

Racial Equity and  
Social Justice

# Plan Chapter



# Introduction

## Planning for Racial Equity and Social Justice

*Urban Planning is the process by which communities build consensus around a shared vision for the future. Planning, like other tools, must be wielded carefully or its use can unintentionally [or intentionally] establish far-reaching consequences that disadvantage those who are not fully considered during the process...*

### Context

The modern planning profession was born out of social movements like the 'Tenement House Reform' movement which broadly exposed substandard living conditions endured by immigrant and working-class residents in New York City in the late 19th century. The resulting Tenement House Act of 1901 established one of the first laws governing how buildings should be constructed and regulated to account for human health and safety. Since that time, countless academics, organizers, politicians, and agitators alike have contributed to establishing urban planning as the 'epistemological field of study' which informs how so many of the decisions that impact our lives are made. Planning is the tool that the state wields when exercising its 'police power' to regulate and govern the development of land and infrastructure through plans, codes, and ordinances, and their associated administrative processes. As such, planning decisions have significant and cross-cutting impacts; how and where things are built (or not built) directly correlates to the physical quality of place and the quality of life for inhabitants. It is precisely because of the tremendous importance of planning why **who** gets to participate in the planning process matters so much in determining future outcomes.

Historically, there has frequently been an atmosphere of distrust around planning because there are often limited opportunities for everyday citizens to participate and truly be empowered in making the important decisions regarding the future growth and development of their communities. This dynamic is compounded by a legacy of exclusion reinforced through racism and classism. Generally speaking, power and decision-making authority in planning has been reserved for those with either direct political access, or those with privileges associated with wealth, education, race, and/or social status. This imbalance has contributed to a dynamic where the interests of 'capital' have often trumped the interest of the public good. While capitalism's market theory has its merits, one of its flaws is that there is no mechanism by which externalities (like pollution) get paid for. Planning's prescriptions are designed to correct for market failure[s] when the market is not able to correct itself. As such, planning is one of the primary tools available to us to deal with the problems of racial inequities and social injustices, which most often show up in the form of segregation, poverty, and its associated impacts.

*This chapter will seek to identify how Montgomery County can improve the overall quality of life for ALL residents, deliberately achieve [more] equitable outcomes, and unwrite past injustices which adversely impact historically disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.*

## Survey before Plan

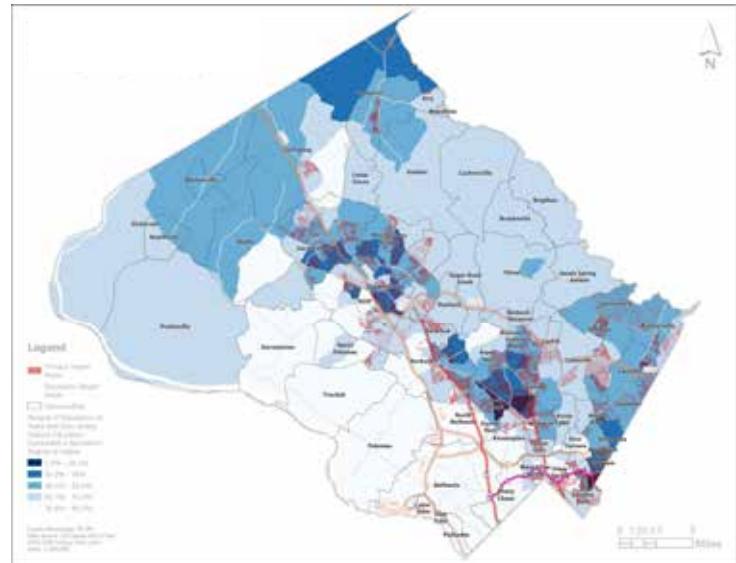
Foundational to planning theory is the work of Patrick Geddes, a planning pioneer, who theorized that you must 'survey before you plan'. The underlying idea is that before you can apply a prescription, you must thoroughly understand and diagnose the issues. Meaningful public engagement is the prerequisite to building the transparency, trust, and collaborative relationships with communities that are needed to establish the two-way learning process which supports holistic planning solutions. Without careful consultation with the community, it is unlikely that a comprehensive understanding of place can be achieved. John Forester, preeminent urban planning professor who writes on participatory planning processes emphasizes that the ears are the practitioners most useful tool, and that listening [is] the most important planning exercise.

## Two Americas

During the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech about the "Two Americas" which highlighted the legacy of racial and economic oppression and the plight of poor people and how their lived experiences juxtapose with the promise of America as the land of opportunity, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Unfortunately, for the decades since this speech was given there are still significant swaths of the black, indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) communities that continue to be 'stuck' in cyclical poverty. The persistent challenges of social and economic mobility is clearly highlighted in the land use and economic patterns observed in Montgomery County, today.

*In 2022, across America, we are still seeing communities of color disproportionately dealing with eroding infrastructure, substandard living conditions, and environmental justice issues like unsafe drinking water. These neighborhoods do not exist by coincidence, they were 'carved out' on the map, years ago, by people who wielded the 'dark side' of planning's power.*

*Too often, when these communities are finally paid attention, the original residents are displaced and unable to benefit. The cycle of divestment and real estate speculation in communities of color has been well documented over time, making 'Gentrification' one of the hottest issues impacting urban America today.*



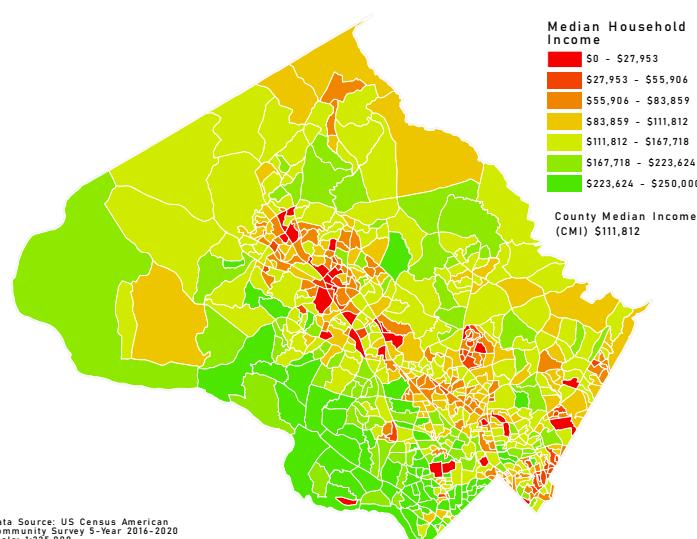
## Educational Attainment

This map depicts Educational Attainment by showing, at the census tract level, the percent of the population 25 years and over who has at least obtained a bachelor's degree.

Census tracts with the low proportions (20.2%-36%) of those holding a bachelor's degree or higher are concentrated in tracts within Germantown, Montgomery Village, and Gaithersburg.

The Rock Creek, Wheaton, and Oakview communities have tracts with the lowest proportion (1.4%-20.1%) of the population holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

The tracts with lowest concentrations of educational attainment are also those that overlay the primary and secondary target areas with high concentrations of BIPOC and LMI residents.



Data Source: US Census American Community Survey 5-Year 2016-2020  
Scale: 1:225,000

## Racial Equity

Racial equity work seeks to **heal**; implementation of its ideals requires an honest and careful examination of history to inform deliberate actions aimed at repairing past injustices which have disproportionately impacted black and indigenous communities in America. The legacy of racist policies, and the land-uses they influenced reverberate throughout the entire spectrum of communities of color with Latin/x, Asian, and other BIPOC communities experiencing different, but familiar challenges as their predecessors. Addressing racial equity requires an honest look at root causes of social problems and recognizing that some form of restitution is required to fix them.

To make planning more equitable we have to acknowledge the systems of racial discrimination and privilege which reinforce disparate outcomes for Montgomery County households. Planning alone cannot end racism and segregation, or prevent the erosion of cultural communities that wish to remain intact, it can however be an important tool to begin the work of dismantling long-established systems of privilege.

## Social Justice

In a planning sense, wealth affords you the opportunity for exclusion: to live in an environment where you do not have to interact with poor people. However, due to the time value of money, the compound nature of wealth creation, and other factors the wealth gap between 'haves' and 'have-nots' is growing. This imbalance creates a strain on society which makes it unstable.

Social justice is a process by which working class people begin to access the privileges only enjoyed by the historically privileged class[es], to afford healthy lifestyles and to experience education and built environments which inspire them to lead happier and more productive lives. In modern times, this is becoming increasingly important as more and more people are finding it hard to thrive economically. As the County plans for the future, special attention needs to be paid to the hidden costs of poverty and determine ways to design communities to reduce problems associated with public health, crime, housing instability, food insecurity, and segregation.

*"Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings." – Nelson Mandela*

## Justice in Planning

### A Right to the City?

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights (Harvey 23).

### Property and Pacification

Quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy. The postmodernist penchant for encouraging the formation of market niches—in both consumer habits and cultural forms—surrounds the contemporary urban experience with an aura of freedom of choice, provided you have the money. Shopping malls, multiplexes and box stores proliferate, as do fast-food and artisanal market-places. We now have, as urban sociologist Sharon Zukin puts it, 'pacification by cappuccino' (Harvey 31).

Source: David Harvey, Rebel Cities

## As inflation heats up, 64% of Americans are now living paycheck to paycheck

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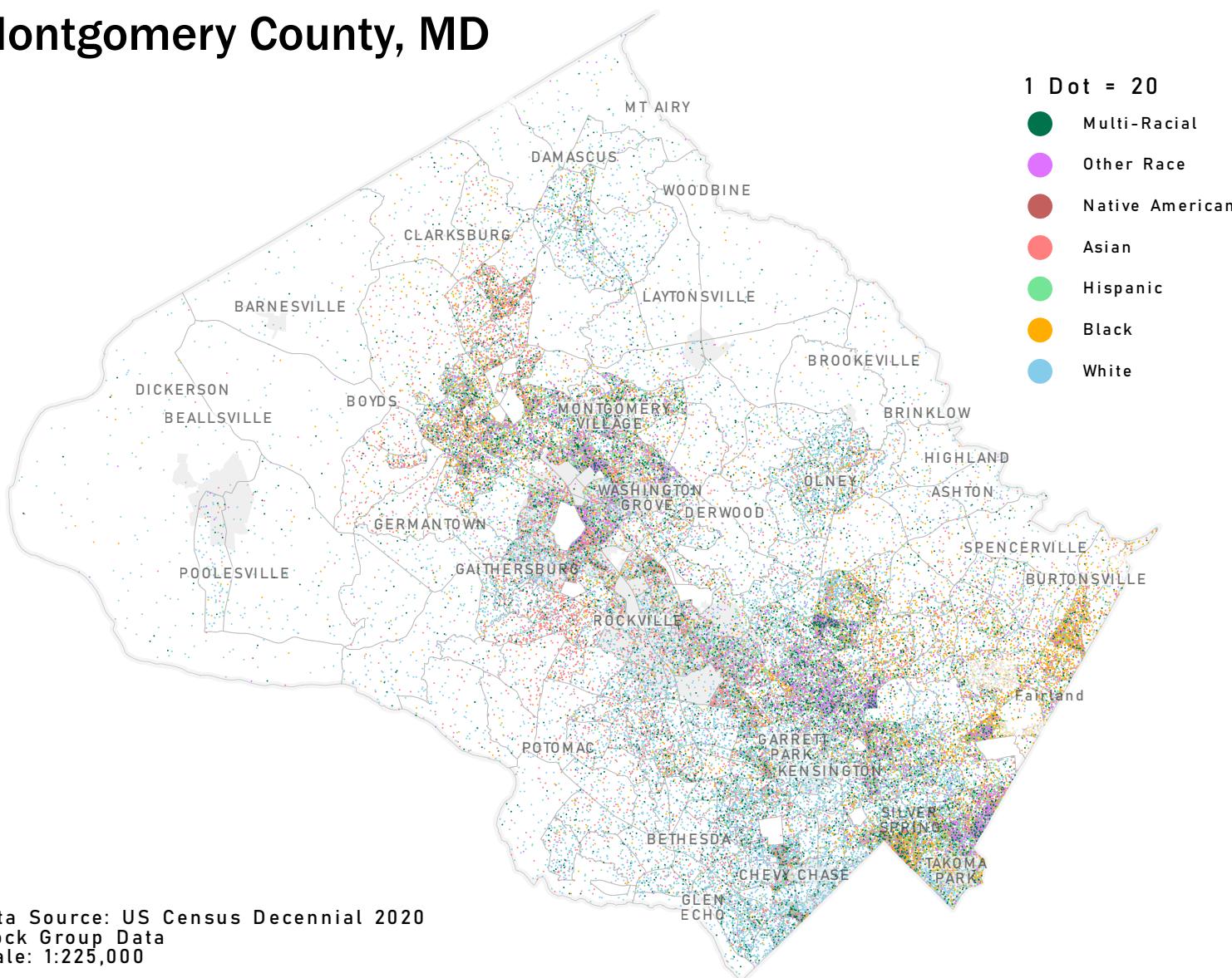
WATCH LIVE

### KEY POINTS

- The increased cost of living is straining households nearly across the board.
- Almost two-thirds of Americans are now living paycheck to paycheck, according to one report.

Source: CNBC, Life Changes

# Montgomery County, MD



## Race & Ethnicity

This dot density map depicts the racial make-up of Montgomery County through showing the concentration and location of racial groups. The data, retrieved from the latest US Decennial census (2020), is depicted at the block group level with one dot representing twenty individuals. The order of racial groups was organized from least predominant to most predominant to ensure the visibility of less reoccurring dots and the representation of these groups. Some noticeable concentration of individual racial groups includes:

- High representation of Whites in Glen Echo, Chevy Chase and Kensington;
- High representation of Blacks in East Montgomery communities of Burtonsville, Fairland, Calverton, and Colesville;
- High representation of Asians around Rockville, Gaithersburg, Germantown, and Clarksburg;
- High representation of Hispanics around Montgomery Village, Washington Grove, Rockville, and Glenmont.

Areas like Silver Spring, Montgomery Village, Washington Grove, Wheaton, Glenmont, and Takoma Park contain a more diverse and concentrated population.

Areas that have greater density tend to have greater racial and ethnic diversity. In contrast, areas such as Boyds, Clarksburg, and Colesville has a diverse racial and ethnic make-up even at lesser densities.

Areas that have a high concentration of those identifying "Other Race" often also have those of more than one race or "Multi-Racial" close by.

### **Examining History (From Plan Draft)**

After the Civil War, African Americans suffered from all forms of discrimination (social, housing, education, employment, commerce, health, etc.). The resulting alienation led to the creation of self-reliant kinship communities in many parts of Montgomery County in the late 19th century. A significant part of the history of racial injustice and discrimination suffered by African Americans includes the formation and subsequent decline (in some cases, destruction) of kinship communities in the early 20th century.

Over time, these communities suffered from lack of public investment in infrastructure such as new roads, sewer and water, schools, health clinics, and other public amenities and services needed to be viable places to live. Some communities suffered the devastating impacts of urban renewal policies of the 1960s. Others faced pressure to sell their houses or farms to developers for housing subdivisions. These communities declined because of an accumulation of racially-motivated actions paired with social, political, and economic circumstances. The very few of these communities that survived in some way include Ken-Gar in Kensington, Lyttonsville in Silver Spring, River Road in Bethesda, Scotland in Potomac, Stewartstown in Gaithersburg, and Toneytown in Travilah.

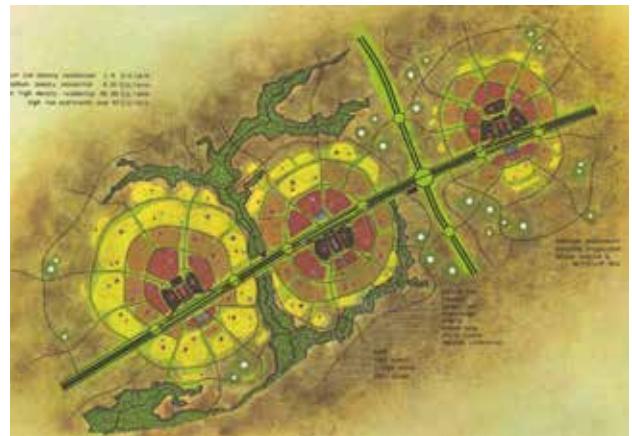
From the 1890s to the 1920s, the first suburban subdivisions in Silver Spring and Chevy Chase used racial covenants prohibiting African Americans and other racial and religious groups from purchasing land or homes. Well into the mid-20th century, these types of covenants were placed in the land records. Even after the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 to end these practices, a development pattern of segregation continued. Injustices were evident in unfair banking and lending practices; federal immigration policies; unequal public investment in schools, parks and other public facilities; and siting a disproportionately high number of undesirable uses, such as landfills, near communities of color.

In Montgomery County, the legacy of such discriminatory policies and the exclusionary zoning and other land use controls led to neighborhoods defined by income, race, and housing types. As a result of these practices and other societal factors, a significant quality of life gaps exist for various racial and ethnic groups in the county.

*Urban renewal policies which may have been designed to address 'blight' were popularly coined "Negro removal" because the aftermath of efforts resulted in the disbandment of communities and created economic and social losses for African Americans and exacerbated psychological trauma.*

### **On Wedges and Corridors (WAC)**

Thrive seeks to "modernize" the old Wedges and Corridors Plan. While it is prudent to not throw the proverbial "baby out with the bathwater," the WAC plan created "land use patterns... which left neighborhoods disconnected and reinforced segregation along racial and economic lines." If the old had plan adverse outcomes for historically disadvantaged groups, how do we address/mitigate its failures? What does "modernization" of the Wedges and Corridors Plan look like?

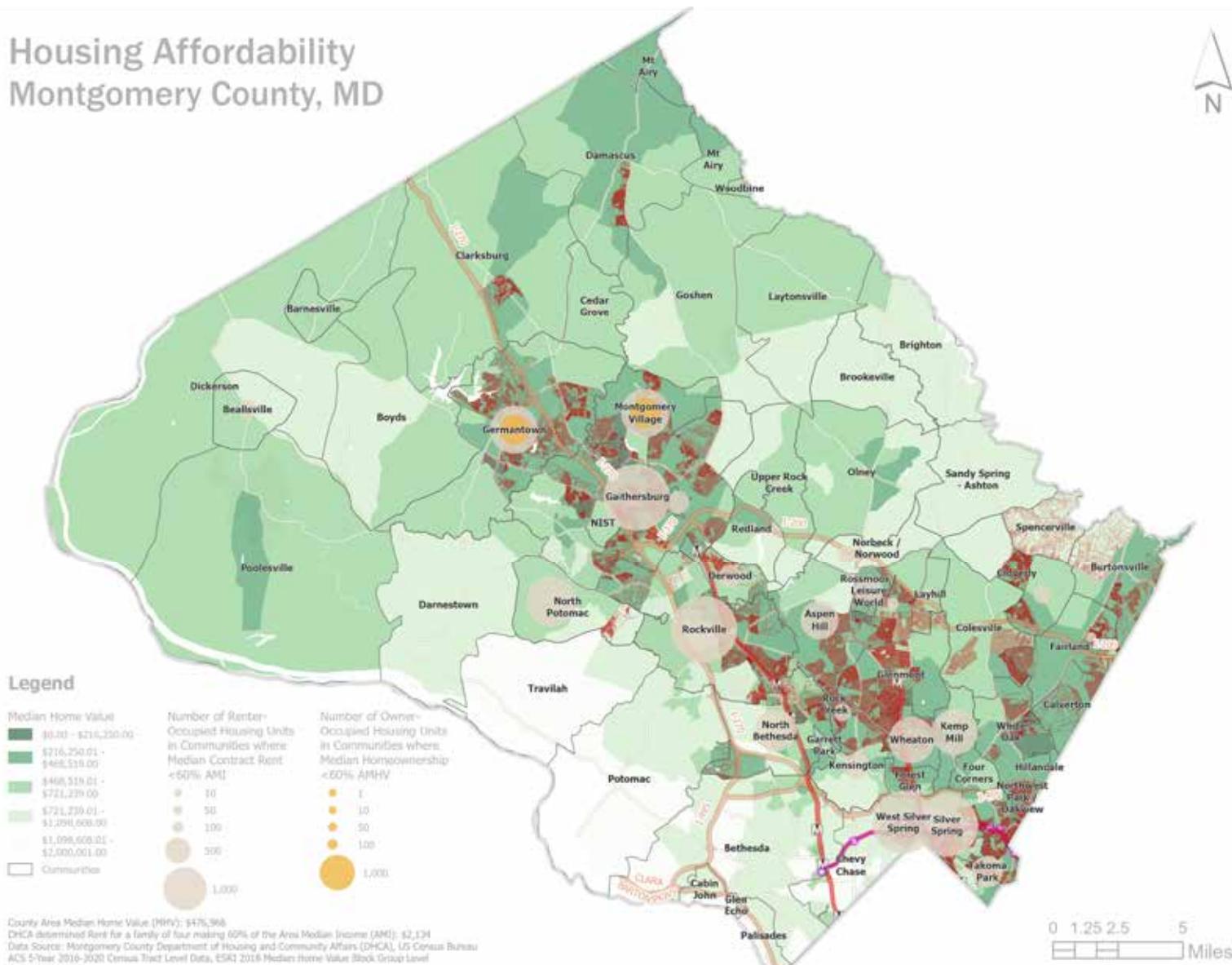


**Wedges and Corridors Plan**

To address segregation and economic inequality established in past zoning/land use planning, deliberate mechanisms need to be introduced to create racially and economically inclusive communities. Planning needs to consider social and economic consequences of efforts to integrate. Communities that face historic challenges need special attention paid to community development and stabilization to ensure that existing social networks and institutions are strengthened so that it is not harder for the existing community to survive in the reimagined one, but they feel a central part of it. Conversely, established areas need to create opportunities for less privileged to access the schools, jobs, natural resources, and other benefits through housing opportunity and improved physical access.

# Housing Affordability

## Montgomery County, MD



### Housing Affordability

This map depicts various layers including median home values, number of renter-occupied housing units where rent is less than 60-percent of area median income (AMI), and number of owner-occupied housing units where median homeownership is less than 60-percent of area median home value (AMHV). Data from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCA) shows \$2,134 as the rent for a family of four making 60% of AMI.

High concentrations of homes with MHVs at or below the County MHV (\$476,966) appears to make up most of the housing stock of census tracts in Germantown, Montgomery Village, and Gaithersburg. Communities in east Montgomery County such as White Oak and Calverton also have MHVs at or below the County MHV (\$476,966).

The availability of affordable rental housing units, shown here as less than 60-percent of AMI, are shown most prominently in Gaithersburg, Rockville, Silver Spring, and West Silver Spring. Each of these communities have over a thousand units where rent is less than 60-percent of AMI.

Owner-occupied Housing Units with an AMHV less than the County AMHV (\$476,966) are only present in Germantown and Montgomery Village.

**The data clearly shows that access to affordable housing is going to be one of the biggest challenges faced by Montgomery County in the future. As such, real planning innovation will be required to protect working families from displacement.**

## Housing

Thrive's housing prescriptions to address racial equity and social justice largely center on a strategy to integrate communities with high concentrations of minorities and/or poverty with new development that attracts multi-racial and higher income households into the area. The strategies seek to integrate (gentrify) communities while simultaneously protecting existing residents from displacement. The idea of development without displacement is an exciting one, but these ideas, in practice are often acting in direct opposition of each other. Development without deliberate community and neighborhood conservation efforts will almost certainly result in (some) displacement. So, instead of ignoring this possibility, let's determine where people can go. Undoubtedly, many residents who currently occupy a community where they have historical, cultural, spiritual, and other ties (kindship) will want to remain in their home community. However, there will be some residents who may like to move to a more affluent area. Traditionally, planning documents are written to support **Housing Choice** as a strategic goal for future outcomes. When we juxtapose this idea with regional housing markets, it would seem that in order to balance the integration of low-income neighborhoods, some accommodation for rebalancing should be made to ensure that economic benefits begin to reach historically disadvantaged populations. As such, integration should be a two-way process, by which there should be a parallel strategy of making accommodation for low-income housing in areas which are already wealthy and thus providing new residents who want the choice of living somewhere else to achieve immediate access to communities that have close proximity to jobs, good education, etc. If we are going to promote development in the growth areas with new market-rate housing, there should also be provision of new low-income housing in high income areas to allow for housing choice in different markets.

The justification for this strategy is doubled when you consider that to support economic competitiveness and sustainability Thrive's number one transportation priority is connecting low-income communities to job areas, but the housing strategy should also seek to provide workforce housing locally. Consequently, areas of high wealth and business activity such as Bethesda should also include sufficient workforce and low-income housing to support housing choices for people who work in the area. Future planning should conduct detailed market analysis of labor markets and determine thresholds by which area plans should promote low-income, workforce,

and middle-class housing options to support a truly local community where commuting is "optional" because the mathematical possibility of the local workforce is reflected in the housing availability.

*In our first focus group meeting with black and brown residents in East County, we heard a story as old as planning itself: several residents were embroiled in a legal case about their substandard housing conditions and alleged that the building inspector meant to enforce quality controls was being paid off. Almost every conversation we initiated on plan topics somehow found a way to veer off into issues of safety, crime, and feelings of neglect...*

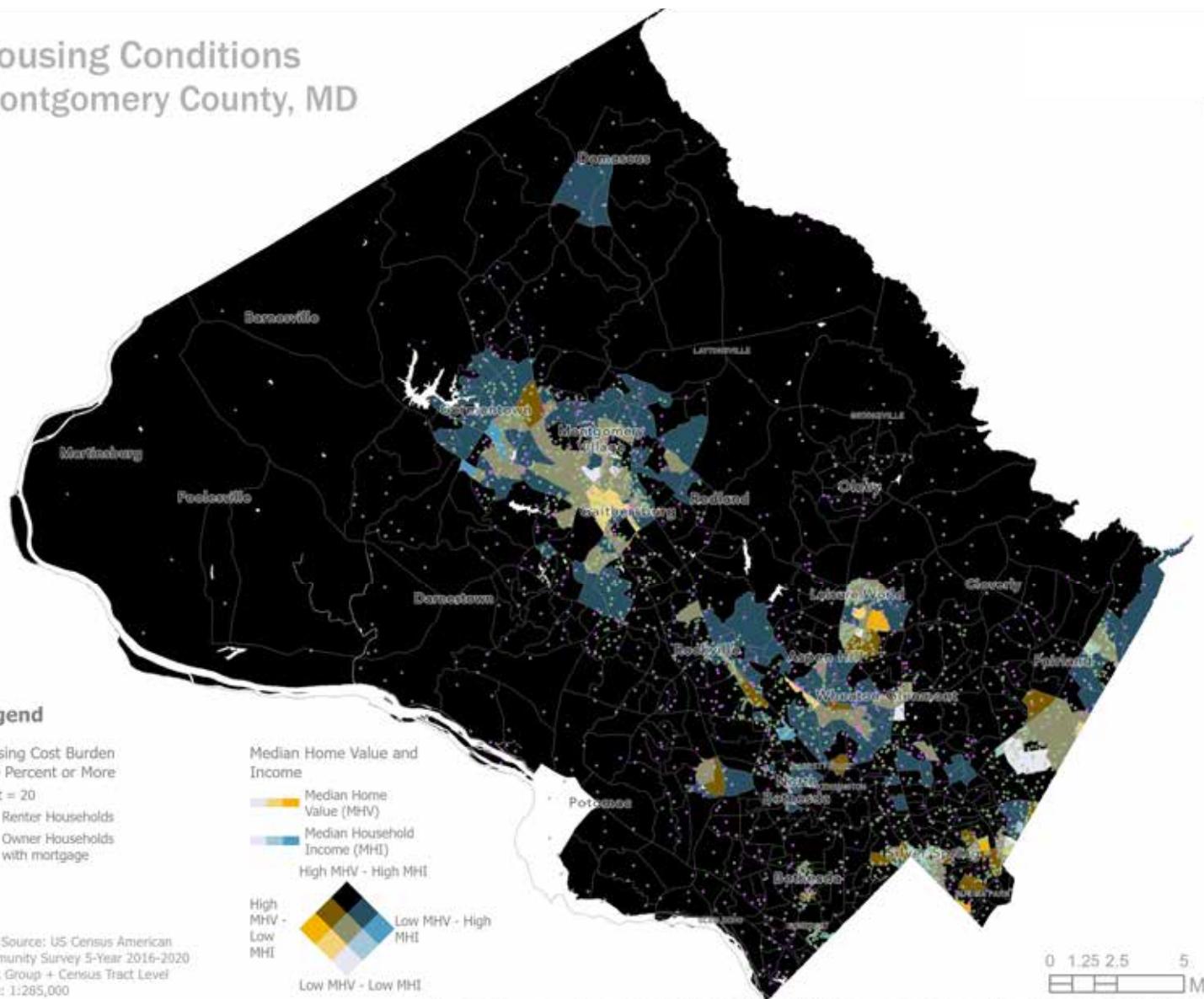
Residents of Montgomery County shared lots of challenging stories about their housing experiences. It is clear that many of the mechanisms put in place to help them are being offset by personal bias (racism) in the system or by individual actors. The County will need to be vigilant to seek accountability for all actors. Successfully addressing racism in housing will require deliberate action and systems of checks and balances.

*Increase access to safe, affordable housing and promote wealth-building by confronting historical and ongoing harms and disparities caused by structural racism.*

# Housing Conditions

## Montgomery County, MD

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### Housing Conditions

This map shows housing conditions in terms of areas with high-to-low ranges of median home value (MHV) compared to high-to-low median household income (MHI). The map also shows renter and owner households who are experiencing a housing cost burden of 50 percent or more, defined as extremely cost burdened by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCA). This means that 50 percent or more of a household's income is devoted to housing-related costs.

Census tracts that are approaching solid gold color represent high MHV and low MHI, an indicator of unaffordable housing. Tracts in Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, and Leisure World show signs of this unaffordable housing.

Census tracts showing a light gray color represents low MHV and low MHI, an indicator for low income but also low-cost housing. Even so, households experiencing extreme housing cost burden may also be present in these tracts. Tracts in Montgomery Village, Glenmont, and White Oak exhibit these housing conditions with all of these showing a high incident of renter households experiencing extreme housing cost burden.

More urban areas like Montgomery Village, Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, and Germantown have high concentrations of renter household experiencing extreme housing cost burden.

More rural areas like Damascus, Olney, and Cloverly have higher instances of owner households experiencing extreme housing cost burden.

## Compact Growth

Encouraging growth in already developed areas, has ripple effects. Density brings economic opportunity, but it can also degrade the quality of natural resources, parks, schools, and neighborhoods. If the majority of new development will occur in urban areas where existing naturally occurring affordable housing exists, special attention needs to be paid to ensure that as the population density increases, residents maintain equitable access to parks, recreation, natural resources, and high quality places which influence quality of life. Additionally, as density increases, increased consideration needs to be made towards maintenance and operations of public spaces and institutions to ensure that effective stewardship is achieved and maintained.

## Environmental Justice

As the County grows, special attention will need to be paid to Environmental Justice issues. Undoubtedly, new residents will put a strain on infrastructure and sustainable practices will need to be implemented to ensure that the County is able to maintain good air and water quality, preserve urban tree canopy, manage stormwater, and invest in renewable sources of energy. Analysis of environmental quality shows that residents of the Target Areas where the majority of BIPOC and Low-Income residents live are more likely to be exposed to poor environmental conditions and live next to polluting land uses. As we look towards the future, and grapple with issues like climate change we need to be deliberate in protecting the County's vulnerable residents to ensure they do not have their life challenges compounded by disproportionate exposure to environmental threats.

## Transportation

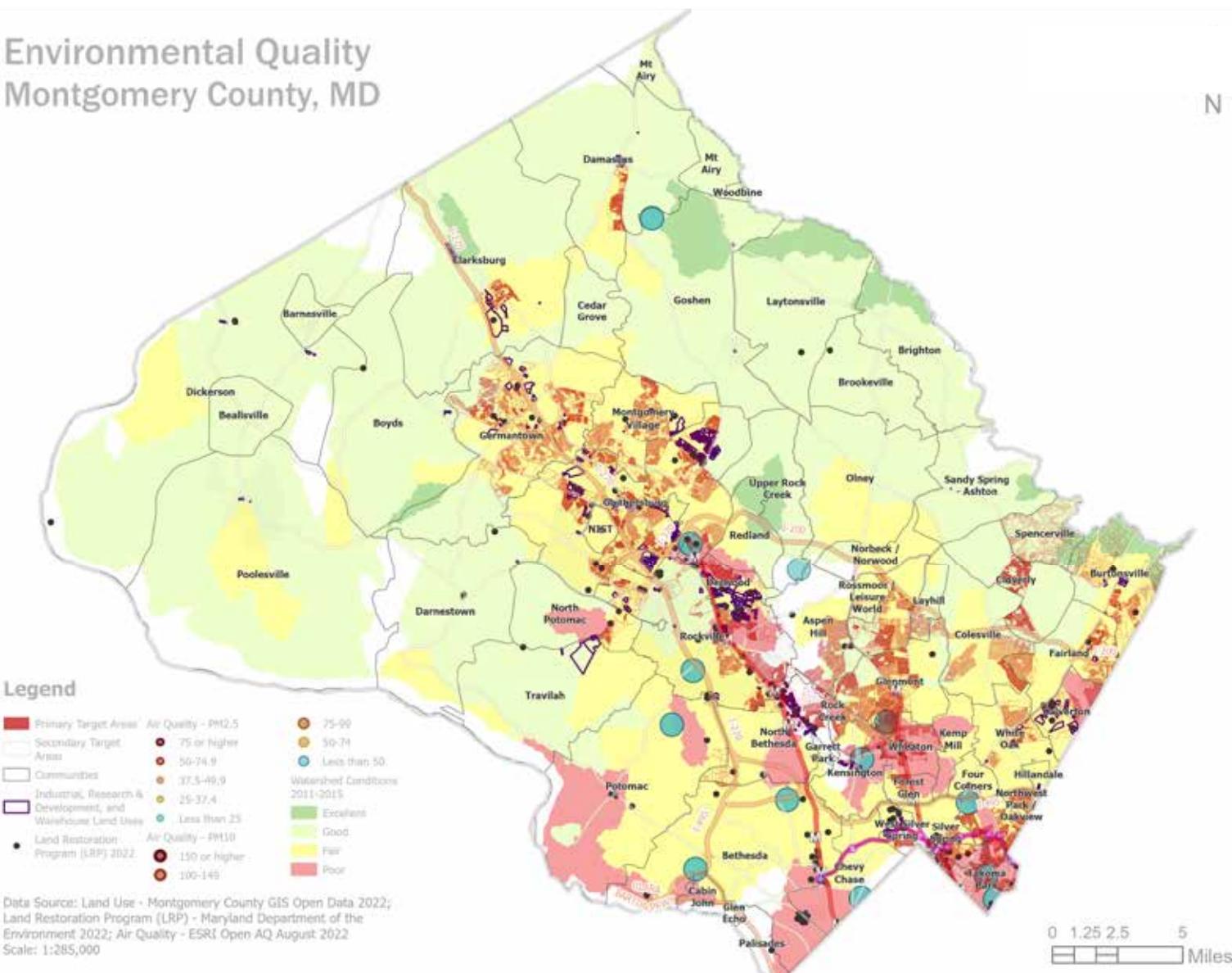
The plight of the working class and many BIPOC people we talked to felt that the needs of working class families were not considered in the planning themes of Thrive. They felt that many of the "progressive" policies did not consider their current status in life and expressed how proposed changes would adversely impact their quality of life. Some people showed great resistance to the idea of '15-minute living' because they relied on their work vehicles to take them to different parts of the county where they had access to jobs. Many expressed that they rely on vehicle miles and parking availability to make a living. For some, getting a vehicle represented the possibility of financial independence. To others, the idea of riding a bike for leisure or to commute was seen as a luxury that comes with a level of economic empowerment they did not have yet. These sentiments are compounded by the long commutes even more traditional workers faced while using locally available transit options. There was a general sentiment that root issues needed to be addressed before new ideas could be successfully implemented.

Instead of welcoming these ideas as positive, they are often seen as a harbinger for gentrification and displacement. Ideas such as congestion pricing and reduced parking requirements that promote "good urbanism" are sometimes outside of the reality for working class people. There is a concern that shifting to this new way of life will make it harder for them to survive and in some instances this is true.

*"I can't take my ladder on the Purple Line" - Montgomery County Resident*

# Environmental Quality Montgomery County, MD

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## Environmental Quality

This map depicts various layers that make up environmental quality conditions within Montgomery County. The layers include watershed conditions taken from 2011 through 2015, air quality measurements of particulate matter 2.5 and particulate matter (PM) 10, industrial land uses, and sites that qualify for the land restoration program (LRP).

A majority of the primary and secondary target areas are located within watersheds that are in fair to poor condition.

Target areas within watersheds experiencing poor conditions, like those in Derwood and Rockville, are adjacent to areas with industrial, research & development, and warehouse land uses. This land use category is associated with the processing of raw materials and hazardous substances, movement of heavy vehicles, and high impervious surfaces; functions that typically contribute to generation of pollutants, run-off, and poor watershed quality.

Target areas are also clustered around Land Restoration Program (LRP) sites, brownfield areas that are identified by the State of Maryland for restoration.

PM2.5 and PM10 values, as captured by the air quality monitors stationed throughout the County, show consistently low concentrations of particulate matter regardless of urban and rural typology.

**Social Capital**

In order for a shared sense of purpose to exist, it is not a one-way process. Communities where wealthy white residents are the norm also have to achieve integration and inclusivity. It could be argued that it is in fact more important for these communities to begin to see their communities as having a shared sense of purpose instead of only addressing racial and economic inequality at the "problem" side of the spectrum. Part of the inequality equation is the exclusivity of the wealthy, some of these doors need to start being opened to truly create a shared sense of purpose and belonging for ALL County residents. Exclusivity reinforces the racial and class divides within society.

**Cultural Competence**

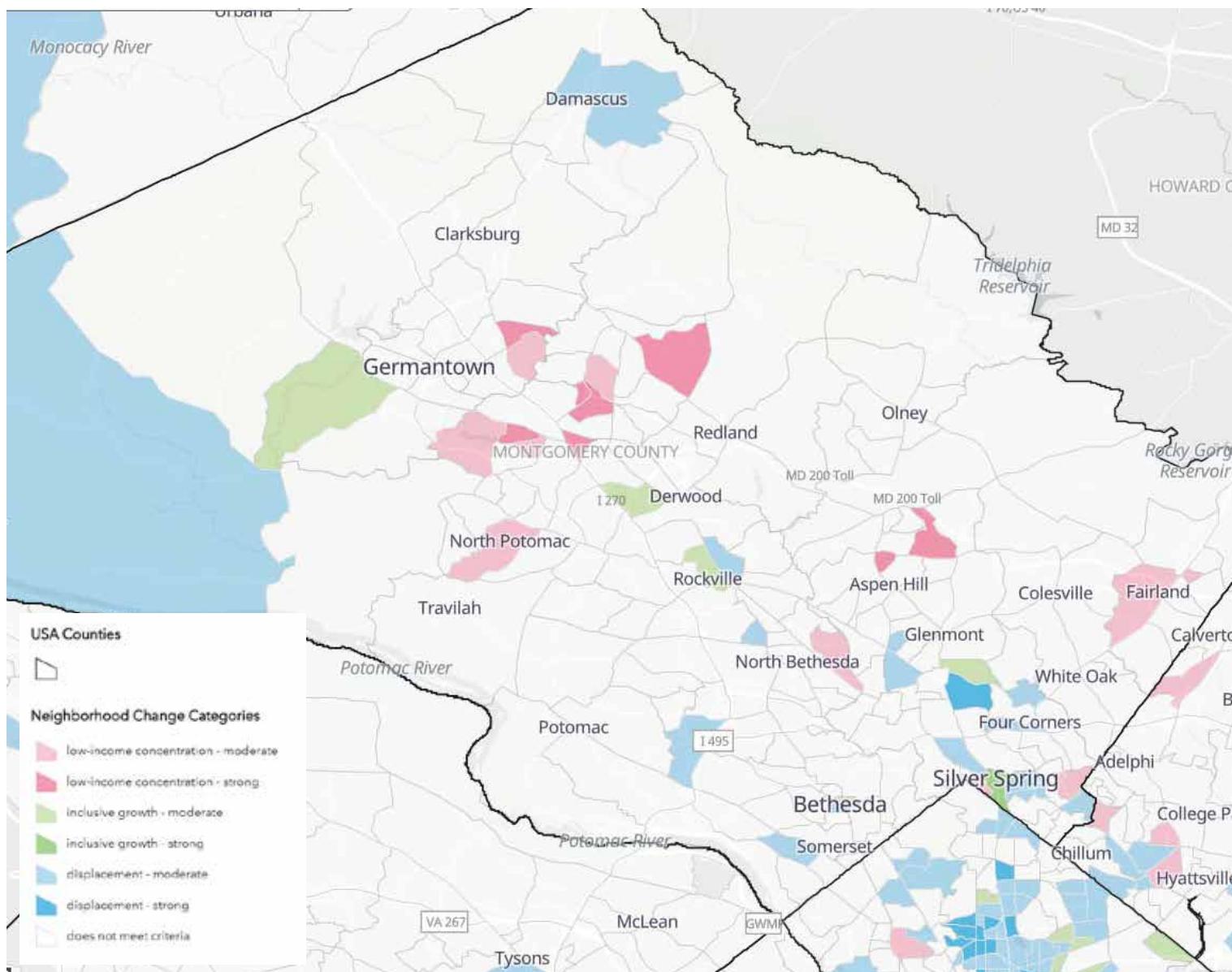
It is vital to have practitioners who can relate to the communities they serve. In executing planning in communities of color, practitioners must lead with deference. Being able to understand cultural cues and nuance plays a large role in comprehension and meaningful engagement. If communities feel that they are not being respected or understood, real conversations will not occur.

**Community Development**

The County has a tremendous opportunity, with Thrive, to develop partnerships with its communities that it can leverage to rebuild trust, strengthen relationships, and celebrate everything that is great about the region. Montgomery County has had success with diversifying by implementing inclusionary zoning in the 70's and 80's. Now, it is important to do the work to protect the existing communities. Planning should seek to leverage and strengthen the existing social networks and identify opportunities to empower local actors to be directly involved in the work of community development.

**Economic Empowerment**

Throughout the public engagement process, it was clear that displacement is a big fear for residents with less means, as they are witnessing escalating [home] prices. The vast majority of working class people expressed that they want access to better education and economic opportunity. Most people who struggle to make 'ends meet' prioritize economic advancement as their number one priority and planning for their communities should reflect that reality.



### Neighborhood Change and Displacement Risk

The Montgomery County Planning Department is engaged in important work to understand the displacement risk in the County. These types of analysis need to be leveraged to understand how to protect neighborhoods and encourage Inclusive Growth. Across the board, low-income and BIPOC residents are very worried about displacement as a result of new development. More work needs to be put into understanding how to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing and establishing new affordable housing to ensure that Montgomery County doesn't lose the rich diversity, both racial and economic, to make it a complete community. If housing conditions continue on their trajectory, it is quite feasible that Montgomery County will cease to be a bedroom community, but a community that requires commuters from outside the region to staff its businesses. This dynamic would be in opposition to both the Equity and Sustainability goals of Thrive.