

Smarter Growth Alliance for Howard County

March 16, 2020

The Honorable Howard County Council
George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, MD 21043

RE: CB11-2020, Bird-friendly building design standards – Support

Dear Council Members:

The Smarter Growth Alliance for Howard County is an alliance of local and state organizations working together to foster healthy, equitable and sustainable communities through smarter development and transportation decisions and improved protections for the county's natural, historic and cultural resources.

We support Council Bill 11-2020 (CB11) to require that new buildings meet bird-friendly design standards as specified in the U.S. Green Building Council LEED pilot credit 55. CB11 is a major step toward a sustainable Howard County, one that will save thousands of birds each year and reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

1. Glass Buildings as Energy Sinks. Howard County is experiencing exponential growth of buildings with extensive glass facades. These majority-glass buildings are an energy sink and erode the energy conservation gains from decades of green building policies through the heat gain from windows and the need for additional air conditioning. If future building is dominated by extensive glass facades, we can only expect increasing energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions for decades.

2. Glass Buildings as Killers of Birds. Up to 1 billion birds die in the U.S. every year from colliding with transparent or reflective building glass (and the number of glass-dominated buildings is growing exponentially). Nearly all species are affected; even the best and brightest birds collide and die. Declining populations of migratory songbirds are significantly attributable to this non-sustainable building construction trend. Birds are both an ecological mainstay and economic driver through pest control and tourism (Maryland receives \$333 million in revenue from bird watching each year). As new large glass buildings are built, such as in Downtown Columbia, we are creating a deathtrap for birds migrating through our community.

*Audubon MD-DC • Audubon Society of Central Maryland • Bicycling Advocates of Howard County
Chesapeake Bay Foundation • Clean Water Action • Coalition for Smarter Growth • Community Ecology Institute
Earth Forum of Howard County • HARP • Horizon Foundation • Howard County Citizens Association
Howard County Conservancy • Howard County Sierra Club • Maryland Conservation Council
Maryland League of Conservation Voters • Maryland Ornithological Society • Patapsco Heritage Greenway
Preservation Maryland • Safe Skies Maryland • Savage Community Association • The People's Voice • Transition Howard County*

Win-Win Solution. Fortunately, both problems are easily solvable. The building standards embodied in this bill would both conserve energy and reduce bird mortality by 90%.

Waiting even one year will see more glass buildings built and more money lost, more greenhouse gas emissions, and more birds dying. The Smarter Growth Alliance for Howard County looks forward to seeing bird-friendly building design become reality and make Howard County more sustainable.

Sincerely,

Safe Skies Maryland

Mark Southerland, Ph.D.
Legislative Director

The Maryland Ornithological Society

Kurt Schwarz
Conservation Chair

Audubon Maryland-DC

David Curson
Director of Bird Conservation

Audubon Central MD

Morgan Lakey
President

Savage Community Association

Susan Garber
Board Chair

Howard County Citizens Association

Stu Kohn
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Howard County Sierra Club

Carolyn Parsa
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Executive Director

Transition Howard County

Margo Duesterhaus
President

Clean Water Action

Emily Ranson
Maryland Program Coordinator

The People's Voice, LLC

Lisa M. Markovitz
President

cc: The Honorable Calvin Ball, County Executive