



**Donna R. Savage, M.Ed., ELS**

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July 8, 2021

TO: Montgomery County Council  
FROM: Donna R. Savage, Kensington Heights

RE: **Thrive Montgomery 2050**

Thank you for this opportunity to express my views about Thrive 2050. Our neighborhood of approximately 1,000 homes is situated to the south and west of Westfield Wheaton and to the north and east of the Town of Kensington. I 'speak' here only for myself, but please note that I am a former president, vice president, and land use chair for the Kensington Heights Civic Association.

I am in favor of a sound strategic planning process for our County, and I applaud the County's Planning professionals for their work on Thrive Montgomery 2050. Although it is likely that I will not live long enough to see the full impact of this Plan, I believe it is my responsibility as a 33-year Montgomery County resident to help ensure an evidence-based and equitable future for the County that is my home.

**Process and Planning Concerns**

1. **Not enough input** to this plan has been gleaned from the myriad stakeholders. As you are well aware, most of us have been in a 'pandemic haze' for the past 16 months, especially those of us who have lost loved ones to this disease. While I thank the Planning Department for continuing to work on this important document while the rest of us were shuttering and shuddering, we did not have adequate opportunity to weigh in and participate in the creation of this document. Not that we should start over, but please let's **slow down and give time for consultation** before the Council approves Thrive 2050. We should spend a bit more time mining the creative and intelligent visions of the County's residents; doing so will serve us well.

2. **Divorce missing middle/attainable housing from Thrive 2050.** The proposal to implement MM/AH is a highly controversial recommendation, and needs more study on its own as a separate piece. Best practices should be studied; we can learn much from cities and municipalities that have already implemented MMH. Locally, Arlington has been studying MMH extensively; go here to see what they've done:

<https://housing.arlingtonva.us/missingmiddle/documents/>

We could make good use of many innovative ideas from Arlington and other locales, and thus be better able to ensure such a proposal will work well in our County.

Specific concerns of the MM/AH proposal include but are not limited to:

- a) What does “attainable” mean, in the real world??!!
- b) MM/A housing is not affordable housing. Such units might be less costly than single-family homes, but not necessarily affordable or “attainable.”
- c) The ability of public facilities, streets, schools, etc. to handle additional density should be studied and reported before any density increase is allowed.
- d) Additional density to be allowed within a 1-mile radius from Metrorail stations is neither the standard nor realistic.
- e) Location and quantity of MM/AH should be limited within single-family-zoned neighborhoods, for reasons of compatibility, infrastructure, parking, etc.
- f) Site plan and/or design review, or some other public review process should be required for MM/AH buildings.
- g) Land ownership for the MM/AH properties will need to be clarified.
- h) Let’s prove we need MM/AH by studying the specific areas of the County in which it would be implemented.

I hope the Council will require full research and public engagement before allowing such significant zoning-definition changes.

**3. More emphasis is needed on climate change and the environment.** The Council should require that this important topic be moved from the appendix to the main body of the Plan, with additional emphasis on its importance. A strong emphasis on environmental issues throughout every part of Thrive 2050 will ensure a future for all of us, in 2050 and beyond.

**4. Alterations to the zoning code** (such as proposed in ZTA 20-07) should await completion and approval of Thrive Montgomery 2050.

## **Recommendations**

The County Council should not yet approve Thrive Montgomery 2050 and should slow its approval timeline, and request and ensure more widespread input from a variety of stakeholders, particularly residents. This is our County and our future. We want more input before this Plan is approved and implementation begins.

In addition, a multi-stakeholder committee should be established to review Thrive 2050 for at least the first 5 years, with a periodic report on implementation and suggested tweaks. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely the start of significant changes in patterns and preferences for working and living that will impact this Plan; therefore, it is likely that important changes in Thrive 2050 will need to be recommended and crafted.

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