

WEST MONTGOMERY COUNTY CITIZENS ASSOCIATION

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Founded 1947

Testimony for West Montgomery County Citizens Association

By Kenneth Bawer, President

on

**Montgomery County Council Public Hearing for
Thrive Montgomery 2050, Planning Board Draft, April 2021**

July 7, 2021

**West Montgomery County Citizens Association (WMCCA)
General Comments**

(NOTE: Some suggestions in our written comments may be too specific for the General Plan, so please consider them as food for thought and input to functional plans, for example.)

First, we would like to suggest that the time frame for finalizing this document be greatly extended due to the pandemic. The pandemic is a once-in-a-century disaster. It has been extremely disruptive and will have uncertain consequences. Some residents still may not have commented on the plan during this pandemic for any number of reasons. These reasons might be a trauma due to loss of a loved one, hardships caused by loss of a job or a closed business, or having a student who is doing remote learning at home causing challenges for the entire family. It would be helpful to post on the Thrive web site what percent of residents have commented to date. During testimony on June 17, someone touted the large number of participants in the public comment process – we doubt if it was more than a fraction of a percent of the one million residents of the County.

Second, the long-term consequences of the pandemic are unknown. The current draft plan could be inappropriate for the reality of a post-pandemic County. As a result of our shared experiences during the pandemic, personal and professional choices may

change. People may favor less dense housing arrangements for health reasons. Transportation preferences and commuting patterns may change dramatically if workers continue telecommuting after the pandemic. Continued high levels of telecommuting may cause a drastic downturn in the commercial office market. Therefore, we recommend pausing the finalization of this plan at least until the consequences of the pandemic start to become clearer.

We appreciate this opportunity to make comments to improve this draft plan. There is a lot in this draft that we do like. While we agree with many of the principles, we do have suggestions that differ in their focus.

Since the public hearing last November on the Public Hearing Draft Plan, the document underwent not just a revision, but a complete rewrite including an entirely new organization, different chapters, and missing chapters. As such, the Planning Board should have been required to go through another round of public hearings. Short of that, it is now incumbent upon the County Council to give even more credence to our input and that of other concerned citizens as the County Council makes revisions to this Planning Board Draft.

For example, Figure 29 shows a “growth corridor” along River Road (presumably since none of the roads are labeled”) from the District line all the way to Potomac Village. We were never consulted in making River Road in our area a “growth corridor” nor in designating Potomac Village as a “potential center of activity”. We don’t know if these are necessarily good or bad things (bad, we suspect), but we object to the Planning Board inflicting their vision on residents with absolutely no collaboration – this speaks to the lack of public transparency in the process of developing this plan. Does this mean that River Road would need to be expanded from 2 to 4 lanes all the way to Potomac Village? We would strongly oppose this. Similar concerns were expressed by residents in other areas of the County during the June 17th public hearing.

We also have concerns about creeping road widenings of other roads such as Piney Meetinghouse Rd (as listed in the Master-Plan-of-Highways-and-Transitways-Approved-and-Adopted, December 2018)

Having said that, there are many admirable aspects to this document, and we sincerely thank those who clearly put much time and thought into its creation and revisions. We applaud the sections on racial equity, public health, social inclusion, walkable neighborhoods, the role of arts and culture, and the transportation focus on mass transit and non-motorized vehicles.

However, the vision of this document is evolutionary rather than visionary. What is missing are truly visionary goals such as, for example, undergrounding parts of Rockville Pike to create parks with walking and biking paths – similar to Boston’s “Big Dig” project which moved a highway underground and created more than 300 acres of open land. We are certain that other visionary goals could have been part of this plan if best-of-breed national/international examples and more community input had been pursued and incorporated.

We completely reject the premise that the county will inevitably become more urban. Certainly, the county will become more urban if this plan is implemented as written. However, the authors’ present this outcome not only as a *fait accompli*, but as the desired outcome based upon their personal preference (and developer interests) for a more urban county. We reject that a more urban county is an outcome that we should strive towards.

Regarding affordable housing, we support Executive Elrich’s comment in his June 10 letter to Council President Hucker that,

“Montgomery County residents are confused and inadequately informed about Thrive Montgomery 2050 and know little, if anything, about the Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative’s complicated rezoning proposals that will make sweeping changes to their neighborhoods. I request that the Council separate the two projects and ask the Planning Board to stop work on elaborate rezoning proposals that would implement Thrive Montgomery before the plan has even been approved.”

We echo the County Executive’s comment that, where increased development (urbanism) is proposed “...the plan must include actions that are restorative and regenerative as opposed to simply doing less harm by “minimizing the negative externalities associated with the development of land and intensification of its uses...”

The mantra expressed in this plan is growth, growth, growth (whether economic, business, or population). Instead, this plan should be designed around the mantra of “sustainable growth”. That is, how can we grow our quality of life in a sustainable manner within the physical limits of our environment? Not adhering to sustainable growth is how we ended up with the global warming crisis. Not adhering to sustainable growth is why the Chesapeake Bay is polluted. Not adhering to sustainable growth is why our air quality is poor, why we have traffic gridlock at times, why we have contaminants in our drinking water, and why we have degraded natural areas.

Astonishingly, the County water supply is mentioned only once, on page 144 (aside from quoting from the Wedges and Corridors plan). Our drinking water sources need to

be protected by new Drinking Water Special Protection Areas, downzoning, purchase of land outright or via eminent domain, enhanced tax credit for conservation easements, etc.

Other areas addressing environmental protections are incomplete and inadequate. For example, walkable neighborhoods do not by definition mean pleasant or healthy neighborhoods. Downtown Manhattan is walkable, but not everyone considers a walk in a concrete jungle while breathing automobile, bus, and truck exhaust to be a pleasant or healthy experience.

It is disturbing that in the Parks and Recreation section, the plan had only one photograph of a natural area being used for passive recreation, the most popular park activity according to the last Parks survey. This reflects the plans bias towards active recreation such as sports. Many of us were never involved in organized sports and became upstanding, productive, and healthy members of the community.

In the Public Hearing Draft Plan from last fall, the “Healthy and Sustainable Environment” chapter was almost an afterthought, being the 6th of 9 chapters. In this Planning Board Draft, apparently most of our environmental problems have been solved in the last six months since the “Healthy and Sustainable Environment” chapter has disappeared. There needs to be a chapter on the environment, and it needs to be Chapter 1. A healthy, sustainable environment is the foundation for our quality of life.

The draft has a lot ink dedicated to Parks, but Parks are only a subset of the County, and residents are entitled to a healthy and sustainable environment not only in our parks, but where they live, work, and play.

Some other ideas we would like to see either in this plan or in the various functional plans:

- We need a goal and policy to require returnable bottles. The Northeast has done this for decades. We need to stand up to the retail stores who have pushed back on this forever.
- We need a goal and policy that retailers can only sell products in packaging that can be recycled by the County. The County needs to use its bully pulpit in this regard.
- We need conservation measures to be enacted to conserve water (for example, an “excessive use” charge which would a higher charge that kicks in when the

“standard” per person daily usage is exceeded – to discourage lawn watering, for example). The County needs to work with WSSC on this. We need a County-wide education program about the need to conserve water.

- We need to change the County code to allow grey-water systems and composting toilets. Montgomery County likes to think of ourselves as being ahead of the curve, but we are years behind California in allowing grey-water systems.
- We need to achieve nighttime light levels near natural and residential areas that protect wildlife and enhance our ability to enjoy the night sky.
- We need at least a pause to re-evaluate the need for so-called “stream restorations” which convert natural (although not necessarily pristine) areas into engineered stormwater conveyances.
- We need to develop incentives for developers to daylight piped and cement culvert-bound streams during the redevelopment process.
- We need to conduct a study of the Special Protection Area (SPA) program law, regulations and implementation and determine what changes are needed to achieve the original SPA program goals and objectives. Our drinking water sources need to be protected by new Drinking Water Special Protection Areas that may include down-zoning, purchase of land outright or via eminent domain, enhanced tax credit for conservation easements, lower impervious surface caps, greater stormwater management requirements, etc.
- We need to change the County Forest Conservation Law and regulations intended to preserve specimen and champion trees so that entire forest ecosystems are preserved. Saving a few “significant” trees while clear cutting forests by both public and private entities is not acceptable.
- We need to perform outreach and develop incentives to conserve forests on private lands and we need to increase penalties for violations of the Forest Conservation Law.
- We need to develop a long-range forest quality management plan to address habitat fragmentation, deer pressure, invasive threats, and the forest’s capacity to withstand and mitigate climate impacts.

- We need a policy of increasing total tree canopy and total forest acreage.
- We need to create a million-tree initiative for Montgomery County to plant 1,000,000 native trees on public and private lands by 2030.
- Beyond the RainScapes program and WQPC rebates, we need to perform educational outreach and provide even more incentives to cultivate private land by sustainable methods including conservation landscaping, organic lawns, native plants, meadow restoration, and use of zero-emission electric tools.

The need for safe passage for wildlife between protected areas is critical to ensuring the healthy genetic diversity of animal and plant populations to withstand the challenges of habitat fragmentation and climate change. Residents should be encouraged to replace traditional turf lawns with conservation landscaping using native plants to support native pollinators and birds and control stormwater runoff. County codes should be revised so that residents do not get citations from a Housing Code Inspector that they are violating Chapter 58 of the Montgomery County Code by permitting weeds and grass to grow in excess of 12 inches when, in fact, they have replaced their turf grass with an area of conservation landscaping - we know people who have had this happen to them.

With respect to reuse, county solid waste transfer stations should allow residents to remove items (such as electronics, metal items, etc.) for reuse instead of shipping it away for recycling. Hobbyists can repair electronics, and do it yourselfers can find uses for metal scraps and perfectly good metal filing cabinets, for example. This will presumably require signing of liability waivers, but this is already routinely done at Parks events.

For the sake of public health, we need to change how WSSC sewage overflows are reported and how the public is notified:

1) Allowing overflows under 5,000 gal to be reported only quarterly or annually is unreasonably lax. A spill of that size would potentially have disastrous health effects for people and pets in a small stream. ANY overflow where sewage has reached surface water of any category (not just the ones listed) should have to be reported immediately. Any spill where raw sewage enters any surface water is a risk to public health - this is a giant loophole where someone can do a paper and pencil justification for claiming there is no risk to public health ("It was only X gallons which would be diluted by Y factor, etc."). If you dump 1 gallon of raw sewage where a child is playing in the water, that is a public health risk.

2) The current public notification requirement is woefully inadequate. The average person does not regularly check the health department websites. The requirement for notifications "WITHIN A REASONABLE TIME" is open to abuse - it should be explicit such as "within one hour of the event discovery". A requirement should be added to notify all local news outlets within one hour of the "discovery" of the overflow (especially radio and TV stations - so that the information can be immediately broadcast). Plus, local governments should be required to send health notifications to subscribers of their emergency alert service (For example, see - <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OEMHS/AlertMontgomery/index.html>). Sewage overflow reports should be reported as seriously and routinely as air quality alerts.

3) Another enhancement should be a requirement for more public transparency in overflow reporting. Currently, one can go to the WSSC (Washington Suburban Sanitation Commission) web site (<https://www.wsscwater.com/customer-service/emergency-sewerwater-problems/sanitary-sewer-overflow-reports.html>) and see reports of individual overflow events. However, it is next to impossible (without spending hours poring over the data) to determine the total overflows by individual county or watershed. That level of detail is absolutely available - it can be requested and received via a spreadsheet from WSSC that can be easily sorted by the above, but this spreadsheet format should be posted to the WSSC web site, not be accessible only via special request. The spreadsheet format allows one to easily determine the cumulative volume of overflows.

The county must get serious and honest about reporting true air quality conditions to residents. Currently, Montgomery County has a single air quality monitoring station in the middle of an open field near Lake Frank surrounded by forest - not exactly where most people breathe the air (<https://youtu.be/FJNRY6TWmaU> & <https://montgomerycivic.org/files/CFN201803.pdf#page=4>). The county needs a network of near-road air quality monitoring stations to accurately enable assessments of public health and to daylight equity issues.

The main driver of ecological degradation in our streams is inadequate stormwater control from uncontrolled development. Our stormwater control is woefully inadequate today, and there is nothing in the Plan that addresses how we are to improve stormwater control while drastically increasing building density. Already, our streams are being converted by the destructive practice cynically known as "stream restoration" into engineered stormwater drainage ditches using heavy construction equipment. The plan must contain more than lip service about protecting the environment.

While this is a 30-year plan, it is worth asking what do we want the county to look like 100 or more years from now? In the next three General Plans after this one, will the recommendation simply be to add more and more growth corridors with higher and higher densities? To put it another way, what is the end game in Montgomery County? Who benefits by building more and more? The answer, of course, is certainly not the average resident. What we are left with is a strategy for never-ending urbanization of the county. If we want more and more of the county to look like downtown Bethesda or Silver Spring, then this plan paves the way.

This plan gives us a fuzzy map (Figure 29) that is so vague as to be useless – the roads and centers are not even labeled. What we are left with is a rush to the notion that undefined corridors should be more densely developed with no mention of capping expansion of those corridors or containing the number and size of additional corridors in the future. (In fact, Figure 29, even states that “The centers of activity shown are not exhaustive of all existing or potential centers.”) If we are serious about the impact of sprawl, we should establish hard boundaries beyond which additional “development” cannot take place. This was done by the city of Portland, Oregon.

In the Parks section, there is entirely too much emphasis on urban/corridor areas and active recreation. We absolutely support more parks in urban and under-served areas. However, this should not be accomplished at the expense of other areas in the county and especially the need for more natural area parks.

Park surveys have shown that the majority of park users want passive recreation opportunities (trail walking, bird watching, etc.), not organized sports. Given the rapidly disappearing open areas in the county, emphasis should be given to acquiring “natural” areas in all parts of the county before they either disappear to development or become too expensive – the county should move aggressively to accomplish this using creative measures such as bond referendums (see Fairfax County). This must be done in all areas in the county, not primarily down county.

There should be a rejection of destructive practices such as “stream restoration” projects in either Parks or other areas of the county. These projects destroy natural areas (even if they aren’t pristine) and do not address the root cause of stream erosion which is uncontrolled stormwater fire-hosing into streams from impervious surfaces. The quick and lower-cost solutions which destroy our natural areas should simply not be allowed. Stormwater control projects should be done outside natural areas in already disturbed areas such as road-sides. “Stream restorations” actually destroy forests rather than protect them. “Stream restorations” destroy natural terrain, turning natural areas

(even degraded ones) into engineered stormwater drainage ditches. The complex web of interactions between fauna, flora, geology, and hydrology that interact in natural areas is irreplaceable and can't be recreated by engineering projects using bulldozers and trucked-in material to create artificial structures in our natural areas.

The plan is steeped in urban planner-speak that is, at times, unintelligible to the general public. For example: "A focus on form and adaptability rather than use and density in regulatory systems..." (p. 71). We suggest a re-write using language that the average resident can understand.

While it sounds nice to imagine that planners will engage everyone in the decision making, our experience is that sometimes this engagement is merely to check off the box of public input. In recent years, residents have their say at public hearings and then planners do what they want, usually favoring development interests over the interests of residents. If this plan wants to give residents a voice, then we suggest that residents, not the Planning Board, be allowed to vote on decisions impacting their communities. Alternatively, there could be equal numbers of Planning Board members and voting representatives from communities for each development project decision.

In the final analysis, what we have been given is a plan which is, for the most part, a present to developers wrapped up with a nice bow.

WMCCA's Vision

Our vision for 2050 is a County where we don't compare our growth to other jurisdictions, but where our main goal and indicator of success is not growth but is quality of life, quality of environment and being at the top of the Happiness Ratings using the same metrics as the World Happiness Report.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Happiness_Report#Methods_and_philosophy)

Our vision for 2050 is a County which is not developer-centric but rather is resident-centric and environment-centric, where the focus is on sustainable growth, not simply population, business, and job growth. The current draft Plan treats population growth as an expectation, rather than either a desired goal or a potential problem. We ask the question, "Is population growth a desired goal or a potential problem to be addressed?" Job and business growth must only be pursued on a sustainable basis, that is, only if they can be attained without negatively impacting quality of life (including, for example, air and water quality, traffic, and yes, our happiness rating) and without negatively impacting the environmental quality of our natural areas (for example, no stormwater or other water quality impacts, no ecological degradation, etc.).

Our vision for 2050 is a County where countering climate change, which is an existential threat, is the top priority and where a “Healthy and Sustainable Environment” is actually a chapter in the General Plan.

Our vision for 2050 is a County that has taken stronger actions to achieve sustainability. We believe that sustainability should be a co-prerequisite with economic growth.

Our vision for 2050 is a County that has maintained the green Wedges & Corridors structure from the current General Plan rather than being “disappeared” from the current draft document.

It is stated that “Thrive Montgomery 2050 proposes to reinforce this web of centers and corridors by focusing growth around transit stations and along the major corridors.” What exactly are all the “centers of activity” and what exactly are the physical boundaries of corridors? The map in Figure 29 does not even label roads. In fact, the outer extension of River Road (we think) is shown as a “Growth Corridor”, yet it is apparently outside of “Corridor-Focused Growth” area. We note other roads (again, not labeled) that are shown as black “Growth Corridors” but are outside the area of Corridor-Focused Growth. **What exactly is the difference between a “Growth Corridor” and “Corridor-Focused Growth”?** The cynical interpretation is that “Growth Corridor” roads outside “Corridor-Focused Growth” areas in Figure 29 are the first step for their future inclusion into “Corridor-Focused Growth” areas – this is creeping urbanism. Thus, it appears that this plan (and future plans if they follow suit) dooms us to a County of all corridors and no green Wedges.

The 1993 General Plan Refinement states that, “...Wedges of open space, farmland, and lower density residential uses have been preserved.” (p. 8). Unfortunately, in spite of this sentiment, open space and lower density areas have not been preserved, and even the Agricultural Reserve is under attack by proposals, for example, for large solar facilities. The 1993 document further says, “The Wedge is as important today as it was 30 years ago. It permits the renewal of our air and water resources and the protection of natural habitats. It is very much the green lung of Montgomery County. ...The proximity of the Wedge to the Corridor provides a sanctuary for those who need a change from the concrete and glass of more urban settings.” (p. 9). Or, to put it a different way, the proposed Growth Corridors and Corridor-Focused Growth areas may be places to shop or work, but many people will not want to live there. The 1993 Plan also says, “The Wedge provides a low density and rural housing opportunity which adds to the diversity of land use in Montgomery County.” (p. 9). We support that sentiment.

Our vision for 2050 is a County in which the creation of wildlife and plant corridors has the same priority as development corridors. The need for safe passage for wildlife between protected areas is critical to ensuring the healthy genetic diversity of animal and plant populations to withstand the challenges of habitat fragmentation and climate change. Residents will be encouraged to replace traditional turf lawns with conservation landscaping using native plants to support native pollinators and birds and control stormwater runoff. County codes will be revised so that residents do not get citations from a Housing Code Inspector that they are violating Chapter 58 of the Montgomery County Code by permitting weeds and grass to grow in excess of 12 inches when, in fact, they have replaced their turf grass with an area of conservation landscaping.

Our vision for 2050 is a County in which low density and rural areas in the County (those areas outside the Planned Sewer Envelope) are afforded special protection since these areas contain watersheds which contribute drinking water to millions of people in the DC area from the WSSC Water Filtration Plants and the Little Seneca Lake emergency drinking water reservoir. Our drinking water sources need to be protected by new Drinking Water Special Protection Areas (SPAs) within which would be downzoning, purchase of land outright or via eminent domain, enhanced tax credit for conservation easements, and removal of these areas from the planned sewer envelope, for example.

In the absence of action by the EPA, we envision the County working with the state to develop health-based standards for PFAS (among the so-called “Forever Chemicals”) and other chemicals in water and food. “New testing conducted on seafood in Saint Mary’s County, Maryland and drinking water in Montgomery County reveals high levels of PFAS chemicals, according to results released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). The chemicals damage the immune system and may make consumers more vulnerable to COVID-19 and/or aggravate COVID afflictions. PEER also tested drinking water for 36 PFAS at homes in three locations in Montgomery County: two in Bethesda and one in Poolesville. The first Bethesda site had 26.94 ppt of ten PFAS, while the second Bethesda site had 48.35 ppt of 11 PFAS. The Poolesville site had 15.4 ppt of seven different PFAS. The levels detected at the two homes in Bethesda were higher than the levels found by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), which tested drinking water for 18 PFAS at its Potomac and Patuxent Filtration Plants.” (<https://www.peer.org/more-pfas-found-in-maryland-water-and-seafood/>)

Furthermore, the residents in these rural and low-density areas that have well water need to have their groundwater supplies protected. To protect our drinking water supply from sewer line spills and leaks, these areas should be protected by policies such as

severe limitations on sewer line extensions (including closing loopholes and backdoors in the Water & Sewer Plan such as the abutting mains policy and the Potomac peripheral sewer service policy) coupled with education for septic system owners on proper care and maintenance of their systems. Our vision for 2050 is for a County that is no longer totally negligent on this issue - to date there are no required septic inspections, no required pump-outs, and no proactive education programs. The county is forcing our 30,000 septic system owners to go it alone until their systems fail and the County can recommend sewer line extensions as the only option.

Currently, there is little protection for well water quality in Montgomery County and the state. Our vision is that the County ask our legislators to support a bill similar to the Maryland Private Well Safety Program bill (HB1069) which is for rental properties only.

At a high level, the Maryland Private Well Safety program, if extended to include non-rental properties will: (1) require the state to offer well owners financial and technical assistance with well water quality testing and remediation when contamination is found, (2) create an online well water quality database to give the public a better sense of the quality of our groundwater resources, (3) require disclosure of well water quality test results upon property transfer, (4) require owners to test and disclose well water quality every three years, (5) require the state to conduct source tracking of common contaminants found in ground water and annual public reporting on the program, building transparency around the state's groundwater protection efforts.

Our vision is for the County to help fund research for new, innovative septic systems at the University of Maryland. Also, in the rural and low-density areas, our vision is for severe limitations on new road construction and road widening, and stricter requirements to control stormwater and impervious surfaces than within the planned sewer envelope.

And our vision is that the County reaffirm its opposition to a second Potomac River crossing in western Montgomery County.

Our vision for 2050 is a County where all decisions and policies are informed by science. Decisions will be based on the fact that any amount of impervious surface degrades our water quality (as exemplified by the continuing battle over Ten Mile Creek). So-called "stream restorations" will be banned (both inside and outside of the MS4 Permit) - with some exceptions such as "daylighting" piped streams and concrete culvert removal - which convert our natural areas into engineered stormwater conveyances with no ecological uplift and without addressing the root cause of the problem - stormwater from impervious surfaces in over-developed areas. Finally, it will

be acknowledged that there are better ways to protect the Bay than to trash our natural areas and parks by doing so-called “stream restorations”. Our vision is that, if stormwater runoff is mandated to be controlled outside of stream valleys, there would be no reason for stream construction work.

Our vision for 2050 is a County where the use of synthetic turf fields is prohibited. Plastic synthetic turf is a urethane-backed carpet of colored plastic blades placed on top of a layer of rocks. The plastic contains known toxic chemicals such as heavy metals, phthalates, UV inhibitors, colorants, and flame retardants. Such carpets usually have anywhere from 30,000 to 50,000 pulverized, used tires added for cushioning impacts from falls. The tire crumbs contain additional known toxic substances including lead, mercury, benzothiazoles, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, carbon black (a known carcinogen), and volatile organic compounds like benzene. A growing number of studies underscore the danger posed by synthetic surfaces to public health and the environment. The turf industry acknowledges that dangerous heavy metals such as lead are found in dust from playing fields. There is no safe level of lead exposure to children according to the CDC. Aside from chemical exposure, safety is a paramount concern, such as over-heating, unexpected failure of infill to cushion falls, sanitation problems (spit, snot, blood that is never cleaned from the plastic carpet), and injuries such as skin abrasions and more frequent joint injury to knees and ankles.

Our vision for 2050 is a County committed to actually enforcing County codes and regulations across the board. We have witnessed an erosion of this principle. Waivers to requirements are being granted and rulings are being made in a seemingly arbitrary and capricious manner, from stormwater management waivers to conservation easement waivers, to monetary fines for forest conservation easement violations that are so low that they have no deterrent value whatsoever - a mere slap on the wrist.

While there will always be extenuating circumstances that warrant a common-sense exception, these cases should be the vanishingly small rather than the increasingly common rule that we are witnessing. Our vision for 2050 is a County where rules are enforced, not ignored by whim. Our vision is where the practice of revolving door employment is severely restricted - this happens when County employees leave to work for the companies they had been working with or regulating.

Our vision for 2050 is a County that is finally honest about air and water quality conditions. The county must commit to honestly reporting true air quality conditions to residents. Currently, we have a single air quality monitoring station in the middle of an open field near Lake Frank surrounded by forest - not exactly where most people

breathe the air. Our vision is for a network of near-road air quality monitoring stations to accurately enable assessments of public health and to daylight equity issues.

Our vision is that Code Red days are declared if any ONE of the monitoring stations in the greater DC area goes over the trigger level, not the current, meaningless practice where Code Red days are declared by averaging all monitoring stations. Residents have a right to know if there is a health threat from a high reading at ANY monitoring station. Loudon County air might be great on a given day while the air quality in Montgomery County might be horrible on the same day - when the results are averaged, residents get the message that all is fine.

Our vision for 2050 is for emergency text, email, and radio alerts for sewer overflows similar to air quality alerts. In 2019, the WSSC sewer system spilled over 5 million gallons of raw sewage, almost 9M gallons in 2018, and over 5M gallons in 2017. So much for people who say septic systems are bad for the environment.

(ref: Wash Post: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/local-opinions/a-frolic-along-the-river-could-be-good-for-your-mental-health-but-bad-for-your-physical-health/2020/10/22/20dfbb86-117e-11eb-ba42-ec6a580836ed_story.html and <https://www.wsscwater.com/customer-service/emergency-sewerwater-problems/sanitary-sewer-overflow-reports.html>)

Our vision for 2050 includes a county government that works to achieve a reduction in noise pollution from Reagan National Airport airplane traffic due to re-routing caused by the ill-conceived NextGen project. Ever since the FAA changed flight patterns without a public hearing or a transition period a few years back, many of our previously peaceful neighborhoods have been subjected to low flying airplane noise to the tune of sometimes one every minute. We would like to see a return to pre-NextGen flight patterns followed by a ten-year notice of intent to change flight paths so that both home buyers and sellers can act accordingly.

Our vision for 2050 concurs with the need to concentrate density along transportation corridors to encourage the use of mass transit. However, our vision also balances any up-zoning along development corridors and centers with downzoning in other areas. This includes the protection of our low-density and rural areas outside of the sewer envelope from creeping sewer sprawl (and resulting development pressure to increase zoning density once sewer lines are extended).

We don't envision "flexible regulations and zoning controls" and "flexible zoning initiatives". We don't have flexible speed limits for a reason. Regulations and zoning controls should be fixed, not flexible.

West Montgomery County Citizens Association (WMCCA) Specific Comments on Sections of the Plan

INTRODUCTION:

"This plan outlines strategies to accommodate growth in ways that not only make room for new residents but also improve the quality of life for the people who are already here. It anticipates a county that inevitably will become more urban...." (p. 4)

WMCCA Comment: We strongly reject the premise that the county will inevitably become more urban. Certainly, the county will become more urban if this plan is implemented as written. However, the authors present this outcome not only as a fait accompli, but as the desired outcome based upon their personal preference for a more urban county. We reject that a more urban county is an outcome that we should strive towards. The envisioning of the county being more urban should be the decision of local residents, not the authors of the General Plan or developer interests.

WMCCA Comment: We are pleased that the comment, "Compact form of development, coupled with conservation of the Agricultural Reserve, has proven to be better for the environment resulting in improved stream water quality," was removed from this draft since it is demonstrably not true in Montgomery County. With compact development comes more impervious surfaces in a given watershed which leads to degraded stream water quality. Unless compact (read: more dense) development is balanced by down-zoning of other areas, the total amount of impervious surface in the county will increase. We call for down-zoning and increased protections in the low density and rural areas outside of the planned sewer envelope to balance the proposed increased density areas.

"Montgomery County experienced the slowest rate of business formation in the Washington region from 2010 to 2019." (p. 8)

WMCCA Comment: Simply saying that we lag behind other jurisdictions such as Fairfax in the number of businesses attracted in a given time frame does not necessarily make this a problem if our overriding concern is (as we believe it should be) sustainable growth.

A glaring omission here is an acknowledgement that, even without the effects of climate change, we are already facing the effects of over-development to the detriment of our quality of life and natural resources. For example, uncontrolled or grossly inadequate stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces such as roads and roofs are fire-hosing into our streams causing environmental degradation. Adding insult to injury, so-called “stream restorations” are performed which destroy even more of these natural areas.

We should only seek to attract businesses within sustainable growth objectives to protect our health and the natural environment from the effects of overdevelopment. Today, the lack of government oversight and lax regulatory enforcement is to the point of being arbitrary and capricious. Fines are so low that they do not deter future violations of regulations. For example, the maximum fine of \$1,000 for violating a Forest Conservation Easement is just a slap on the wrist. Another example is the liberal use of stormwater management waivers and special exemptions (zoning waivers) for businesses at the expense of residents’ quality of life considerations.

This plan should also acknowledge sins of the past such as approving ZTAs proposed by developers which would allow higher density than existing zoning.

Further, this plan should acknowledge the failure to protect Little Seneca Lake, our emergency drinking water source, from the impacts of overdevelopment in the Clarksburg area. This plan should suggest corrective action.

“Along with aggressive stormwater and forest conservation regulations, these efforts have established a strong framework for the protection of natural resources.” (p. 14)

WMCCA Comment: No one can claim that the county has aggressive stormwater regulations or forest conservation regulations. Our stormwater control is woefully inadequate today (requiring only the control of only about 1 inch of rain in 24 hours for new builds), and there is nothing in the Plan that addresses how we are to improve stormwater control while drastically increasing building density. For the huge number of existing homes, there should be a new regulation that properties must be retrofitted to control storm water to “new build standards” upon property transfer – who pays the cost could be negotiated

between buyer and seller. For commercial property, stormwater control to “new build standards” should be required upon sale. Grandfathering for commercial property should not be allowed. And forest destruction during so-called “stream restoration” should be banned. We should be protecting our existing forests, not bulldozing them and then trying to replant them with saplings.

“We do not have the land available for more suburban subdivisions, so we need to change how we design our communities and transportation network to accommodate new growth.” (p. 32)

WMCCA Comment: Instead of “new growth”, this should say “sustainable growth”.

“With 85 percent of our land already developed or otherwise constrained...” (p. 5)

WMCCA Comment: Figure 2 includes single-family homes in its definition of “constrained areas”. This plan declares war on single-family housing by implying that it is a mistake to have lower density land because there is money to be made by overdevelopment. We disagree with that premise. The county must shift its focus from growth which primarily benefits primarily to only allowing sustainable growth either 1) in those areas where more environmental damage (e.g. to stream water quality) will not be inflicted, or 2) in areas which are first designated as “stormwater control zones” which would require, for example, on-site control of stormwater from 100 year (or greater) storm events.

“Our quality of life depends on the ability to attract and retain employers and the employees they need.” (p. 5)

WMCCA Comment: This is a rather perverse statement – that we need more people to improve our quality of life. This might be true only if adding more employers and employees does not negatively impact our goal of environmental sustainability. This includes having no negative impact on our natural areas. We should not sacrifice water and air quality, nor accept more overcrowding of roads and schools or other degradations of quality of life simply to simply add jobs.

“Montgomery County experienced the slowest rate of business formation in the Washington region from 2010 to 2019.” (p. 7)

WMCCA Comment: Why are we using the “must keep up with the Jones” mentality? The emphasis should not be on job growth compared to other jurisdictions, but rather sustainability and quality of life. For decades, Fairfax

County emphasized attracting more businesses for job growth (to “broaden the tax base”) and look at what happened: taxes never went down, and the only ones who benefitted were landowners, realtors, and builders, not the average citizen. If you want to compare us with other parts of the region, we need to ask questions such as, “What did their faster rate of business formation do for their quality of life and the environment?”

“In this regard, a stronger focus on walking, biking, and transit infrastructure will be crucial....” (p. 17)

WMCCA Comment: We agree on the need to emphasize transit, walking, and biking. The County has done an extremely poor job of promoting safe walking and biking in the past. Especially in the lower density areas, many roads have no sidewalks or trails alongside them. Even the lack of bicycle racks at retail centers sends the message, “Bikes are not welcome here.” This is not only a public health issue, it is a climate change issue - walking and biking to destinations means less greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles.

WMCCA Comment: Trails for bicycles should be built along all existing and planned rail and bus rapid transit (BRT) corridors. Bicycle trails should be separated from roadways with jersey-type barriers, for example, to completely shield bicycles from vehicular traffic. To only have signs that say “Bicycles may use full lanes” along roads (such as Quince Orchard Road in Gaithersburg) with 40 mpg speed limits is courting more deaths of bicyclists.

Trails in the stream valleys should be natural surface only so as to not add to impervious surface coverage.

“...all residents can benefit from a more active lifestyle supported by an emphasis on transit, walking, and biking, and easy access to parks....” (p. 18)

WMCCA Comment: Increase access to parks by asking for (possibly in exchange for a tax credit) or purchasing (via eminent domain) public access points (i.e., short connector trails between homes from a road or sidewalk to parks. There are miles of parkland that are not easily accessible within neighborhoods because there are extremely limited access trails. Examples include both Muddy Branch and Watts Branch SVPs. Note: Muddy Branch SVP does have a few access trails between homes, but these are signed as being private. It should not be allowed to have private access trails to public parks.

“...the damage caused by the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events have highlighted the importance of taking steps to strengthen our economic, social, and environmental resilience without further delay.” (p. 21)

WMCCA Comment: To only point the finger of blame at climate change is highly disingenuous. Upgrades to our infrastructure to handle existing weather conditions have been woefully inadequate for decades. Some of our stream valleys are highly degraded due to decades of inadequate stormwater control regulations - yes, this will be made worse by climate change. We expect more intense storms caused by global warming. To lessen the burden on the County's financial resources, a Thrive 2050 goal should be to enact more stringent stormwater control requirements for new build homes and home renovations (i.e., much more than the current 1 inch or so of rain in 24 hours). For the huge number of existing homes, there should be a new regulation that properties must be retrofitted to control storm water to “new build standards” upon property transfer – who pays the cost could be negotiated between buyer and seller. For commercial property, stormwater control to “new build standards” should be required upon sale. Grandfathering for commercial property should not be allowed.

WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

WHAT IS THRIVE MONTGOMERY 2050?

“Thrive Montgomery 2050 does not abandon or reject the Wedges and Corridors concept but instead modernizes it to remain relevant.”

WMCCA Comment: If “to remain relevant” means opening up more of the county to overdevelopment to the detriment of our quality of life and limited remaining natural areas, then this plan remains relevant. This plan paves the way to expanding development corridors while shrinking green wedges.

Overarching objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050

“Montgomery County is growing more slowly than in past decades, but our population is still projected by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to increase by about 200,000 people over the next 30 years.”

WMCCA Comment: Is population growth a desired goal? First, this growth projection is presented without evidence. What are the underlying assumptions for this projection? Second, the plan treats population growth as an expectation, rather than as either a desired goal or a potential problem. As written, the plan assumes we have no control over our own destiny. However, do County residents want the population size to increase? Were residents surveyed on their opinion? Would a higher population lead to a lower quality of life, regardless of where in the County they live? Rather than planning around an assumed population growth, would current residents prefer to set goals of sustainable growth including sustainable population growth, sustainable economic growth, sustainable/increased natural resources protection, and sustainable/increased quality of life? We recommend gathering citizen input on this issue, perhaps with a county-wide survey of residents. And, of course, a survey should be crafted so as to not lead to a desired response.

“The way we think about growth needs to change.”

WMCCA Comment: We agree. The focus should be on sustainable growth, not simply growth (which the plan seems to define as population, job, commercial building, housing, and density growth), given that we have finite resources (both natural and economic). Instead of saying, “The way we think about growth needs to change,” we should make a more declarative statement such as, “We need to think in terms of sustainable growth. Sustainable growth is defined as growth that both enhances the quality of life for residents and also enhances the environmental health of our remaining natural areas (which most certainly does NOT include the destructive practice of so-called “stream restoration).” For each “item” in the plan, is the above reflected? See the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_Development_Goals)

“This plan... anticipates a county that inevitably will become more urban...”

WMCCA Comment: We completely reject the premise that the county will inevitably become more urban. Certainly, the county will become more urban if this plan is implemented as written. However, the authors’ present this outcome not only as a fait accompli, but as the desired outcome based upon their personal preference for a more urban county. We reject that a more urban county is an outcome that we should strive towards.

Economic performance and competitiveness

“The Plan recognizes that our quality of life depends on the ability to attract and retain employers and the employees they need.”

WMCCA Comment: Change to read, “The Plan recognizes that our quality of life depends not only on the principle of full employment with living wages, but also on maintaining and enhancing our environment to provide clean air and water, as well as protecting our natural areas for plant and animal life and passive recreation.”

“The total number of jobs in the county grew by five percent from 2004 to 2019, while 20 similarly sized counties across the country grew their employment base by an average of 21 percent. Montgomery County experienced the slowest rate of business formation in the Washington region from 2010 to 2019.”

WMCCA Comment: These comparisons with other areas in total job growth and business formation are irrelevant. The metric we should use to compare the county with other areas should be measurements related to attainment of full employment, living wages, and metrics of air quality, water quality, and environmental protection.

“This weak household income and job growth shrinks the county’s tax base, constraining its capacity to provide high-quality amenities and services and limiting the ability of many county residents to buy homes, a key tool for building household wealth and investing in their communities.”

WMCCA Comment: This seems to be a developer-centric view meant to scare people into believing that we must grow, grow, grow at all costs. The emphasis must be on sustainability.

For decades, Fairfax County emphasized attracting more businesses for job growth (to “broaden the tax base”) and look at what happened: taxes never went down, and the only ones who benefitted were landowners, realtors, and builders, not the average citizen. If you want to compare us with other parts of the region, we need to ask questions such as, “What did their faster rate of job growth do for their quality of life and the environment?”

“All this is occurring at the same time as large numbers of our residents are reaching retirement age, creating the region’s highest elder-adult dependency ratio. Unless we can attract and retain more young adults, this aging of our workforce will put pressure on the tax base as the proportion of Montgomery County residents in retirement grows and the percentage of residents in their peak earning years shrinks.”

“This demographic shift means that the county’s economic performance will have to get better just to maintain current levels of tax revenue and the services it funds, making economic competitiveness an even more pressing concern.”

WMCCA Comment: This is another development-centric perspective based on the premise that population growth must continue indefinitely while completely ignoring finite environmental limitations. While we agree that there may be short-term pain from the baby boom bubble of older adults, this is only a temporary situation.

Furthermore, approximately half the county’s operating budget is spent on Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). As the population moves away from child-bearing/rearing age, there will be downward need for school funding and hence less need to maintain current levels of tax revenues. This will also, allow a shift of funds from schools to other amenities and services, including those targeted at elder-adults.

Thus, expenses such as “retirement programs for old people” may be more than offset by the lower need for public education expenses which is currently about half our operating budget.

Environmental resilience

“Along with aggressive stormwater and forest conservation regulations, these efforts have established a strong framework for the protection of natural resources.”

WMCCA Comment: This statement is too self-congratulatory and is unwarranted. Unfortunately, there is no acknowledgement that, in spite of our regulations, the protection of our natural resources has been wholly inadequate. For example, the watershed for Seneca Lake, an emergency source of drinking water, has been allowed to develop to the extent that the high percentage of impervious surface guarantees a loss of water quality in the lake and the streams that feed it. The inadequate control of stormwater from developed areas has resulted in the degradation of our streams and natural areas. To add insult to injury, the County and Parks do so-called “stream-restorations” that clear-cut and destroy the forest community in their footprint and destroy the natural character of streams using heavy equipment to straighten them out and armor-plate sections with stones. Chronic underfunding of Parks has resulted in huge areas

being over-run by non-native invasive plants. Plus, ill-advised rulings have allowed construction to take place in protected watershed buffers.

“Despite these policies, the county cannot avoid the impact of global climate change.”

WMCCA Comment: The implication here is that, except for climate change, the county’s natural resources are in great shape and have been protected adequately. Nothing could be further from the truth, and it is disingenuous to put the entire blame on global warming.

Our infrastructure to handle weather conditions have been woefully inadequate for decades. Plus, the county continues to allow development without adequate stormwater control. Some of our stream valleys are highly degraded due to decades of inadequate stormwater control regulations - yes, this will be made worse by climate change. We expect more intense storms caused by global warming. To lessen the burden on the County’s financial resources, a Thrive 2050 goal should be to enact more stringent stormwater control requirements for new build homes and home renovations (i.e., much more than the current 1 inch or so of rain in 24 hours). For the huge number of existing homes, there should be a new regulation that properties must be retrofitted to control storm water to “new build standards” upon property transfer – who pays the cost could be negotiated between buyer and seller. For commercial property, stormwater control to “new build standards” should be required upon property transfer with no grandfathering.

“Precipitation in northeastern United States increased by 55 percent between 1958 and 2016. This trend has meant more frequent violent weather events like the flash flooding that occurred in July 2019, when the D.C. region received a month’s worth of rain in a single day, causing streams to rise 10 feet in less than an hour, inundating vehicles, businesses, roads and closing the Metrorail system.”

WMCCA Comment: While true, this statement tries to put the entire blame for flash flooding on global warming. What is ignored is that continued development with grossly inadequate stormwater control is a major contributor to this problem.

“Thrive Montgomery 2050 builds on the tradition of robust protection of the natural environment.”

WMCCA Comment: This is too rosy a view of past environmental protection in the County. Objectively, it must be said that the tradition is one of inadequate protection of the natural environment. See above comments.

Urbanism as organizing principle

“This approach calls for focusing growth in a limited number of locations rather than dispersing it, avoiding “sprawl.””

WMCCA Comment: In direct contrast to this statement about “growth in a limited number of locations,” Figure 29 states that “The centers of activity shown are not exhaustive of all existing or potential centers.” If you keep designating more and more locations for “focused growth”, that is also the definition of “sprawl”.

This is a developer-centric statement based on the amorphous concept of “focused growth”. If you “focus growth” in certain areas without explicitly preventing growth elsewhere, that is the definition of sprawl.

Our approach should be one of “sustainable growth”. We should be making resident-centric and environment-centric statements where the focus should be on sustainable growth, not simply population, business, and job growth. The current draft Plan treats population growth as an expectation, rather than either a desired goal or a potential problem. Job and business growth must only be pursued on a sustainable basis, that is, only if they can be attained without negatively impacting quality of life (including, for example, air and water quality, traffic, and yes, our happiness rating) and without negatively impacting the environmental quality of our natural areas (for example, no stormwater or other water quality impacts, no ecological degradation, etc.).

If we are serious about the impact of sprawl, we should establish hard boundaries beyond which additional “development” cannot take place.

COMPACT GROWTH CORRIDOR-FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT

“...conserve natural resources and protect the public water supply.” (p. 27)

WMCCA Comment: This aspiration from the Wedges and Corridors Plan has disappeared from this plan. Our vision for 2050 is a County in which low density and rural areas in the County (those areas outside the planned Sewer Envelope) are afforded special protection since these areas contain watersheds which contribute drinking water to millions of people in the DC area from the WSSC

Water Filtration Plants and the Little Seneca Lake emergency drinking water reservoir. Astonishingly, the County water supply is mentioned only once, on page 144 (aside from quoting from the Wedges and Corridors plan). Our drinking water sources need to be protected by new Drinking Water Special Protection Areas, downzoning, purchase of land outright or via eminent domain, enhanced tax credit for conservation easements, etc.

WMCCA Comment: The county must actively work with WSSC to propose and implement watershed protection plans for those watersheds that feed into WSSC Water Filtration Plants (for example, as an alternative to the previously proposed mid-Potomac River intake extension). This should include enhancements and retrofits such as green streets, increased tree canopy, and green stormwater management. This must NOT include so-called “stream restorations” which convert natural (although not necessarily pristine) areas into engineered stormwater drainage ditches.

In the absence of action by EPA, we envision the County working with the state to develop health-based standards for PFAS chemicals (among the so-called “Forever Chemicals”) in water and food.”

“New testing conducted on seafood in Saint Mary’s County, Maryland and drinking water in Montgomery County reveals high levels of PFAS chemicals, according to results released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). The chemicals damage the immune system and may make consumers more vulnerable to COVID-19 and/or aggravate COVID afflictions.

PEER also tested drinking water for 36 PFAS at homes in three locations in Montgomery County: two in Bethesda and one in Poolesville. The first Bethesda site had 26.94 ppt of ten PFAS, while the second Bethesda site had 48.35 ppt of 11 PFAS. The Poolesville site had 15.4 ppt of seven different PFAS. The levels detected at the two homes in Bethesda were higher than the levels found by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), which tested drinking water for 18 PFAS at its Potomac and Patuxent Filtration Plants.”

[\(https://www.peer.org/more-pfas-found-in-maryland-water-and-seafood/\)](https://www.peer.org/more-pfas-found-in-maryland-water-and-seafood/)

Furthermore, the residents in rural and low-density areas that have well water need to have their groundwater supplies protected. To protect their drinking water supply from sewer line leaks and overflows, these areas should be accorded policies such as severe limitations on sewer line extensions (including

closing loopholes and backdoors in the Water & Sewer Plan such as the abutting mains policy and the Potomac peripheral sewer service policy) coupled with education for septic system owners on proper care and maintenance of their systems. Our vision for 2050 is for a County that is no longer totally negligent on this issue - to date there are no required septic inspections, no required pump-outs, and no proactive education programs. The county is forcing our 30,000 septic system owners to go it alone until their systems fail and the County can recommend sewer line extensions as the only option.

Currently, there is little protection for well water quality in Montgomery County and the state. Our vision is that the County ask our legislators to support a bill similar to the Maryland Private Well Safety Program bill (HB1069) which is for rental properties only.

At a high level, the Maryland Private Well Safety program, if extended to include non-rental properties will: (1) require the state to offer well owners financial and technical assistance with well water quality testing and remediation when contamination is found, (2) create an online well water quality database to give the public a better sense of the quality of our groundwater resources, (3) require disclosure of well water quality test results upon property transfer, (4) require owners to test and disclose well water quality every three years, (5) require the state to conduct source tracking of common contaminants found in ground water and annual public reporting on the program, building transparency around the state's groundwater protection efforts.

“The excision of the Route 29 corridor effectively directed new public and private investment away from the East County and toward the established urban ring and I-270 corridor. As a result, the I-270 corridor has benefited from successive cycles of investment and reinvestment, even as other corridors – including Georgia Avenue, where Metrorail’s Red Line was built – were largely left behind.” (p. 28)

WMCCA Comment: The authors certainly hold a developer-centric view of the County. When it is stated that “the I-270 corridor has benefited from successive cycles of investment and reinvestment”, they do not say who has benefited. The “corridor” is not a resident. Clearly, the only beneficiaries of the investment are the commercial property owners, not the ordinary residents who are regularly stuck in traffic in the I-270 corridor and who suffer the health consequences of the exhaust pollution plume and noise on either side of I-270. And now, because the “the I-270 corridor has benefited from successive cycles of investment and reinvestment”, our Governor Hogan is trying to ram through the addition of 4 more car lanes in the I-270 corridor. Anyone living in the auto exhaust pollution plume

in the I-270 corridor will tell you that the last thing we need is more of the type of “investment and re-investment” the authors speak of near where they live and drive.

“Thrive Montgomery 2050 proposes a recommitment to concentrating growth in downtowns, town centers, rural villages, and intensively developed centers of activity, or nodes, along major transportation corridors to maximize the efficient use of land and create Complete Communities.” (p. 29)

WMCCA Comment: The emphasis should be on sustainable growth, one component of which might be compact growth. Any up-zoning for “concentrating growth” should be balanced by downzoning in other areas. Rather than “concentrating growth” the goal should be “containing growth”. Concentrating growth without containing growth is just more sprawl.

Figure 29: Corridor-focused growth (p. 31)

WMCCA Comment: Figure 29 shows a “growth corridor” along River Road (presumably, since none of the roads are labeled) from the District line all the way to Potomac Village. WMCCA was never consulted in making River Road in our area a “growth corridor” nor in designating Potomac Village as a “potential center of activity”. We don’t know if these are necessarily good things or bad things, but we object to the Planning Board inflicting their vision on residents with absolutely no collaboration. Does this mean that River Road would need to be expanded from 2 to 4 lanes all the way to Potomac Village? We would strongly oppose this.

“Concentrate growth in centers of activity along corridors through compact, infill development and redevelopment to maximize efficient use of land.” (p. 32)

“Amend land use, design, and zoning regulations, including the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, to remove regulatory barriers and permit corridor-focused compact development. Appropriate densities will vary but should be sufficient to support, at a minimum, the efficient provision of transit service along these corridors.”

WMCCA Comment: This plan promotes the gradual “Bethesda-ization” of corridors by up-zoning (increasing zoning density). Transit service should be established BEFORE, not AFTER any increase in density is allowed. The reverse has always occurred in the past as an afterthought. As written, Thrive Montgomery is declaring war on single-family homes. If we follow the money, only developers stand to profit from this plan, not the residents. The acceptance of more housing should be the decision of residents, not the authors of the

General Plan or developer interests. To meet what should be our objective of sustainable growth, for every up-zoned area, there should be an equal down-zoned area. The down-zoned areas should be given Transfer of Developable Rights (TDRs), similar to what was done in the Ag Reserve, that can be sold to developers in the up-zoned areas. Without a balance between up-zoning and down-zoning, the overall density in the County will continued ratcheting up with no end in sight.

In addition, tax breaks (such as multi-year tax abatements) should not be given to developers - they need to pay their own way and not be subsidized by taxpayers.

WMCCA Comment: At a minimum, any efforts to “Amend land use, design, and zoning regulations” should 1) better protect our drinking water supplies in those watershed areas that feed into WSSC Water Filtration Plants and Little Seneca Lake (an emergency drinking water source) and 2) better protect rural and low-density areas outside the planned sewer envelope from sprawl.

WMCCA Comment: Proposing the wholesale removal of regulatory barriers is a non-starter. This is a dog whistle for developers. We need regulations so that we don’t end looking like Tysons Corner. The reason we have (and need more effective) so-called “regulatory barriers” is to protect quality of life metrics (e.g., air and drinking water quality, green space, etc.) and the environmental quality of our natural areas (e.g., to hopefully prevent stormwater impacts).

“Improve the environmental sustainability of growth by encouraging infill and redevelopment to curb sprawl and bring areas built out in an era with little or no environmental regulations up to robust standards for stormwater management and other state-of-the-practice environmental standards.”

WMCCA Comment: We appreciate the recognition that current stormwater management standards are inadequate. However, it should be required that areas of inadequate stormwater management be retrofitted before allowing a net increase in impervious surface in any sub-watershed.

“Limit growth beyond corridors to compact, infill development and redevelopment in Complete Communities to prevent sprawl. Apply principles of urbanism at an appropriate scale along a rural-to-urban transect as outlined in the Complete Communities chapter.”

WMCCA Comment: Figure 29 states that “The centers of activity shown are not exhaustive of all existing or potential centers.” If you keep designating more and more locations for “focused growth”, that is also the definition of “sprawl”.

Continuing to add more Complete Communities over time will lead to a merging of Complete Communities into one large urbanized area, i.e., Bethesda-ization.

“Sustainably manage land outside growth corridors and Complete Communities to increase biodiversity, improve the health of natural habitats, preserve privately owned forests, protect watersheds and aquifers, and improve water quality while providing expanded opportunities for outdoor recreation, including vigorous physical activity.” (p.33)

WMCCA Comment: While admirable, these exact same principles should apply to the corridors as well.

“Preserve and enhance the Agricultural Reserve and manage the areas designated within the footprint for a rural pattern of development for the benefit of the entire county.” (p. 33)

- “Maximize the benefits of the Agricultural Reserve through policies designed to ensure the continued viability of farming as an economically productive and sustainable activity, discourage sprawl, facilitate a broad range of outdoor recreation and tourism activities, conserve land and natural resources, and promote practices that advance environmental quality.”
- “Improve access to the Agricultural Reserve for the public to experience and directly benefit from this valuable resource for locally grown food, outdoor recreation, and tourism.”

WMCCA Comment: We reject this attempt to weaken the original purpose of the Ag Reserve which is for farming. We support Executive Elrich’s comments: “The county must reaffirm its unconditional support for the Agricultural Reserve and reject the Planning Board’s attempts to weaken the Reserve by no longer supporting farming as the preferred use in the Reserve. The Planning Board draft recommends that the county “...manage the areas designated within the footprint [of the Reserve] for a rural pattern of development for the benefit of the entire county.” The draft retreats from the support of farming as the preferred use in the Reserve, instead supporting the economic viability of farming and policies to “facilitate a broad range of outdoor recreation and tourism...” p. 20 The General Plan must reaffirm the county’s commitment to the Agricultural Reserve, and to the 1980 Preservation of Agriculture and to the 1980 Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space, Functional Master Plan as it did in the 1993 General Plan Refinement.”

“We must encourage compact, infill development and redevelopment to accommodate anticipated population growth in a way that supports dense, vibrant, energized communities.” (p. 34)

“We must encourage compact, infill development to accommodate anticipated population growth of approximately 200,000 more people over the next 30 years.” (p. 34)

WMCCA Comment: The plan presents this anticipated population growth as a fait accompli while never addressing whether this is desirable or not. If is desirable, that is one thing. If it is not desirable, what policies could discourage the County's population growth. If population growth continues, will development corridors get wider and wider with more and more nodes in future plans?

Unlike the Planning Board, we don't see the projection of 200,000 new residents as a fait accompli. We believe that we can have some control over our own destiny. While no one has a crystal ball, some argue that if the housing supply is not grown, there will be no place for new residents to move into, and the county's population will not grow as projected. This is a decision for residents to make, not the authors of the Thrive 2050 General Plan or developer interests.

Figure 33: Lining corridors with appropriate densities provides housing options. (p. 36)

WMCCA Comment: The "before" image of a tree-lined street with a fully wooded forest on the right is replaced with cheek-to-jowl buildings in the computer graphic image at the bottom. While this may represent a cash cow for developers, it represents a horror show for residents whose local woodland has been clear cut. This is just another example of the developer-centric vision represented by the Thrive 2050 document in its current form.

"Compact growth also improves the environmental performance of both sites and buildings, as it allows the redevelopment of areas developed prior to the adoption of modern stormwater controls and often characterized by high proportions of impervious surface cover." (p. 38)

Figure 35: At Pike and Rose, infill development reduced stormwater runoff flows by over 70 percent

WMCCA Comment: Compact growth is not a requirement to improve environmental performance. Existing buildings can be retrofitted to be made more energy efficient. Sites can be made to control more stormwater if the political will exists. Currently, taxpayers are paying to control stormwater runoff through the Water Quality Protection Charge. This fee should be raised for the larger developments that cause the problem. Figure 35 is misleading since the Pike and Rose site before development was mostly just a large parking lot. The extremely misleading implication is that we need higher density development to reduce stormwater runoff. What is needed is more stringent stormwater control regulations and elimination of waivers.

“Finally, compact, corridor-focused development is essential to the continued protection of the Agricultural Reserve and preservation of land for environmental stewardship and recreation. As our population grows and the region continues to develop, pressure on rural areas and natural systems will increase.”

WMCCA Comment: “As our population grows” is a false premise. There needs to be an honest, open discussion on whether never-ending population growth of the county is desirable given our finite resources.

COMPLETE COMMUNITIES

MIX OF USES AND FORMS

“The separation of uses and associated homogeneity in lot sizes, development standards and building forms, coupled with the commitment to barriers, buffers and transitions had the effect – whether intentional or not – of discouraging connections among people and places and reinforcing racial, social and economic divisions between neighborhoods and parts of the county.” (p. 44)

WMCCA Comment: We completely agree that barriers of the past such as red-lining were abhorrent. However, to completely demonize “The separation of uses and associated homogeneity in lot sizes, development standards and building forms” is unwarranted and unfair. In fact, minimum lot size requirement was used in some areas to protect water quality and drinking water supplies.

“The preservation and protection of neighborhoods dedicated exclusively to detached single-family houses has left residents disconnected from retail and other services, encouraged the construction of stand-alone public facilities, and perpetuated the inefficient use of land.” (p. 44)

WMCCA Comment: We are not necessarily against the concept of allowing small convenience stores, for example, in neighborhoods of detached single-family houses. An example of this is the Vilas area in Madison, Wisconsin.

However, as written, Thrive Montgomery is declaring war on single-family home neighborhoods. The phrase “inefficient use of land” is developer-speak for “I can make more money with denser development.”

If we follow the money, who stands to profit from this? Not the residents. To meet our objective of sustainable growth, for every up-zoned area there should be an equal down-zoned area. The down-zoned areas should be given Transfer of Developable Rights (TDRs), similar to what was done in the Ag Reserve, that

can be sold to developers in the up-zoned areas. Without a balance between up-zoning and down-zoning, the overall density in the County will continued ratcheting up.

“Allow sufficient densities to make a wide range of uses economically viable in complete communities. Encourage densities sufficient to support convenience retail and other local-serving amenities at the neighborhood level. Provide guidance for accommodating additional density in a context-sensitive manner.” (p. 45)

“Encourage higher density economic and housing cooperatives (live/work areas such as home occupations, artist villages, farmers’ market/villages, tech/life-science startup incubators).” (p. 46)

WMCCA Comment: To meet what should be our objective of sustainable growth, for every up-zoned area, there should be an equal down-zoned area. The down-zoned areas should be given Transfer of Developable Rights (TDRs), similar to what was done in the Ag Reserve, that can be sold to developers in the up-zoned areas. Without a balance between up-zoning and down-zoning, the overall density in the County will continued ratcheting up with no end in sight.

“The task of this plan, therefore, is less about identifying new locations for large government or corporate tenants and more about making parts of the county that already have been developed or planned more attractive to residents and workers, which in turn will help attract employers. The central premise is that making individual neighborhoods and districts more complete is among the most effective ways to accomplish this goal.” (p. 47)

WMCCA Comment: We disagree that the task of this plan should be to attract employers. The goal should be to ensure sustainable growth including sustainable population growth, sustainable economic growth, sustainable/increased natural resources protection, and sustainable/increased quality of life.

“This implementation will be primarily market driven, using the development review process to funnel contributions from private developers to streetscape improvements, dedication and construction of parks and public spaces, and the addition of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.” (p. 48)

WMCCA Comment: If “contributions from private developers” means voluntary contributions, we disagree. Such “contributions” should be mandatory as part of the development approval process.

“Opportunities for increased housing diversity outside the defined growth areas will allow neighborhoods to evolve over time to address current and future housing needs and become more racially and socioeconomically integrated.” (p. 49)

WMCCA Comment: This is just a dog whistle for allowing higher density outside of the “defined growth areas”. This is a recipe for creeping over development and environmental degradation.

“In addition, flexible use and development standards that allow variety in lot sizes, building types, and building placement offer an opportunity to increase commercial and residential diversity within neighborhoods.” (p. 50)

WMCCA Comment: We object to the concept of “flexible use and development standards”. This terminology has been substituted for “flexible regulations and zoning controls” which was used in the Public Hearing Draft. We don’t have flexible speed limits for a reason. We don’t want an officer to say, “The speed limit is 25, but I’ll be flexible and make it 45 for you, Mr. Jones.” Regulations and zoning controls should be fixed, not flexible. The implication is that the Planning Board can change regulations and zoning controls based on a whim or developer influence.

“Entitlement-centered rules are well-suited to standardized, cookie-cutter subdivisions but poorly adapted to the design of distinctive projects...” (p. 62)

WMCCA Comment: Standardized, cookie-cutter subdivisions are the product of lack of imagination on the part of the developers. This is not the fault of zoning rules.

“These policies will ensure that the design of our built environment supports our economic competitiveness”

WMCCA Comment: Our policies should ensure that the design of our built environment supports our sustainability (both economic and environmental).

“A focus on form and adaptability rather than use and density in regulatory systems will provide flexibility to respond to changing market conditions and demographic trends and adapt to disruptive technological and environmental change.” (p. 71)

WMCCA Comment: This language is unintelligible to the general public.

“Highly skilled workers in creative or knowledge-intensive occupations are particularly sensitive to quality of place, which includes an open and tolerant attitude toward different people, cultures, and lifestyles along with attention to the built and natural environment and excellent public services.”

WMCCA Comment: It is highly offensive to say that “highly skilled workers...” are particularly sensitive to these items. These are attributes of the average County resident regardless of occupation.

“Strategic investments in these kinds of spaces can increase the economic contribution of arts and culture over the long run by reinforcing the role of the sector in building centers of social gathering and cultural events which in turn attract other business and investment.”

WMCCA Comment: Arts and culture should be seen as important in their own right, not as a means to attract business and investment.

TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

CONNECTING PEOPLE, PLACES, AND IDEAS

WMCCA Comment: We agree with Executive Elrich’s comments that, “The public Hearing draft’s Goal 7.1 recommended that growth be focused on infill development and redevelopment concentrated around rail and BRT, but the Planning Board removed the transit underpinning. The General Plan should return to the Public Hearing draft’s recommendation,” and “The Planning Board’s recommendation to designate communities with limited public transit for urbanization with MMH [missing middle housing] is a new form of sprawl.”

WMCCA Comment: We support the recommendation that no new highways be built. We would add the recommendation to eliminate the proposed environmentally destructive M-83 highway from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways. Better to use those funds for mass transit projects.

WMCCA Comment: In coordination with other jurisdictions in the area, we should encourage people to move closer to their jobs by offering government subsidies for moving expenses, based on need, for people who wish to avoid long commutes. Not only would this reduce demand for new road construction,

but it would also take cars off the road. Our guess is that this would be less expensive than building or widening roads. It is a given that housing costs increase the closer-in you move. That will always be a trade-off: a longer commute with a bigger house vs. a shorter commute with a smaller house or apartment/townhouse. The reason we have suburban sprawl was (and is) the lure of less expensive/larger houses coupled with relatively cheap (arguably government subsidized) gasoline and roads. Solving congestion is not a simple problem and there are many variables in the equation. What if gas was taxed the way it should be (as in Europe), such as phasing in a tax of \$1 or more per gallon? This would have lots of possible repercussions: people buying smaller cars, moving closer-in, switching to transit, moving to Virginia (which may not be a bad thing), etc. The regressive nature of such a tax could be offset by needs-based refunds.

“Expand the street grid in downtowns, town centers, transit corridors, and suburban centers of activity to create shorter blocks.” (p. 80)

WMCCA Comment: This is not a good idea. It will result in more miles of impervious roadway, leading to more stormwater runoff, leading to more degradation of stream valleys.

“Convert existing traffic lanes and on-street parking to create space for walkways, bikeways, and street buffers with landscaping and street trees.” (p. 80)

WMCCA Comment: We support this ideal. Plus, walkways/bikeways must be separated from motorized vehicles by solid barriers such as jersey walls, not simply low curbs.

“Adapt policies to reflect the economic and environmental costs of driving alone.” (p. 80)

WMCCA Comment: Examine the pros and cons of increasing the gasoline tax with allowances/refunds for low income households and small businesses dependent on, for example, local delivery trips.

AFFORDABLE & ATTAINABLE HOUSING

MORE OF EVERYTHING

“Housing price increases have outpaced growth in incomes, leading some people to leave the county in search of more affordable places to live.” (p. 90)

WMCCA Comment: This is not necessarily a bad thing. Fewer people means decreased demand for county services. Some people leave the county to get larger houses and more land in places like Frederick. The trade-off is that they have longer commutes. We should not be held hostage to their demands to build more roads to speed their long commutes. Still, we totally support the need for more affordable housing.

“The obstacles faced by young workers in finding housing they can afford makes it harder for employers to attract and retain the employees they need, damaging our economic competitiveness.”

WMCCA Comment: This is just one of many examples where statements are made as factual without references to any study results. Statements like this, not supported by evidence, are not believable. It could be that employers need to offer living wages to attract and retain employees.

“With more than one-third of the county’s land area currently zoned for single family residences, these needs will be difficult to meet.” (p. 96)

Expansion and diversification of our housing stock is an essential step toward reducing these kinds of racial and socioeconomic inequality. By 2045, the people of color are forecast to make up 73 percent of the county’s population, with a significant percentage earning less than \$50,000 a year. In order to match the anticipated incomes and housing types suited to the county’s future population, about half of all new dwellings will need to be rental units in multifamily buildings (including both apartment and townhome, duplex, triplex, and quadplex units) and more than one quarter will need to be for sale units in multifamily buildings (including condominiums and other attached and semi-detached building types). With more than one-third of the county’s land area currently zoned for single family residences, these needs will be difficult to meet. (p. 96)

WMCCA Comment: The logic used to reach this conclusion does not make sense. For example, in theory, if building height restrictions were removed, tall buildings in the other two-thirds of the county’s land area surely could accommodate any amount of population growth. Furthermore, the statistic that “By 2045, the people of color are forecast to make up 73 percent of the county’s population, with a significant percentage earning less than \$50,000 a year” assumes that the county does nothing to ensure that all workers earn a living wage. The lack of housing affordability can be counteracted by paying employees a fair wage.

“Between 2020 and 2040, Montgomery County is expected to need to add 63,031 new households, both working and non-working households, specifically new residents who are seniors or persons with disabilities.” (p. 97)

WMCCA Comment: This is just one of many examples where statements are made as factual without references to any study results. Statement like this, not supported by evidence, are not believable.

“Adding more “Missing Middle” housing types – ranging from low to medium densities such as accessory dwelling units (ADU’s); duplexes; triplexes; quadplexes; live-work units; and clustered housing such as townhouses, courtyard dwellings and smaller apartment buildings to more neighborhoods will provide more choice, enhance intergenerational interaction, promote aging in place, and build social capital.” (p. 106)

WMCCA Comment: What is the evidence to support the above statement with respect to “promote aging in place”? Some of us know of seniors that age in place in single family homes with and without the help of care givers

PARKS AND RECREATION

FOR AN INCREASINGLY URBAN AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY: ACTIVE AND SOCIAL

“Montgomery County has long been a leader in adopting forward-thinking policies for the preservation of land for parks, recreation, agriculture, and resource conservation. (p. 112)

WMCCA Comment: This is too self-congratulatory. There is no way we can claim to be a leader when, for example, we are trashing our natural areas by doing so-called “stream restorations” which convert natural (although not always pristine) areas into engineered stormwater conveyances (with some exceptions such as “daylighting” piped streams and concrete culvert removal). We are not a leader in protecting our natural environment when over-development has been allowed which degrades the water quality in Little Seneca Lake, our emergency drinking water supply.

“Many conservation-oriented parks lack trails and are inaccessible to walkers, cyclists, and transit users, limiting their availability to the greater public.” (p. 115)

WMCCA Comment: Conservation parks are dedicated to environmental conservation. Therefore, trails should only be allowed if they do not interfere with the purpose of such parks.

“Focus on social engagement and community building as a central role of parks and recreation.”

WMCCA Comment: While these are a few of many parks roles, it should not be THE central role. The central role of parks should be providing areas for passive enjoyment of nature - this is the top usage of parks per the last resident survey (passive enjoyment was the top 4 priorities: trails, natural space, wildlife habitat, and nature recreation)

“Prioritize acquisition of land for parks in urban centers and other intensively developed places along growth corridors.”

WMCCA Comment: While acquisition of parks in these areas is important, they should not be prioritized over other parts of the county. Given the rapidly disappearing “large” tracks of contiguous natural (even if not pristine) land throughout the county, it is important to continue adding larger areas throughout the county to our park system to preserve them for future generations. If funding is prioritized towards urban and growth areas, the other unprotected natural areas will disappear forever.

“Use park and recreation facilities/programs to promote active lifestyles.”

“Include active recreation as an integral element in park planning and design.”

“Encourage active recreation as a key component of POPS in all parts of the county.”

“Provide park/recreation facilities and programs designed to encourage residents of all ages/ cultures to engage in vigorous physical activity.”

“Integrate park trails and paths into transportation planning and better use them to connect residents to jobs and centers of activity.”

WMCCA Comment: We disagree with the strong emphasis on “active recreation”. First of all, Park surveys show that passive recreation is the preferred use of parks by a wide margin. Second, studies have shown that even moderate activity, such as walking 20 minutes a day, have huge health benefits. Third, an emphasis on “active recreation” means, by definition, more ball fields, ice rinks, and other facilities for organized sports to the detriment of land dedicated to natural areas and passive recreation. The emphasis on the benefits of team sports is vastly overrated. Many of us who never participated in team sports

(which promote a culture of winners and losers) as children are healthy, vigorous adults.

“Make social connection a central objective for parks and recreation.”

WMCCA Comment: While social connection is important, so is enjoyment of nature and quiet contemplation. Residents shouldn't have to travel long distances to large national parks to have such experiences. Social connections can be made at the grocery store, but quiet enjoyment of nature and bird watching can best happen in areas like parks.

“Update park facility standards and acquisition strategies to align with infill development and adaptive reuse.”

WMCCA Comment: See above comments. Acquisition strategies must also align with the purchase of “large” natural areas outside urban/corridor areas.

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“Maintain high standards of environmental stewardship in park management and operations.”

“Reaffirm the Parks Department's commitment to resource conservation, stewardship, and sustainability practices such as innovative stream and habitat restoration projects.”

WMCCA Comment: There should be absolutely no reaffirmation of the destructive practice known as “stream restoration” projects. “Stream restoration” projects are not innovative - these projects destroy natural areas (even if they aren't pristine) and do not address the root cause of stream erosion which is uncontrolled stormwater fire-hosing into streams from impervious surfaces. Parks must work with other government agencies (DEP, DOT, MCPS, SHA, etc.) to control stormwater upland from streams.

“World-class places require world-class park, recreation and cultural amenities. Look to Central Park in New York, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, Millennium Park in Chicago, or Hyde Park in London and the significance of great urban parks becomes clear.”

WMCCA Comment: None of these examples are natural parks. While these types of urban parks are fantastic, they are groomed, man-made areas not natural parks. Included in the list of parks to emulate should be natural parks such as Rock Creek Park, the largest natural urban park in the country.

“Stream restoration and stormwater management projects on parkland protect against flooding and improve water quality.”

WMCCA Comment: While we enthusiastically support daylighting buried streams and removing concrete channelization (as shown in Fig. 74, Evens Parkway stream), other “stream restorations” to stabilize stream banks or reconnect floodplains are a case of the cure being worse than the disease. These projects destroy natural areas (even if they aren’t pristine) and do not address the cause of stream erosion which is uncontrolled stormwater fire-hosing into streams from impervious surfaces. Parks must work with other government agencies to address stormwater control upland from streams. It has been proven by researchers such as Margaret Palmer and Robert Hilderbrand (at the U. of MD) and others that the water quality as measured by standard biological indicators rarely if ever improves after a “stream restoration”.

“Parks provide wildlife corridors that can account for changes in habitat patterns.”

WMCCA Comment: Parks themselves do not provide wildlife corridors. Parks themselves are fragmented islands of biological discontinuity. It is only when parks and other natural areas are interconnected do they provide true wildlife corridors. Efforts should be made to acquire land for such interconnectivity between parks.

“Urban tree canopy mitigates thermal pollution, helps limit the heat island effect of intensive development, filters pollutants, and sequesters carbon. Habitat restoration provides wildlife with natural terrain, reduces human-wildlife conflict and improves overall ecosystem performance.”

WMCCA Comment: “Stream restorations” actually destroy natural areas rather than restore them. “Stream restorations” destroy natural terrain, turning natural areas (even degraded ones) into “nature-land” theme parks. To think that we can improve the ecosystem with heavy equipment is the height of human hubris. The complex web of interactions between fauna, flora, geology, and hydrology that interact in natural areas is irreplaceable and can’t be recreated by engineering projects using bulldozers and trucked-in boulders and fill material to create artificial structures in our natural areas.

WHAT CAN THRIVE MONTGOMERY 2050 – OR ANY PLAN –
ACHIEVE?

Relationship between Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the Climate Action Plan

“The Planning Department staff worked with executive branch representatives to ensure that the goals, policies, and actions recommended by Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the CAP are complementary rather than duplicative.”

WMCCA Comment: The Thrive Montgomery’s promotion of “stream restorations” is in direct contradiction of the CAP’s vision to retain forests (p. xvii). “Stream restorations” are highly destructive construction projects which actually destroy forested areas in their footprints. Even if replanted, the complex web of interactions between fauna, flora, geology, and hydrology that interact in natural areas is irreplaceable and can’t be recreated by engineering projects using bulldozers and trucked-in material to create artificial structures in our natural areas.

APPENDIX A

“2. Public Participation. The Plan has been developed with broad and deep engagement with neighborhood organizations, businesses, cultural groups, religious institutions and other stakeholders.” (p. 141)

WMCCA Comment: The West Montgomery County Citizens Association was not consulted during this revision of the Public Hearing Draft Plan from October. Nor, we suspect, were other citizen groups. In fact, this Planning Board Draft is not just a revision of the October Public Hearing Draft Plan, it is a complete rewrite. As such, the Planning Board should have been required to go through another round of public hearings.

“8. Economic Development” (p. 142)

WMCCA Comment: Economic development should not include the use of subsidies in the form of, for example, tax breaks such as multi-year tax abatements or payment in lieu of taxes, property tax exemptions, etc. for any commercial development projects. Tax-payer subsidies of large corporations will no longer be tolerated - these enterprises need to pay their own way and not be subsidized by taxpayers. In addition, new business development must not get ahead of infrastructure and public services. New businesses must contribute funds to the roads, sidewalks, schools, fire departments, community centers, parks, etc., required to support the needs of the new residents that they attract to the county.

Development must proceed on its own merits with any risks shouldered by commercial enterprises, not the public. Tax concessions to sports arenas, for example, have been shown to not return the public's initial "investment".

"10. The Plan's recommendations on Complete Communities; compact development; heavier reliance on walking, rolling, and transit with reductions in vehicular travel; stewardship of parks and land conservation; and other environmental management strategies such as stream restoration will help protect and conserve the county's waterways, forests, farmland, and other natural resources." (p. 142)

WMCCA Comment: This is simply not true for "stream restorations" – they neither protect nor conserve the county's waterways or forests. "Stream restorations" are highly destructive construction projects which actually turn natural waterways into engineered stormwater drainage ditches and destroy forested areas in their footprints. Even if replanted, the complex web of interactions between fauna, flora, geology, and hydrology that interact in natural areas is irreplaceable and can't be recreated by engineering projects using bulldozers and trucked-in material to create artificial structures in our natural areas.

"Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act of 1992, as amended

(House Bill 1141 Land Use Planning – Local Government Planning, 2006 (HB 1141) The 1992 Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Act required local jurisdictions to adopt a "sensitive areas" element designed to protect sensitive areas from the adverse effects of development. Sensitive areas include streams and their buffers, 100-year floodplains, habitats of threatened and endangered species, steep slopes, wetlands and other areas in need of special protection. In Montgomery County, the sensitive areas element was satisfied by the Planning Board's approval of the Guidelines for Environmental Management of Development in Montgomery County (the Guidelines). The Guidelines are a compilation of policies and guidelines that affect the protection of sensitive resources during the development review process." (p. 143)

WMCCA Comment: The Planning Board is simply not doing its job to protect these sensitive areas – it has ignored the Guidelines in our area of the county.

"Local jurisdictions are also required to include a water resources planning element in their comprehensive plans. This element ensures that drinking water and other water resources will be adequate and suitable receiving waters and land areas will be available to meet stormwater management and wastewater treatment and disposal needs of existing and future development. Montgomery County met this requirement through its Water Resources Functional Plan, which was approved by the County Council in July of 2010, and adopted by the full Commission in September 2010."

WMCCA Comment: While we may have a Water Resources Functional Plan sitting on the shelf, by allowing over-development in the Seneca Lake watershed the county has not ensured that drinking water will be adequate for those receiving water from WSSC. Seneca Lake is an emergency water source, and over-development in its watershed has led to degraded water quality.

The county has not ensured that drinking water is adequate for properties on well water. Currently, there is no county testing nor a requirement for property owners to test well water quality other than at the time of property transfer.

END OF WMCCA COMMENTS