

Betsy Mendelsohn

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Hi neighbors, my name is Betsy Mendelsohn. My family bought a house in downtown Silver Spring in 2015. We had moved to Washington DC in 1999 so we've witnessed the neighborhood springing. As your neighbors we love the many small businesses and transit options that a dense and diverse neighborhood provides. So I support Thrive 2050.

As an historian, I have studied law, infrastructure, geography, environmental quality and changes that occur over many decades. I know that cities built their first municipal garbage stations in the poorest neighborhoods and built their public housing at sites with a long journey to work. I know that urban infrastructure and zoning laws typically have supported the interests of only a slice of society. I know that my current neighborhood was a "sundown suburb."

Also as an academic historian, it's easy to criticize the infrastructure and zoning rules made in the past as exclusionary and economically regressive. Much of our current built environment is the bricks and mortar legacy of old public laws and policies that would not be enacted today. I recognize that Thrive 2050 intends to correct this legacy.

Education efforts around Thrive 2050 ought to put people - and their quality of life - at its center. In championing denser development, education efforts ought to reveal the economically regressive practice of preserving single family homes close to transit and other public infrastructure. In promoting affordable housing, these efforts ought to vividly describe long commutes by bus for our poorest neighbors. And, these efforts ought to reveal the far greater energy and public infrastructure use of single family homes relative to denser housing.

One thing true of private property is that owners' rights have been limited by their responsibilities to the broader society. I say this as a legal historian. Private property rights have not been immutable because society's needs have changed over time. I frankly hope that county residents come to value their neighbors - all of their neighbors - more than the current structure of their neighborhoods.

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