

June 17, 2021

## Testimony re Thrive Montgomery 2050

My name is Patricia Johnson. I'm a resident of Kenwood. Thrive is a radical plan for the next 30 years that will not accomplish what the county needs for continuing vitality and growth. The second part of this: the AHSI rezoning proposals that derive from this plan will not do what they are proposed to do: they will not provide affordable housing. They will not provide attainable housing. They will provide market priced housing in dense areas where land is expensive. Housing type does not reduce housing cost. This plan will not solve the equity issue. In fact it will exacerbate gentrification. It will not protect Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing

The process has been flawed with the lack of citizens being able to participate in the development of these ideas. Zoom meetings do not allow free discussion or an informative exchange. A pandemic is not the time to introduce a sweeping zoning plan with an exclusive group deciding how we live our lives. This has been the time for a small inside group to expand on ideas that affect a large group of people, who cannot influence the outcome because they cannot participate. Both the Thrive Plan, and the zoning projects that go with it, should be stopped until they can receive the full vetting that a thirty year plan deserves. We need neighborhood advisory committees that can have person to person discussions about the intricacies of Thrive and the ZTA's that spring from the plan. The HEAT Committee was not transparently chosen and is weighted toward developers/realtors rather than residents of neighborhoods that will be affected. At one meeting a neighborhood activist (one of the few allowed) was told to "be quiet and stop talking" by a realtor that had a vested interest. That would not happen if people were face to face.

Zoning changes in R40, 60, 90, and 200 zones should be done through the master plan process. Site Plans must be required for infill development in both single family neighborhoods and dense corridors. A process should be in place that requires community input and participation. Compatibility is fundamental to our county zoning codes. It must be upheld.

Compatibility preserves quality of living in single family neighborhoods and dense corridors. Building and architectural standards must be compatible with existing scale and the character of the neighborhood it is in.

Standards cannot be picked out of a "pattern book", which has been touted as an answer to "attainable housing" but hasn't yet been

developed. A county as large and diverse as ours cannot be subject to a “pattern book” of building standards as a cure all solution with no community input. This has been introduced to speed up development at communities’ expense. One size does not fit all and compatibility has been left out of the proposal of Thrive. Building standards from a pattern book will adversely impact neighborhoods from the standpoint of structures looming over existing houses, overloaded street parking, traffic, noise, adverse lighting, depleted green space and canopy. These dense structures are suggested without notice to or input from the affected neighborhoods. We need rules in place that demand good planning principles, and participation from the community. Leaving it up to developers to pick from a ‘pattern book’ is going to lead to community discord and the destruction of established neighborhoods that create an environment where people want to live.

National and international trends which propose Missing Middle Housing (now referred to by the Planning Staff as “attainable housing”) and ‘complete communities’ are misplaced in a county that is 507 square miles. We are not a city. This plan will not solve its economic problems with this “pattern book” of activity centers. The center of economic development are the urban centers which must attract jobs first. Builders will not build if there are no jobs. Jobs in Montgomery County have decreased by 6.5%. People cannot afford rent or mortgages without jobs that pay more than minimum wage. Office and apartment spaces are vacant in both Silver Spring and Bethesda. If you build it they won’t come unless there are jobs. The county needs to think of ways to attract business with incentives and incubators for entrepreneurs. Young people need a reason to move to Montgomery County. National government positions cannot support our economic development. Montgomery County Government is the county’s largest employer. Job growth has lagged behind our neighboring counties by over 21% in the last 10 years. There is much work to be done here before a plan like Thrive can exist.

Thrive is a fantasy with no explanation or thought to fiscal responsibility. Thrive has been derived without a financial plan in place to support, schools, infrastructure, environmental pressures, roads, paths, green spaces. Higher taxes will be needed to pay for these amenities. These cost items will not pay for themselves with added density.