

Submitter: Harriet Cooke
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure: HB3414

Dear House Rules committee,

I am writing in strong opposition to HB3414, which would allow developers to bypass urban environmental regulations designed to protect trees, wetlands, and floodplains.

These rules have always been important for ecosystem health, but as we advance more deeply into our climate changed reality, these areas are ESSENTIAL for not only "ecological health," but for human health as well. The power of trees to help mitigate extreme heat is unquestionable, with shaded neighborhoods up to 25-30 degrees cooler than heat islands of concrete and asphalt. Trees also sequester carbon emission in the long run, the older the trees, the greater the amount of carbon sequestered exponentially.

Specifically, Section 2 of HB 3414 represents one of the biggest rollback of urban environmental protections since the land use planning system was put in place. It would allow housing developers to obtain an unlimited number of variances from and use planning regulations without any commitment to lower housing costs or increase housing capacity. HB 3414 is a giveaway to housing developers at the expense of our communities and environment. This section must be removed if the bill moves forward, which I oppose.

There is nothing in these proposed rules changes that would require the developer to pass any of the savings they accrue from bypassing important regulations onto house purchasers. There is no requirement that a developer demonstrate that the variance(s) will result in either lower housing costs or increased housing units. They can keep all the profits they accrue from bypassing important regulations to protect our neighborhoods and our environment.

Our land use regulations are critical for protecting our communities and environment. HB 3414 will allow housing developers virtually unlimited ability to bulldoze those protections.