

# Testimony of Michael DeLong to County Council on Thrive Montgomery 2050

June 29, 2021

Council President Hucker, members of the County Council, thank you for hearing my testimony. My name is Michael DeLong and I am a resident of Silver Spring. I am a thirty one year old renter who has lived in Montgomery County since 2015. I support the Planning Board Draft of Thrive 2050 and urge you to maintain its bold vision for a sustainable, inclusive county, where housing is affordable for everyone.

Montgomery County is an excellent place to live, and more people are coming here every year. In order to accommodate them, we need to build more housing of all types in major centers and corridors, specially near public transit. We also need more affordable housing, since the median rent in the county was around \$1,700 in 2019. Traditionally policymakers and planners have too often focused just on single family homes and promoted them as the county's ideal; single family homes are important, but so are duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, small apartments, and even high rise apartments and condominiums.

Ensuring that we have affordable housing and promoting homeownership for everyone will also help promote racial equality, since so much wealth is tied up in people's homes. I'm encouraged by the plan's statements that we need to use land more efficiently, promote compact, infill development, and make racial equity and social inclusion high priorities. However I would like to see housing mentioned as a human right, as it was in the earlier drafts, and all tenants should have a right to legal counsel in eviction cases.

Our parks are wonderful—I have visited places like Wheaton Regional Park, Sligo Creek Park, and others countless times. Thrive Montgomery focuses on promoting access to parks (especially walkable access, making them gathering places for people instead of barriers, and encouraging people to use them. Parks are good for people's mental and physical health, and promote outdoor activity and exercise. I support this 100%; parks should be more equitably distributed.

One improvement would be more emphasis on is creating a tree canopy—trees improve the neighborhood, provide shade and counteract the urban heat island effect, and hold the soil in place. They also provide habitats for insects, birds, and other animals. Additional focus on flood protection would be great as well.

Montgomery County needs more and better public transportation, and to move away from relying on cars for everything. I am excited that Thrive Montgomery is not planning and constructing new highways, which would further increase traffic. Vision Zero, which strives to ensure no traffic fatalities or serious injuries on our roadways, is a noble and excellent goal. Crossing some places like Georgia Avenue is incredibly dangerous for pedestrians—every time

you do that you feel like you are risking life and limb. The county already has a number of excellent trails and bike lanes, and we should work to connect them.

Finally, we should embrace transit oriented, mixed use development, with both residential and commercial buildings. I love being able to go from my house and walk to nearby grocery stores, restaurants, shops, and parks. More and more people are appreciating the benefits of mixed use development, which provides opportunities and relaxation for residents, as well as connecting them to each other. It is also more environmentally friendly, which should be one of our top priorities in this era of climate change.

Thank you very much.