



September 2, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Planning & Growth Management
Charles County Board of Appeals
Attn: Clerk to the Board of Appeals
200 Baltimore Street
La Plata, MD 20646
BoardofAppeals@CharlesCountyMD.gov

Re: Docket #1471, Bona Terra Commercial Greenhouse

Dear Members of the Charles County Board of Appeals,

We, the undersigned organizations and community members dedicated to native plant conservation and ecological restoration, write in strong support of Bona Terra's request for a special exception to allow on-site sales of native plants at their new nursery in Indian Head, Maryland.

Bona Terra is not simply another plant nursery. Instead, their guiding principles and practices make them uniquely positioned to provide unparalleled ecological, educational, and economic benefits to the Charles County community.

- **Exclusively True Native Plants:** Bona Terra grows only plants that are truly native to our region by intentionally excluding non-natives (i.e., species that evolved elsewhere and provide little to no support for local wildlife) and cultivars (i.e., once-native plants that have been bred by humans for appearance rather than ecological function, limiting ecological value).
- **Local Ecotype Commitment:** Bona Terra collects small, sustainable amounts of wild seed and plant materials from naturally occurring plant populations within 100–200 miles of their nursery. It then grows them in carefully managed “mother gardens.” This ensures their stock represents true local ecotypes, which are plants genetically adapted to our region (including our soil, climate, and weather) and are best suited to support local insects, birds, and wildlife and provide maximum ecological support.
- **Sustainable Operations:** From producing and locally sourcing soil, to avoiding pesticides and herbicides, Bona Terra integrates sustainability at every level of their business model. Their operations are designed to

minimize emissions, recycle materials, and enhance ecosystem resilience. While ecologically significant, this practice also limits traffic traveling to and from the nursery, as their self-sustaining recycling and re-use practices limit the need for large, repeated deliveries of peat-based soils, fertilizers, pesticides, and other materials.

- **Educational Impact:** Beyond selling plants, Bona Terra serves as a vital educational resource. They offer workshops, tailored plant packs, seed giveaways, and conservation guidance that empower homeowners, schools, and community organizations to contribute directly to ecological restoration. This benefits Charles County as a whole by adding to ecological productivity, beautifies neighborhoods and business areas, and promotes awareness of environmental issues, all while increasing eco-tourism to the County.
- **Community Building:** To date, Bona Terra has given away nearly one million seedlings to over 1,000 community members and more than 125 other grantees, including non-profits, schools, scout groups, and more. This has been accomplished through the nursery's "Plant Grant," which seeks to make native plants accessible to everyone. Grants are awarded in the form of young seedlings to individuals and groups that prioritize community outreach through native plant gardening. This results in communities that are more collaborative and ecologically resilient—traits that can only benefit Charles County residents and businesses.
- **Proven Leadership:** Owner Jeremy Tidd has been instrumental in Maryland's broader ecological movement. He was outspoken in his support of Maryland's Native Plants Program (passed in 2023), giving him unique insight into both the state's ecological priorities and community concerns. His leadership demonstrates that Bona Terra is not only sensitive to the needs of the greater Maryland community, but also deeply invested in Maryland's broader environmental future.

Approving on-site sales at Bona Terra will directly align with Charles County's goals of protecting natural resources, expanding environmental awareness, and promoting sustainable economic development. Bona Terra's presence will provide residents with rare and much-needed access to authentic local-ecotype native plants, filling a gap that no other nursery in the region currently addresses.

We would also like to directly address potential concerns regarding traffic, noise, and overall community disruption. Bona Terra has operated successfully at its other locations without generating negative impacts on surrounding neighborhoods. Their business model is built around low-impact practices, and appointment-based, small-scale sales. Customer deliveries are bundled with commuter trips, and there is no expectation of heavy traffic, loud operations, or industrial activity. Furthermore, the nursery does not use heated greenhouses or outdoor lighting, so it will not create noise or light pollution, even if demand is increased due to on-site sales. In every sense, Bona Terra's presence will blend seamlessly with the community while offering significant ecological, economic, and educational benefits.

For the foregoing reasons, we strongly urge the Board of Appeals to approve Bona Terra's special exception request. We believe this nursery represents a model for how businesses can simultaneously support biodiversity, build community, and strengthen local economies. On-site sales at Bona Terra will not only benefit Indian Head, but will also serve as an asset to the County generally, becoming a cornerstone for ecological resilience in the Chesapeake region.

Respectfully submitted,

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