

LOCAL LAW NO. “M” FOR 2021

A LOCAL LAW CONCERNING THE CUTTING, REPLACING AND PRESERVATION OF FOREST LANDS BY COUNTY AUTHORITIES

Introduced: 11/8/21

By: Messrs. Perlee, Drake, Grimm, Langdon, Ms. Lockhart, Messrs. Mauriello, Tunny and Ms. Whalen

SECTION 1.

Legislative Intent.

Trees play an essential role in the survival of our planet. Trees mitigate temperature fluctuation and lower air temperatures. Trees prevent soil erosion, regulate the hydrology of soil and groundwater levels and absorb surface water, preventing it from flowing into built up and paved areas that contain pollutants that contaminate our waterways. Trees provide aesthetic comfort to urban landscapes and help delineate and buffer areas of current and future development. Through photosynthesis trees sequester harmful carbon dioxide and release life giving oxygen. Certain species which were once abundant in our County, such as the White Pine and Black Locust, are particularly effective at carbon sequestration. By regulating the exchange of energy and water between earth's surface and atmosphere, trees are our planet's primary defense in the battle against global warming. If the present rate of tree removal and death is not addressed, we will lose our last tree, and with it the planet, in less than 200 years' time. It is the intent of this law to create a replacement protocol related to the cutting of forested lands of one-half acres or more owned by Albany County and to create an Albany County Forest Preserve which shall serve to help ensure the preservation and enhancement of the total amount of forest land within Albany County.

SECTION 2.

Protocol related to the cutting of forest lands owned by Albany County.

No area of forested land of one-half acre or greater owned by the County shall be disturbed and developed unless:

(a) an inventory of trees to be disturbed and /or removed is made and filed with the Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District (“ACSWCD”). The survey will conform with generally accepted standards of professional tree surveying and will comprehensively and accurately indicate the species and size of all trees 4” and greater diameter at breast height; and

(b) the ASCWCD will determine the value of the trees to be removed (“tree replacement value”) using the Basic Formula Method from the *Guide for Plant Appraisal 10th Edition* by the International Society of Arboriculture;

(c) the County Executive shall place, or cause to be placed an amount equal to two times the tree replacement value (“replacement payment”) into a special Forest Replacement Reserve Fund (“Reserve Fund”) established for the purpose of purchasing replacement forest property;

(d) upon confirmation of deposit of the replacement payment, the ASCWCD shall certify compliance with this section and issue an authorization to proceed with disturbance and/or removal.

SECTION 3.

Purposes of the Reserve Fund.

Funds deposited within The Reserve Fund shall be utilized exclusively for the following purposes:

(a) to purchase lands suitable for reforestation to be held in fee simple by the County (b) costs directly associated with planting said purchased lands with tree species known to possess high carbon dioxide sequestration capabilities;

SECTION 4.

Acquisition and Maintenance of Replacement Forest Property.

No more than one year following an authorization to disturb county forest lands, the County Executive shall identify and caused to be purchased real property suitable for replacement forest. Said property shall:

(a) be designated as Albany County Forest Preserve and shall be operated and maintained as natural open space in accordance with New York State General Municipal Law, Section 247;

(b) be no smaller in area than two times the area of the parcel containing the disturbed forest land it replaced;

(b) be suitable for reforestation;

(d) be located in an area of the County otherwise underserved by County facilities;

(e) be located where it can serve as a permanent green buffer to existing or proposed development;

(f) be contiguous or in proximate vicinity to lands designated as County Forest Preserve, if applicable;

(g) be forever kept as forest lands;

(h) be capable of use for nature education programs, nature trails and other County recreation purposes.

SECTION 5.

State Environmental Quality Review Act Compliance.

This County Legislature determines that the adoption of this Local Law constitutes a “Type II action” as said term is defined in the State Environmental Quality Review Act (“SEQRA”), and that no further action with respect to same is required under SEQRA.

SECTION 6.

Severability.

If any section, subsection, sentence, clause, phrase or other portion of this law is, for any reason, declared unconstitutional or invalid, in whole or in part, by any court of competent jurisdiction, such portion shall be deemed severable, and such unconstitutionality or invalidity shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of this law, which remaining portions shall continue in full force and effect.

SECTION 7.

Effective Date.

This local law shall take effect upon filing with the New York Secretary of State.

Referred to Conservation, Sustainability and Green Initiatives and Law Committees – 11/8/21