

June 17, 2021

Montgomery County Council Members
100 Maryland, Avenue, 6th floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear President Hucker and Council Members:

As the elected board of the Brookdale Citizens' Association¹, we are appealing to our elected representatives, five of whom directly represent us, to consider resident perspectives before moving forward on any zoning changes or the Thrive Montgomery 2050 plan.

The county executive and other groups have detailed specific steps that the County Council needs to address before proceeding with any steps affecting existing single family home neighborhoods. We have reviewed several of these and strongly endorse their consideration by the County Council. While we are not repeating those recommendations and comments, we would like to add a few additional points for consideration.

While we, like others, think bringing additional living units, including MPDUs near transportation is a laudable goal, it can be executed without eliminating single family home neighborhoods as proposed by the Planning Board (see [3/7/21 Washington Post opinion by Natali Fani-Gonzalez](#), Planning Board vice-chair). The Planning Board's one-size-fits-all approach to urban, suburban, and more rural areas of the county near metro stops is extremely short-sighted and irresponsible, doesn't benefit stable and historic neighborhoods like Brookdale and will not create any affordable/attainable housing.

Our reasoning is as follows:

First, despite a significant collapse in the Friendship Heights retail core, redevelopment is planned or underway to expand new residential opportunity. For example, the 5500 Wisconsin plan by Donohoe and Carr Properties will replace a mostly empty one story retail complex with a 380 unit apartment building, including 15% MPDUs. In addition, on the D.C. side the current Mazza Gallerie site has been purchased by Tishman Speyer, and they announced plans to construct 350 apartments on the site, including affordable units, along with ground floor retail. Finally, GEICO has an approved development plan that includes 500 residences (town homes and apartments). Further cooperation between jurisdictions is an essential component of any plans in the Friendship Heights area. It would seem encouraging development or conversion to residential/mixed use would yield more of the affordable/attainable housing desired.

Second, we applaud the policy to permit accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in single family neighborhoods, such as Brookdale. This has the potential to increase density in the neighborhood and affordability both to the owners of the property and the people who live in the smaller accessory units. As the change to zoning allowing ADUs by right is very recent (2019), it clearly needs time to attain broader adoption.

Third, as we understand the proposal, letting developers, by right, infill our R-60 lots with town homes or apartment blocks, with no off-street parking requirements or community comment or review, causing significant increases in density on our mostly narrow streets, with no sidewalks, curbs, or gutters seems like a recipe for accidents waiting to happen.

¹ Brookdale is an over 80-year-old community of approximately 400 single family homes along the D.C. border near the Friendship Heights metro.

When residents have events with significant street parking, you can't drive a normal car down some streets, let alone emergency vehicles.

Fourth, though the proposed changes will increase density, given the significant cost to land in this neighborhood, it will yield more higher-priced homes, offering none of the attainable units desired. Evidence of this can be seen in the enormous prices obtained by other town house type developments in and around Chevy Chase and Bethesda.

Finally, real estate experts have told us that the real scarcity is in the number of single family homes. Every sale of a single family home in our area in the past six months brings in multiple buyers, bidding wars, and prices exceeding the already high asking prices by 10-20%.

We recently heard from several members of the planning department at our annual meeting and it became clear they are moving forward to implement a plan that isn't even approved. We urge the Council to slow the process down and expand your outreach efforts to locations across the county to obtain the input you need from your constituents and allow for debate on such a significant change to the county plan.

The county's Wisconsin Place Recreation Center will be available to host neighborhood meetings again in September so the Brookdale Board would be happy to host an event where informed citizens can offer their perspective on these planning efforts.

Please do not mistake our politeness for acquiescence as many residents are outraged over this assault on taxpayers that seems to mostly benefit developers. The Thrive Montgomery 2050 plan and related zoning proposals will be eliminating a zoning planning and approval process that resident taxpayers relied upon when buying homes.

We thank you for the opportunity to offer our views and concerns and look forward to robust community involvement in the development proposals for our county.

Sincerely,

Richard Podolske

President, Brookdale Citizens' Association on behalf of the Brookdale Board