

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Council:

I am writing to express my **strong support** for Montgomery Thrive 2050.

Montgomery County is not separated from the rest of the country and the world. We face the same problems the whole country faces—ranging from a national housing shortage to enduring systematic racism. We are not alone in facing a global, cataclysmic climate crisis. However, many of these challenges were not created by anyone alive in the county today. These challenges are a legacy of decades and centuries of policies. Piecemeal policy is not enough to address the challenges we face as a county. We need large systematic changes to address these issues.

End Racist Housing Policy

I moved to this county in 2012, and while I have lived here for several years, some of the history has been invisible to me. However, after becoming more active in my community, I began researching about the history, and I have learned a lot about the racist housing policies in the county and how they continue to have racist outcomes.

One of the most shocking was learning about the history of Chevy Chase, and understanding how the policies and practices from its founding were used throughout the county and still affect the county today. Chevy Chase was founded by Francis Newlands, a land developer and senator from Nevada who was an open and active white supremacist. In a 1909 article titled “A Western View of the Race Question” published in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Newlands describes African Americans as “a race of children, requiring guidance, industrial training, and the development of self-control, and other measures designed to reduce the danger of that race complication.” Ultimately, however, that piece is targeted at Asians, particularly Chinese and Japanese who he described as “...the Chinese, who are patient and submissive, would not create as many complications as the presence of the Japanese, whose strong and virile qualities would constitute an additional element of difficulty.” In this article Newland ultimately concludes that the United States must prevent all non-white immigration into the country. To this day, Chevy Chase memorializes Newlands with the Francis Griffith Newlands Memorial Fountain, and Newlands Street.. Much like the physical monuments that honor his memory today, the effects of his racist housing and land-use policies still live on today. Chevy Chase, listed as “White Predominant” in the Thrive introduction, is about 90% white, while neighboring Silver Spring is classified as “No Predomianant Group”.

Originally, Newlands sought to keep the community white through high house prices, but his Chevy Chase Land Company even used legal means to prevent black families from purchasing property even as detailed in the Washington Post article, “The racist history of Chevy Chase, long home to Washington’s power players.” Chevy Chase—along with neighborhoods and

communities across Maryland and the country—would employ racial covenants that forbid families from selling their houses to non-white families. These practices eventually gave way to the National Housing Act of 1934 and the Federal Housing Administration which employed redlining to maintain and promote segregation as documented in Thrive’s introduction. Redlining, housing covenants, and other overtly racist policies now live on in exclusionary single family zoning.

In his April 2021 opinion piece, “The ‘New Redlining’ Is Deciding Who Lives in Your Neighborhood” published in the New York Times, Richard Kahlenberg documents how single family only zoning has been employed since the early 20th century, when outright racial zoning was banned, to maintain racist and classist segregation. This kind of exclusionary zoning is still used throughout the county, and maintains racist and classist segregation throughout the county. It is a living legacy of Newlands and others like him.

Thrive seeks to “facilitate the integration of neighborhoods by race and income. Increasing the share of racially and economically mixed neighborhoods and schools across all parts of the county is critical to ensure that the inequities of the past will not be perpetuated in the future.” Alone, the general plan will not end exclusionary zoning itself; it does provide the foundation for it to be done. It is an important first step.

Disappointingly, earlier this year many community members and organizations spoke up in defense of exclusionary zoning during the hearing on ZTA 20-07. It was disheartening to witness community leaders, including County Executive Marc Elrich, defend this racist and classist practice. Again, I urge you to support Thrive 2050 and work towards implementing antiracist housing and zoning policies with the plan as a guiding principle.

Urbanism: For Us and the Planet

I moved to Downtown Silver Spring in 2012 for three reasons: 1) I found an apartment I could afford as a graduate student, 2) I could take public transit to where I worked and studied 3) Everything I could need or want was essentially within walking distance from my apartment. Many of these reasons are why I remain in DTSS: I can walk to the grocery store; I use public transit to get to work; and I can walk to a number of restaurants, theaters, breweries, parks, and so much more.

Thrive—which it states outright—uses urbanism as its organizing principle, informing much of its recommendations and visions. This fact is one that both excites me about the possibilities for the county and represents a critical step to addressing climate change while creating a better, more healthy lifestyle for our county neighbors.

There are a number of ways the county can address climate change, and Thrive lays out a vision to implement many ways to address these issues through urbanism. Lower density developments and suburban communities do not promote a sustainable way of life. There are certainly things people in those kinds of communities can do to be environmentally conscious, but the car dependence and infrastructure required to sustain that lifestyle are not environmentally sustainable. As Thrive points out, “buildings and transportation are responsible for more than 90 percent of our county’s greenhouse gas emissions.” The plan’s vision for denser development focused on public transit is exactly what the county needs to implement to address our contributions to climate change.

However, much like the need to address racist and classist housing policy requires major changes, so too will adopting urbanism across the county. Even in the urban centers within the county, many areas are still car dependent even near the urban centers. As a resident of north DTSS, the stretch of Georgia Avenue just north of me and Woodside, where 16th and Georgia meet, is an aggressively car-focused area. While the area sees a great number of cars, less foot traffic than the areas of Silver Spring to its south, it remains difficult for cars to even navigate, discouraging people from visiting those businesses. During certain times of the day it is forbidden for traffic to make left turns to visit the businesses along that stretch of the road. Making these areas more walkable by implementing urbanist tools such as traffic calming will not only make for a more livable and healthy community, but it will create a more attractive environment for retailers, restaurants, and other businesses.

I support Thrive 2050 and urge you to do the same. The plan provides an essential blueprint for dismantling racist and classist land-use and housing policy which our community must get to work doing. Moreover, it provides a vision for the county to create livable, desirable, and sustainable communities for ourselves, new neighbors, and generations to come.

Thank you,

Benjamin Bradley
Silver Spring