May 2, 2011

North Carolina General Assembly
Legislative Building
16 West Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27601

Members of the North Carolina General Assembly,

Charlotte's tree canopy is one of its signature assets and its only significant natural resource. Taxpayers have invested millions in the city's Municipal Tree Program in order to maximize the benefits from this resource, and they have succeeded--the economic and environmental benefits provided by these trees have been calculated to be over four billion dollars annually.

In particular, Charlotte's street trees are an integral component of the urban infrastructure, and contribute significantly to Charlotte's desirability as a place to live and work, and as a popular destination city. The city's mature street tree canopy, decades in the making, currently provides millions of dollars in benefits each year to Charlotte's citizens. It is these publicly-owned trees, which line the city's streets and are the basis of Charlotte's renown as a "City of Trees", which will be most impacted by the proposed bill.

The Charlotte Tree Advisory Commission has reviewed Senate Bill 183 and determined, if passed, it will permit significant removal of Charlotte's street tree canopy, as most of the city's thoroughfares are state roads. Installation of even a single sign would result in the removal of three block's worth of street trees. Removal of such broad swaths of trees would permanently eliminate the environmental, health and economic benefits these trees provide to the city's citizens and residents, benefits which increase in value with each passing year. Specifically, the removal of these trees would have the following negative impacts:

1. Loss of significant economic benefits generated by these trees, including increases in property values, lease occupancy rates, and retail sales.

2. Elimination of Municipal Tree Program on key thoroughfares, due to loss of local taxpayer control over all tree-related decisions on these streets.

3. Reduction in environmental and health benefits, causing greater pollution and higher costs to taxpayers.

4. Adverse effect on economic development efforts by the city, as Charlotte's "iconic" tree canopy is used to attract new businesses and families to the city.

Clearly, the passage of this bill will result in both economic and environmental losses to the community, which could be significant. In contrast, we cannot identify any community or taxpayer benefits that will be generated by the passage of this bill. Therefore, as members of the Charlotte Tree Advisory Commission, we strongly encourage the General Assembly to oppose this bill.

Chris Buchanan, Chairman
Charlotte Tree Advisory Commission