped with little review and generally no on-site inspection. Even where vigilant CW residents have sounded the alarm to the county of apparent violations and demanded on-site inspections—saving a few trees marked for destruction—nothing could be done to save the majority of the trees.

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### **What, if anything, is the CWCA doing about it?**

Last year, after hearing from many neighbors increasingly alarmed at the rate of deforestation taking place in CW, the Board formed an Environmental Committee. As a first step, the Committee worked with an expert in land and soil issues to establish responsible guidelines for the protection of trees and soil on land that is being developed. These guidelines were incorporated into a voluntary Contractor Pledge that we have begun asking contractors to sign, committing them to adhere to the described practices. Contractors who sign the Pledge will be placed onto a favored Contractors list; those who do not, will not. (A list of signatories to the Contractor's' Pledge will be posted on the CWCA website soon.) In addition, the Committee is currently (i) exploring ways to strengthen enforcement of existing tree canopy regulations with the county and state; (ii) exploring the use of conservation easements which can be placed by residents on their land, on a voluntary basis, to limit the removal of trees upon a sale of their property; (iii) working with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust and other local organizations regarding other possible conservation strategies; (iv) working to secure a discount with local nurseries and other organizations to help residents purchase new trees or to replace trees lost due to any cause.

### **What Can I Do to Help Save our Trees/Enhance the Tree Canopy?**

Given the unwillingness and/or inability of local governmental officials to restrict the removal of trees on construction sites and the behavior of many spec builders, it is incumbent on us as individuals and as a community to work proactively to enhance the existing tree canopy by planting new trees and to educate ourselves on how to prevent and to discourage irresponsible building practices. The Environmental Committee suggests that you consider the following actions as appropriate to your circumstances:

- Plant new native trees on your property and encourage your neighbors to do so
- If you're thinking of selling soon, ...
  - **Resist the temptation to sell directly to a spec builder.** Spec builders are directly soliciting our older residents who they believe are most likely to sell or move soon. In our experience, it is the spec builders who are most likely to engage in the described tree removal practices. **We are advised by real estate experts that, by selling directly to a spec builder rather than listing the house in the open market, you are likely to get a lower price for your house.**
  - List your house with a Realtor who will work to find buyers who will pay a market price for your house, who intend to live in the neighborhood and who are more likely to share our collective love of our tree canopy.
  - Consider placing a conservation easement or the like on your property limiting tree removal when you sell your house. (Information about the establishment of a conservation easement will be available on the CWCA website soon).
- If you're considering an addition or rebuild, talk with the builders who have signed the Contractors Pledge first and demand that other contractors agree to adhere to responsible land use and soil conservation standards. Talk to neighbors on our resource list who have gone through a rebuild effort AND preserved the trees on their property.
- Notify the Environmental Committee **immediately** if you see a builder's sign placed in a yard ([cwca.environmental@gmail.com](mailto:cwca.environmental@gmail.com)).
- Talk to your neighbors about tree and soil conservation issues.
- **Join the Environmental Committee.**

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The Environmental Committee is working to retain the natural beauty that we all moved to Chesterbrook Woods to enjoy. We are not anti-development and it is not our goal to stop the construction of new homes in our neighborhood or to impose restrictions on the rights of our homeowners. We are for responsible development that reasonably respects the unique character and beauty of our neighborhood and our neighbors. While none of the steps we are taking will entirely stop the destruction we see from certain builders, if we are vigilant and work together we can continue to live in a vibrant community that moves forward with the times, but also one which dutifully respects its history and unique character.

Your comments, questions and assistance are desired and appreciated.

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