

## Council Testimony April 6, 2022

Greetings Council Members. My name is Randy Gibson from Ward 3, member of *Climate Action Coffee*, part of *Takoma Park Mobilization*.

The City declared a Climate Emergency in March 2019 and we agree. Tonight, I will share the Good, the Bad and the Actionable, specifically on the subjects of civic activism and public greenspace.

First, the Good: Two things that make Takoma Park great are: 1) A healthy tree canopy and 2) Robust civic activism. Case in point: On Saturday, March 26, more than 20 Takoma Park residents and friends came out to help protect City-owned Dorothy's Woods from invasive plants.

Coordinated by Climate Action Coffee and cleared through Public Works, volunteers removed Kudzu, Garlic Mustard, English Ivy and Japanese Honeysuckle and trash from the slopes of Dorothy's Woods. Joined by CCAN and Friends of Dorothy's Woods, we demonstrated that we care about our public greenspace and this small wooded ecosystem in particular. This is not the first time. For several years, local residents have pulled invasives and picked up trash at this 2 ½ acres site, one of the largest undeveloped sites in the city. Home to nearly 2 dozen native tree species, and an underground stream, Dorothy's Woods deserves our collective protection, care and restoration.

Next, the Bad: Notwithstanding helpfulness from members of Public Works, I would characterize the City's recent approach to Dorothy's Woods as one of risk aversion and neglect. The impact of this approach is to: 1) discourage civic activism, 2) restrict needed conservation efforts, and 3) ignore opportunities to increase accessibility and education. The City attorney's recent recommendation imposes, among other hurdles, an onerous 10-day advance volunteer waiver for conservation activities at Dorothy's Woods. Is this time needed to do background checks?

And lastly, the Actionable: The Council has the clear authority to interpret the covenant for Dorothy's Woods in a way that encourages responsible stewardship and active resident involvement.

Facing a climate emergency requires us to protect our woodlands and public greenspaces. Why shortchange those efforts by discouraging resident involvement? How many of you schedule your family's weekend 10 days out? How many make last minute weekend decisions? Council members, please review your stewardship obligations and consider how healthy trees and robust resident involvement make Takoma Park great. One easy step is to create a same-day volunteer waiver process.

Thank you.

