




MEMORANDUM

July 8 2021

To: Tom Hucker, President, Montgomery County Council

From: Scott Mostrom, President, Darnestown Civic Association 

Subject: Darnestown Civic Association Testimony to the Montgomery County Council
- Thrive Montgomery 2050 Planning Board Draft, April 2021

On behalf of the Darnestown community, The Darnestown Civic Association is pleased to submit our testimony for your consideration. As evidenced by our enclosed January 16, 2020 communication to the Planning Board we had high hopes and serious concerns related to the new general plan.

We have a great deal of respect for the people, processes, and work products of the Planning Board. We have unwavering gratitude for the graciousness of Planning Board Chair Anderson, diligence of the Commissioners, adept management of Director Wright and her management team, and the amazing work the staff does to make our lives exceptional every day here in Montgomery County.

We believe what makes us all exceptional is our ability to embrace our differences while we work together to improve the future.

We have been working diligently while juggling demanding professional and home lives, community stewardship responsibilities and a disruptive pandemic to prepare for the delivery of the plan to the County Council. We are better off for the process and have certainly refined our thinking, approach, and capabilities. We have learned much from Montgomery Planning and look forward to detailed and open collaboration in the future. Today we offer a straightforward, non-disruptive set of adjustments which begin to correct oversights and mitigate shortcomings in the proposed new general plan amendment. These adjustments put the county on track to meet its strategic

goals by acting to (borrowing from Pamela Dunn in the staff report for the Public Hearing) “guide future master plans, County and State capital improvement processes, and other public and private initiatives that influence land use and planning in Montgomery County”.

We stand ready to continue our work with the County Council, the Planning Board, and the Executive Branch to help create the future of Montgomery County.

cc:

Councilmember Gabe Albornoz
Councilmember Andrew Friedson
Councilmember Evan Glass
Councilmember Will Jawando
Councilmember Sidney Katz
Councilmember Nancy Navarro
Councilmember Craig Rice
Councilmember Hans Riemer
Marc Elrich, County Executive
Casey Anderson, Planning Board Chair
Natali Fani-Gonzalez Planning Board Vice-Chair
Gerald R. Cichy, Planning Board Commissioner
Tina Patterson, Planning Board Commissioner
Partap Verma, Planning Board Commissioner
Gwen Wright, Planning Department Director
Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst, Montgomery County Council
Meredith Wellington, Land Use Planning Policy Analyst, Office of the County Executive

Introduction

SUBJECT

Darnestown Civic Association Montgomery County Council Public Hearing Testimony on the Planning Board Thrive Montgomery 2050 Draft Plan

DESCRIPTION/ISSUE

The Darnestown Civic Association (DCA) has been connecting its residents with credible information, policy makers, and when required advocating about Montgomery County public policy issues including land use for over fifty years.

The DCA and other civic associations including West Montgomery County Citizens Association, Montgomery Countryside Alliance, Boyds Civic Association, Sugarloaf Citizens Association, and Coalition for Smarter Growth have all indicated the Thrive maps shown as Figure 29 and Figure 61 need to be adjusted.

We stand ready to work with the Council and others on seeing these map adjustment amendments through to adoption and collaborating on a myriad of other plan improvements and refinements.

KEY POINTS

As submitted to you on June 21, 2021:

Our initial suggested changes are essential for us, key to achieve corridor-focused growth, non-disruptive to the plan, and straightforward.

A.

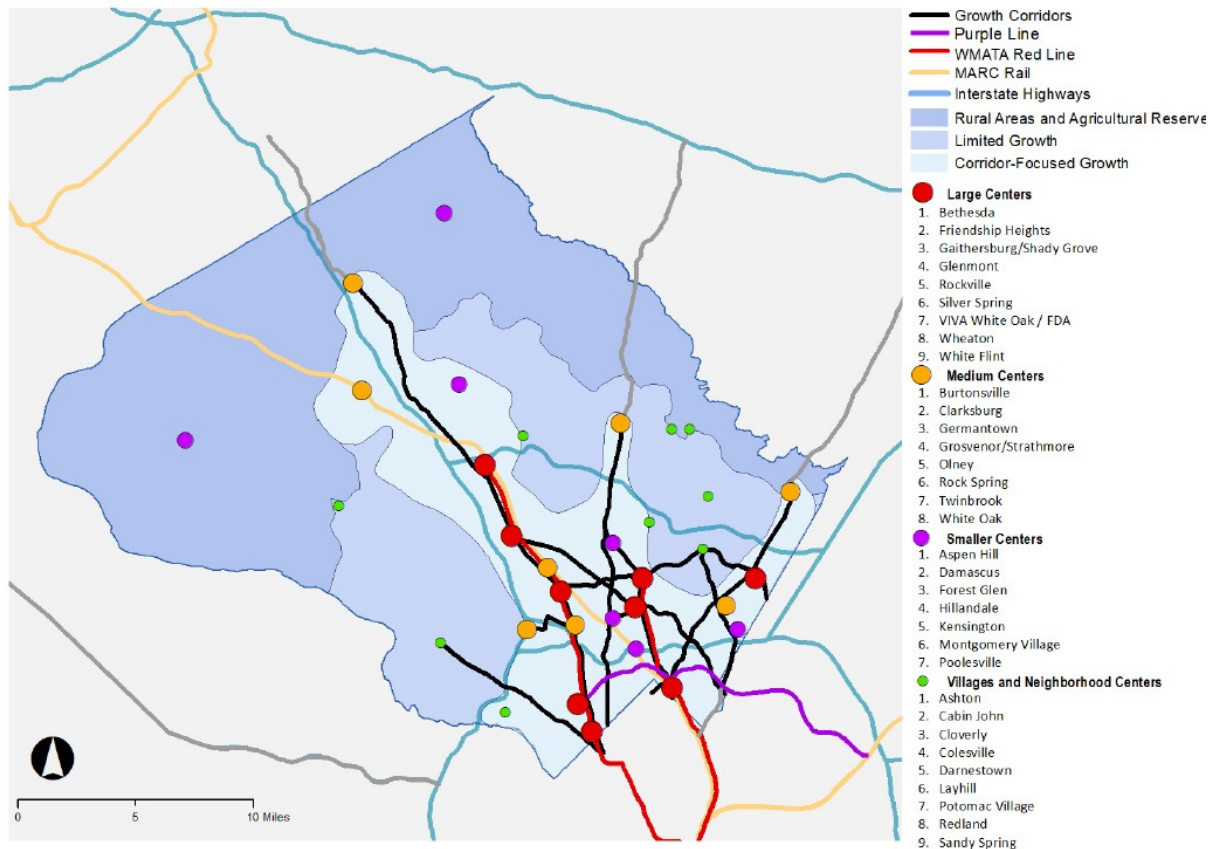
Amend the “Rural Areas and Agricultural Reserve” area depicted in Figure 29 on page 31 of the proposed new general plan to match the Rural East and Rural West Transportation Policy Areas in the currently adopted Growth and Infrastructure Policy.

B.

Amend the “Rural, Agricultural” area depicted in Figure 61 on page 98 of the proposed new general plan to match the Rural East and Rural West Transportation Policy Areas in the currently adopted Growth and Infrastructure Policy.

C.

Remove Darnestown from the list of “Villages and Neighborhood Centers” in Figure 29 on page 31 of the proposed new general plan.



The Thrive Montgomery 2050 Growth diagram illustrates growth concepts and potential centers of activity, but the diagram should be considered in the context of the Compact Growth and Complete Communities chapters. The centers of activity shown are not exhaustive of all existing or potential centers.

Figure 29: Corridor-focused growth

31 Compact Growth

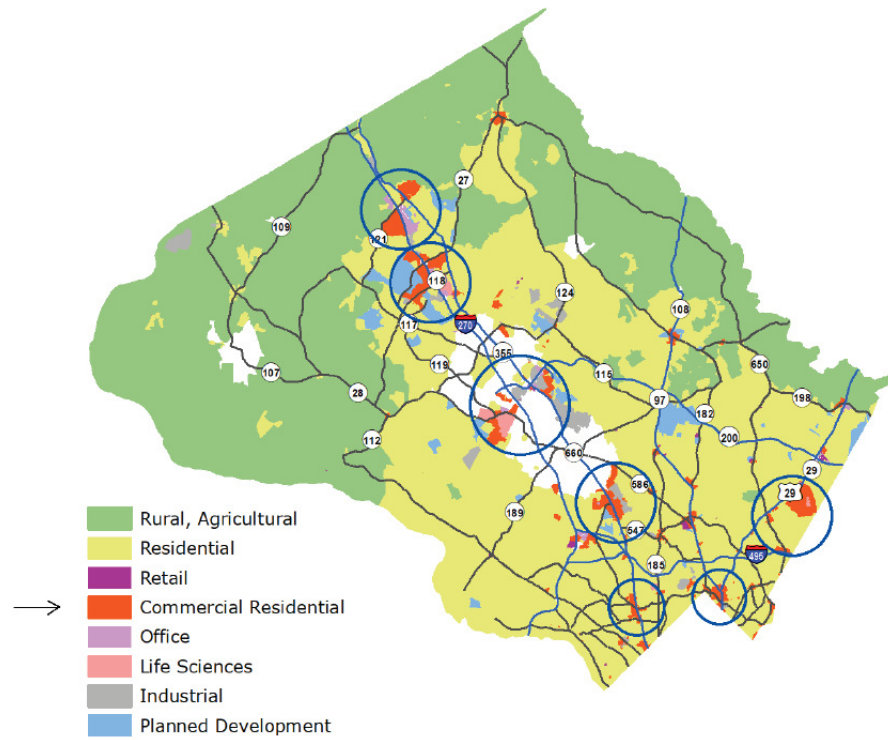
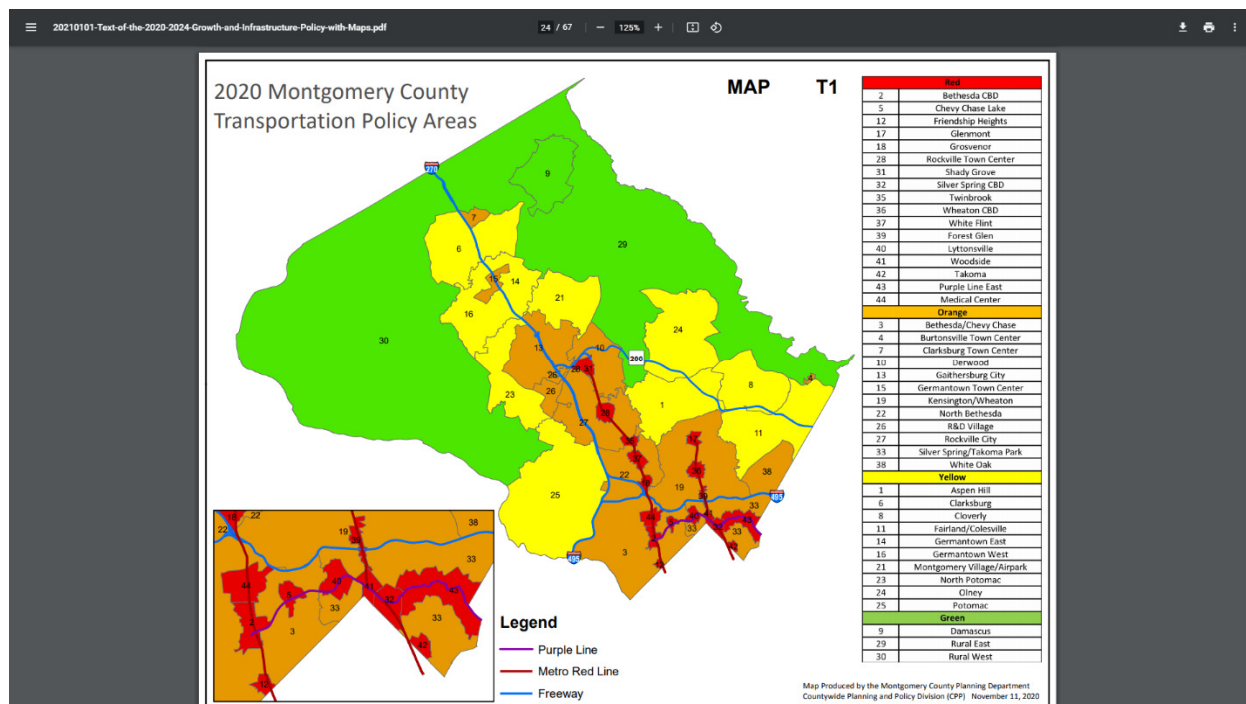


Figure 61: Land uses in Montgomery County, 2020



The Protected Lands resulting from these map adjustments definitively shape a pattern of sustainable development.

The 2020 Montgomery County Transportation Policy Areas map may not have been intended as such, but it is an excellent growth footprint map, showing four density gradients, crisp boundaries, aligns with other policy efforts including the Montgomery County Comprehensive Water Supply and Sewerage Systems Plan, and restores protections for previously protected lands. Just add the roads based growth corridors and it's a much better 2050 growth footprint map.

Today we provide background on our three initial suggestions and add a fourth more cumbersome suggestion, in that it requires language changes in multiple places.

D. The rural and agricultural Protected Lands should be excluded from density initiatives, including compact growth and complete communities. These Protected Lands need a fundamentally different set of human settlement precepts. Perhaps a good example is how our rustic roads are covered by a whole different code set than the rest of our roads. We are also, in the Coalition Accord for Rural Communities, calling for a rural living creed which suggests accountability measures for situations where people own and inhabit large plots of land. All the exceptions to allowing density to occur outside the focused growth area should have the word "rural" stricken.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Who we are and what we do.....	6
Background and Rationale	8
General Discussion.....	8
Councilmember Brief	9
Coalition Accord on Rural Communities (C ARC)	12
Testimonies Submitted to the Planning Board	16
January 16, 2020 – Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Issues Report	16
June 10, 2020 - Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Vision, Goals, Policies and Actions	17
August 28, 2020 - Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Supplemental Testimony and Additional Input - Vision, Goals, Policies and Actions.....	20
November 19, 2020 - Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Planning Board Public Hearing.....	28
December 9, 2020 - Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Planning Board Public Hearing – Coalition Accord on Rural Communities.....	32

Who we are and what we do

We would like to first provide some background on who we are - Darnestown, the Darnestown Civic Association (DCA), as well as the people of Darnestown.

Darnestown is a rural community with defined borders, and includes approximately 6000 residents in 1950 households. In total we have approximately 28 neighborhoods across our 16 square miles. We're bordered by critical watershed and heritage areas that include:

- The Agricultural Reserve and the Seneca Historic District (Maryland's largest) to our west
- The Potomac River & the C&O National Historical Park to our south
- Muddy Branch Stream Valley on the east, and
- Seneca Creek State Park that wraps our north and west borders

There are more than 800 businesses registered with a Darnestown address. In our consistently low density rural community's commercial and civic core – the three square miles around the intersection of MD RT-28 and MD RT-112 - we have a 42,000 square foot national grocery chain and coffee shop, a national bank branch, a fuel station, a dry cleaner, a beer and wine store, a saddlery, a flooring store, a senior residence home, four places of worship, two M-NCPPC parks, Darnestown Elementary School and three private schools. Across the rest of Darnestown there are three additional county parks, an international recreation center, two day camps and the Darnestown Swim & Racquet Club.

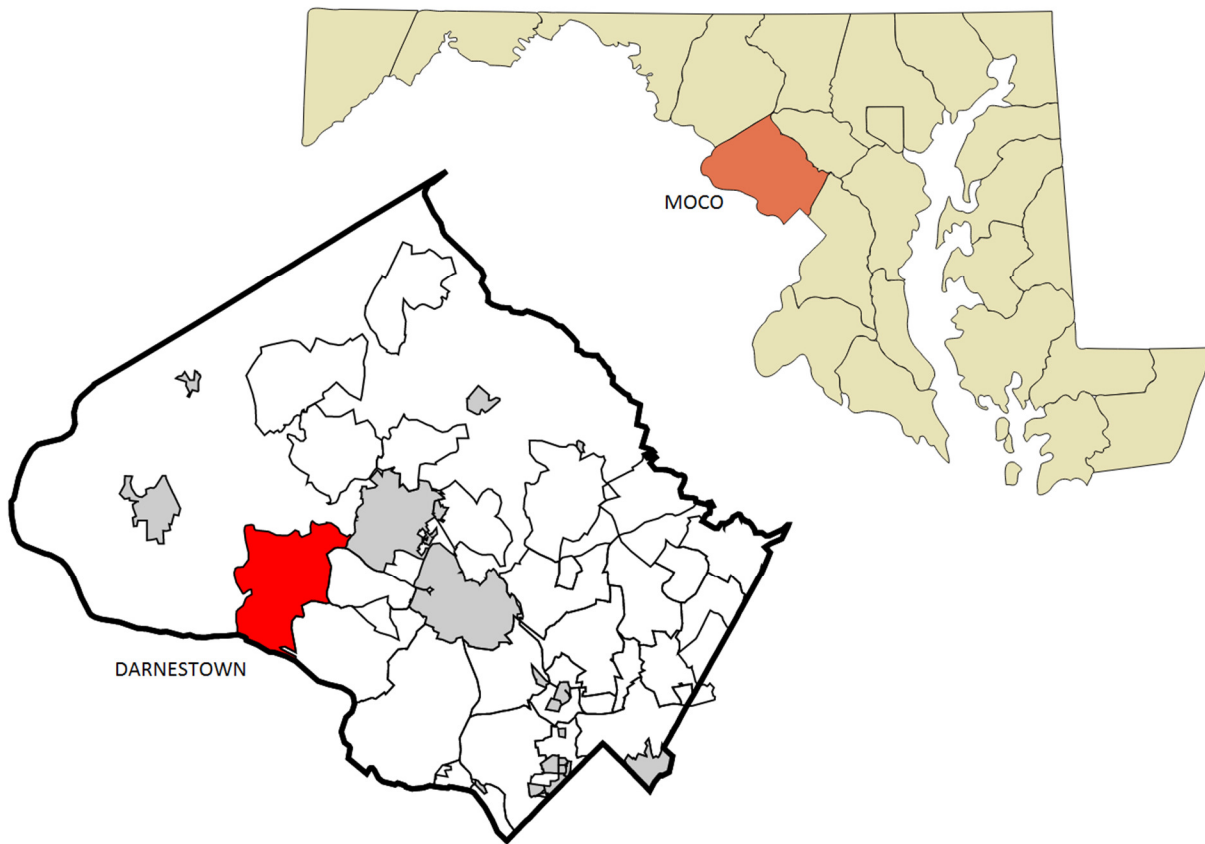
The DCA is in its 56th year serving the interests of the Darnestown community. This includes advocating for our residents and connecting our residents with County and State policy-makers. As you probably know, we've been very actively engaged in Thrive, just as we were in the 1980 and 2002 Potomac Subregion Master Plans. We are actively visioning Darnestown's future, leveraging a diversely talented team of volunteers as well as input from our entire resident base. In these efforts - and all engagements with our residents - we are committed to support diversity, inclusion, and equity within our association and across our community.

We take great pride in the space we have, our quaint nurturing neighborhoods, a wide range of institutions, natural and heritage resources, and community events and social activities that bring us together. Above all, we take great pride that this - is our home ... this - is our community. We support each other, embrace our differences, and celebrate the common identity of living in Darnestown.

Preserving all of this is core to the DCA and core to our mission to serve our residents.

Top concerns for our future include the continued sprawl of dense development and traffic throughout the county, especially in rural areas like ours that are outside the current sewer envelope and outside the Agricultural Reserve.

The maps below show our geophysical position in the county and the county's position in the state.



Graphic thanks to Arkyan

Background and Rationale

General Discussion

Compact Growth and Complete Communities are centerpiece concepts in the draft plan. Protected Lands should be on equal footing. Together these three pillars offer a well-balanced set of guidelines.

The proposed Limited Growth area is too large, encompasses previously protected land, and includes land outside the current sewer envelope. The sewer envelope will expand to fill the Limited Growth area and it will not be limited in its growth nor will its growth be organic.

The lack of inclusion of a large portion of what is classified today as rural residential land by the new proposed rural area is unconscionable.

Even before the complete surprise notion of a Limited Growth Area appeared in the Planning Board Draft we testified in November 2020 that “the proposed new plan has less overarching protections for the environment and against sprawl than the plan it intends to replace”.

The areas outside the current sewer envelope:

- are Protected Lands
- should not be part of the Corridor-Focused Growth or Limited Growth footprint areas (our changes A. and B.)
- should not contain designated activity centers (our change C.)
- should not be included in density initiatives (our change D., requires language changes)
- are essential to achieving corridor focused growth and,
- should have a fundamentally different set of human settlement precepts

We ask to be removed from Figure 29 as Darnestown has characteristics not at all like the other Villages and Neighborhood Centers (VNC) listed on the map. We have no sewer service except where four very small islands of service have encroached and are the only VNC outside the sewer envelope. We have a much lower population density (under 400 people per square mile) than the other VNCs which have densities two to eight times higher. We have an unmatched density of vital natural and heritage resources in and around us.

Protected Lands whether they are to be called Rural Areas and Agricultural Reserve, Heirloom Areas, Ecosystem Stewardship areas or any other name are essential for the county to achieve its strategic goals.

We have more work in progress and would like to continue to assist in the creation of the new general plan but our time has run out. Should the council decide to keep the window open for input and participation we will allocate time and resources to continue our efforts.

Councilmember Brief

The Approach

Urban planners have for over fifty years been telling us in our general plans that the best form of human settlement is highly dense population centers.

Urban planners promote a gradient of population densities from the natural, lightly visited areas, to areas lightly inhabited, and then on to dense and highly dense areas. Maintaining proper density gradients is essential. Market pressures to sprawl are intense. It is not enough to do the good things and encourage focused growth, in order to stop sprawl, you must stop it where it is mostly like to occur – on the edges.

Controlling the density gradient becomes a primary land use and adequate public facilities objective. Every general plan has talked about it and tried to make it happen. Yet the seepage of density continues.

The Plans

While Thrive is intensely focused on high density growth it is much weaker than its predecessors in preventing sprawl. The case can be made that Thrive enables, encourages, promotes, and in some cases, requires sprawl.

Like all good general plans Thrive questions existing policies. It finds fault in previous plans, identifies emerging trends, and the next plan will do the same. What is not being asked is the question of; is there anything obvious about Thrive that future plans will regard as reasons why it failed to deliver its desired outcomes.

We see at least one item, and it jumps out at us when we look at three or four maps in particular. We see this so clearly because of our location in the county;

wedged between an unmatched amount of natural and heritage areas and our position at the edge of multiple corridor cities and suburban elements.

Our area was continuous in the 1964 plan, chopped into three parts in the 1993 Plan Refinement, and now Thrive proposes to cut us in half.

The Thrive growth footprint map is more informative in its detail than the 1993 Refinement map, as it shows interconnected growth corridors, yet it still has a similar growth footprint and in fact moves in reverse and enables more sprawl than indicated in the Transportation Policy Areas map in the adopted 2020 Growth and Infrastructure Policy.

What We've Got

There are many great ideas in Thrive. Please don't mistake our focus on concerns as a lack of recognition of the advancements made by Thrive.

Our suggested adjustments to Thrive address what we see as existential harm to our area and to varying extents to all rural areas outside the Agricultural Reserve. These adjustments not only promote and protect our way of life, but prevent sprawl and guide the pattern of development in the direction desired for decades but marginally achieved to date.

Additionally, we have joined with four other civic organizations to create a Coalition Accord on Rural Communities. The Accord was submitted to the Planning Board as Thrive Public Hearing testimony and today submits to the County Council as included in the next section. The Accord is a one page document with three objectives.

It would be useful for the submission deadline to remain open. We would like to provide more input. We are ready with our most essential items. Keeping the process open for input would allow for a collaborative public policy process to continue.

Wrap Up

In conclusion, sprawl reduces our capability to Thrive. Thrive enables more sprawl than its predecessors. A straightforward, non-disruptive Thrive adjustment in concert with current policy can solve sprawl.

Our main message today is Protected Lands. Defining Protected Lands forces growth to happen where it is most desired and prevents sprawl. Thrive's smaller rural areas and large limited growth area invites sprawl and detracts from focused growth.

The 1980 Preservation of Agriculture & Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan had three areas: The Agricultural Reserve, Rural Open Space, and Rural Residential. These Agricultural, Rural, Heritage and Ecosystem stewardship lands should stay unified and have a far different set of codes, be they form based code or otherwise and design guidelines be they pattern books or otherwise than the rest of the county.

These Protected Lands should not be included in broad density initiatives. Disruptively adding density to these areas invites sprawl and eventually makes it imperative.

A reinforcement, renaming, reaffirmation, refinement, redefinition, and recommitment to Protected Lands is required to make Thrive work.

In closing, the Potomac and Patuxent Protected Lands secure our future. Protected Lands are a key element of our strategic vision's alignment with county goals.

Coalition Accord on Rural Communities (C ARC)

When it became apparent the ecosystem fragile, sparsely populated, consistently low density sliver of land between the Agricultural Reserve and the current sewer envelope was at risk of being developed we sought out partners to advocate for protecting these lands. West Montgomery as our neighbors to the east and Boyds as our neighbor to the north in the Potomac portion of these lands joined us as signatories. The Montgomery Countryside Alliance and the Sugarloaf Citizens Association asked us to add the entire Agricultural Reserve to the area covered by the C ARC and we obliged. The Coalition for Smarter Growth endorsed the first two points about sewer and roads but not the third point about rural residential. We were unable to connect with any groups in the Patuxent portion of these lands.

2020 COALITION ACCORD on RURAL COMMUNITIES

(C ARC 2020)

We seek General Plan level and other legal protections for Rural Communities. Rural Communities as referenced herein are areas that are outside the current sewer envelope. The protections we seek are to 1a) ensure extremely high restrictions on sewer service and 1b) mitigate current and prevent future corridor level (highway and arterial) non-transit traffic in Rural Communities.

We seek explicit General Plan 2) acknowledgement of Rural Communities as a viable, desirable, vital, wholly appropriate, important type of development, place making, and way of life.

The Signatories implore the Planning Commission to work collaboratively to enumerate and the County Council to enact legislation required to specifically provide for and codify via Montgomery County's new General Plan; and as otherwise required in other plans such as the Ten-Year Comprehensive Water Supply and Sewerage Systems Plan and throughout the Montgomery County Code, Zoning Ordinance, and Code of Montgomery County Regulations (COMCOR); and work to effect the same with area, state, county, local jurisdictions, agencies, and commissions; and reiterate and reinforce at county operational levels; in a manner to cause:

1. Protections for areas that are outside the current sewer envelope to ensure
 - a. Extremely high restrictions on sewer service, and
 - b. Mitigation of current and prevention of future corridor level (highway and arterial) non-transit traffic in these areas.
2. Recognition of Rural Communities and their vital characteristics.

Rural living is resilient, healthy, equitable living in a sustainable, harmonious coexistence with the natural environment and heritage sites. Stewardship of all ecosystem components, especially regionally critical systemic components such as native plants, watersheds, groundwater and soils is the prime guiding factor in planning human activities in Rural Communities. Curation of heritage sites and their surrounds is an exceptional feature of Rural Communities. Open spaces, low levels of impervious surfaces, and low occupancy densities span the entirety of Rural Communities. Rural Communities strive for sufficiency in production and consumption of water, food, energy, and waste disposal, first and foremost with local resources.

2020 COALITION ACCORD on RURAL COMMUNITIES

(C ARC 2020)

SIGNATORY STATEMENT

_____ hereby attaches our name to
and express our support for the 2020 Coalition Accord on Rural Communities.

We seek General Plan level and other legal protections for Rural Communities. Rural Communities as referenced herein are areas that are outside the current sewer envelope. The protections we seek are to 1a) ensure extremely high restrictions on sewer service and 1b) mitigate current and prevent future corridor level (highway and arterial) non-transit traffic in Rural Communities.

We seek explicit General Plan 2) acknowledgement of Rural Communities as a viable, desirable, vital, wholly appropriate, important type of development, place making, and way of life.

Signed

Printed Name

Date

Title

Organization

My signature represents and warrants that I have full authority to execute this Signatory Statement on behalf of the organization named above and said execution has been duly entered in the records of the organization.

Should your organization ever wish to withdraw just submit this form again with a notation indicating your desire to withdraw.

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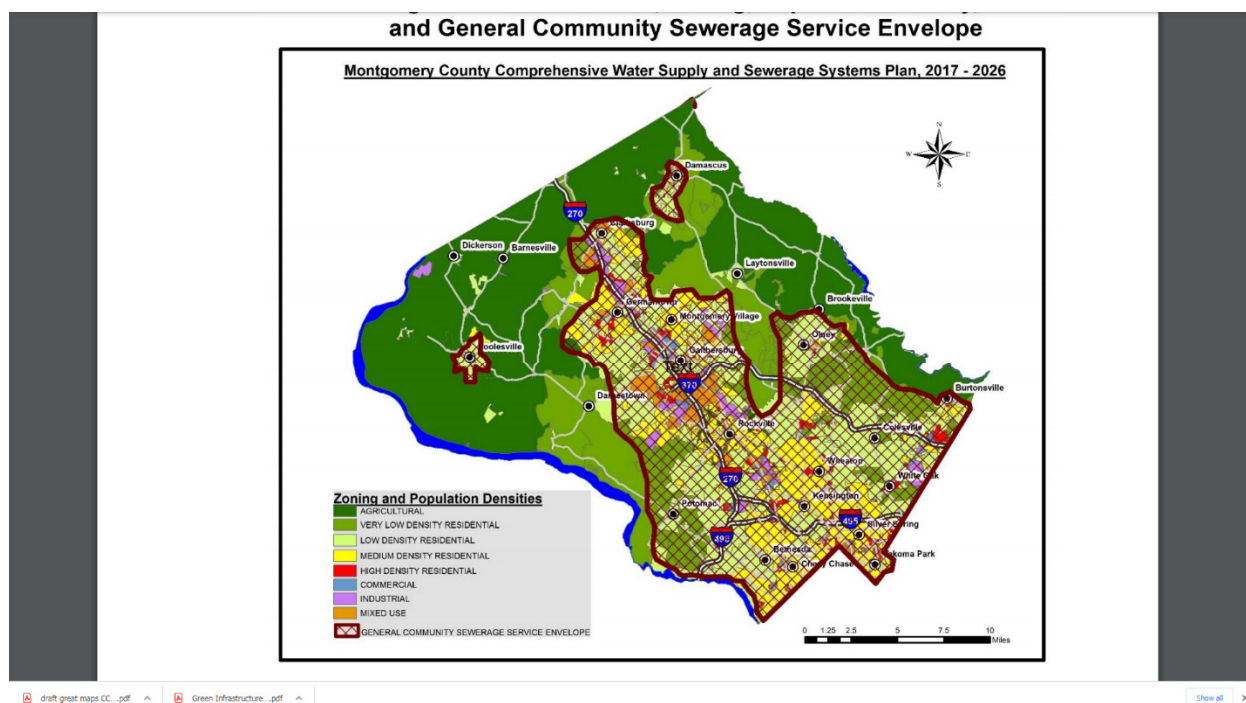
2020 COALITION ACCORD on RURAL COMMUNITIES

(C ARC 2020)

LIST OF SIGNATORIES

(as of December 9, 2020)

DATE	ORGANIZATION
11/8/2020	Darnestown Civic Association
11/15/2020	Montgomery Countryside Alliance
11/16/2020	Boyd's Civic Association
11/16/2020	West Montgomery County Citizens Association
11/23/2020	Sugarloaf Citizens Association



Testimonies Submitted to the Planning Board

We had numerous opportunities to participate in the Thrive process. Our formal transmittals are below.

January 16, 2020 – Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Issues Report

Darnestown Community Input Regarding the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan

January 16, 2020

On behalf of the Darnestown community, the Darnestown Civic Association (DCA) wants to commend the Planning Board for developing an innovative Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan where we have a shared vision that allows our community to keep what we love while taking the actions needed to thrive over the next 30+ years. We understand, per the Plan, the result of Thrive Montgomery 2050 will be a living and breathing plan that guides decision making and helps secure resources to ensure Montgomery County is a place where everyone can be successful, have opportunities and enjoy a high quality of life in a beautiful and resilient environment.

The DCA is dedicated to promote and protect what our residents love about Darnestown. We understand the Planning Board shares our same values of growing in a way that will retain and enhance what we cherish as a rural community while addressing challenges such as housing affordability, environmental degradation, traffic congestion, and social injustice. We also understand that this Plan will have long-term impacts on the development growth and transportation infrastructure in and around Darnestown.

We value and appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with the Planning Department and provide our evaluation of and input to the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan for incorporation into an Issues Report that will be published and presented to the Planning Board. We agree with many of the issues as outlined in the report. Nevertheless, it does appear that much of the focus of the Plan is relative to urban areas of the County. While urban areas are important for consideration, we are concerned and want to verify that the Board is also considering and respects rural areas of the County including Darnestown. Darnestown values our rural residential culture, our Village, our abundant open space and low density, and our position as a transition area adjoining the Agricultural Reserve. We respectfully recommend the Board embrace our rural culture, as it is core to the character of our community, and explicitly adopt a

rural residential approach to areas of the County including Darnestown. We hope to see these values in the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan.

We want to thank you for continuing to include our community in the Plan's ongoing collaborative development and look forward to engaging as an active partner throughout this process.

Sincerely,



Scott H. Mostrom
President, Darnestown Civic Association

June 10, 2020 - Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Vision, Goals, Policies and Actions

Hello everyone. The Darnestown Civic Association wishes to thank Chair Anderson, Vice Chair 'Fawne'-Gonzalez, and the rest of the board for allowing us to testify today. We also wish to thank Director Wright and the entire Montgomery Planning staff for their exceptional work which we enjoy every day as we live our lives in Montgomery County.

Select Overall Observations

Schools are a vital and central part of our communities yet their inclusion in Thrive seems tangential and strained at best. We hope current governance and planning structures are able to overcome obstacles so our schools can be an integral part of Thrive.

We are surprised about the lack of points around watersheds and other fragile ecological resources as they are the backbone of green corridors and require more protection than ever as we increase the human activity in green corridors.

We were a bit A bit startled by:

Action 3.5.3.b: Encourage and facilitate the physical integration of higher education campuses such as Montgomery College and the Universities at Shady Grove into their

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urban surroundings.

We are perplexed and concerned about the Universities at Shady Grove being seen as having urban surroundings. We fear solving sprawl and corridor bloat by making urban areas larger could be an unintended and undesirable consequence of Thrive.

We are encouraged by:

Action 8.6.1.c: Establish a neighborhood design center within the Planning Department that equitably supports citizens through community-engaged design and planning services for projects identified by neighborhood residents.

and

Policy 6.1.3: Support the concepts of compact form of development and complete communities to avoid sprawl. Limit expansion of new roads and of the sewer and water system to direct new development to areas served by existing infrastructure.

We think it important to address all basic needs as done for food specifically in:

Action 7.4.1.a: Develop a food security plan with the Montgomery County Food Council and county agencies to include urban, suburban and rural farming that expands access to local foods.

Policy 7.4.8: Establish food production and distribution infrastructure to enable county growers to process their products locally and to reach residents through culinary, grocery and wholesale outlets. This system will increase the competitiveness of farmers and reduce reliance on imported agricultural products and associated carbon emissions.

We believe delivery services should have mandatory training, certification and licensing around safe driving practices, package handling and where food safety is involved the level of care should be equal to other food services. Thrive recognizes the growing role of delivery in our society and can prepare legislators for pre-cursor elements of public policy around emerging trends embraced by Thrive.

Lastly, we think agile, multi-dimensional statements of approach are more effective than monolithic aspirational statements and myopic single solutions looking for problems to solve. The statement in Theme 7 Diverse and Adaptable Growth is an example of a statement of approach we think works well.

“Managing Growth as a Mature, Built-Out County

Since the future is unpredictable, we must be flexible and nimble in our plans and implementation tools so we can change quickly and adapt to new conditions and still be able to keep our focus on achieving the desired outcomes no matter what challenges and disruptions we will face. Today, technological innovations such as wayfinding apps can give us real time information expanding our ability to manage traffic in a whole different way. Increases in the number of people working remotely, as well as demand for office space, and could change the traffic conditions significantly.

We must manage growth and development as a mature, built out county by maximizing use of constrained land, and explore new mechanisms to evaluate and deliver public facilities and infrastructure improvements.”

We believe Diverse and Adaptable Growth is best served with diverse and adaptable solutions.

Rural Design

While initially appealing, it now seems odd to have Design principles combined in Theme 8 with Arts and Culture.

Statements in Theme 7 Diverse and Adaptable Growth are concerning. For example, the following paragraph about the applicability of urbanism and compact development:

The principles of urbanism and compact development can be applied in urban, suburban and rural areas to address the variation in context, scale, intensity and the desired community character. According to a ULI paper, compact development “does not imply high-rise or even uniformly high density, but rather higher average “blended” densities. Compact development also features a mix of land uses, development of strong population and employment centers, interconnection of streets, and the design of structures and spaces at a human scale.”⁵¹

We are open minded but wary and doubt the recursive nature of compaction and believe at its core it the belies the most desirable features of each form type. As stated earlier we prefer a broader solution set of design principles. We envision a

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dynamic and broad range of Complete Communities across a wide spectrum of densities each with their own interpretive application of design principles befitting their defining aspects.

We are similarly concerned about the following statement in the Theme 8 Design, Arts, and Culture Vision section:

A comprehensive urban design vision strengthens and creates a collection of great towns, cities and rural villages, each with neighborhoods built around a walkable center.

We are not sure we share the concept or agree about what those neighborhood centers would look like in a rural setting.

We want to be clear we do not view compact urban form design elements as compatible with rural villages. For example, while the design work was comprehensive and well done, the Sandy Spring Rural Village Plan strikes us as particularly not rural.

We welcome the opportunity to continue to explore these design and form gradient elements with you, the staff, and our community.

Thank you for your time and attention.

August 28, 2020 - Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Supplemental Testimony and Additional Input - Vision, Goals, Policies and Actions

Sections

Overall

Precepts

Transportation

Darnestown – Our Place

Overall

Improving the Strength of the General Plan (GP)

Develop consistent cohesive threads in the language. Walk through the document as a whole, taking each of 400+ specific statements (outcomes, issues, goals, policies, and actions) and look to be sure there is a consistent set of threads. Then do the same for the supporting discussion and commentary. Cohesive threads should repeat and refine the Outcomes, Goals, and Design Precepts. Each Goal should be scored on its contribution to each of the three Outcomes. Each Goal should address one or more Issues. A chart with Goals as rows and Issues as columns might work. The chart would need to be in three parts, ten columns per set. In addition to strengthening the fabric of the GP these scoring and cohesion exercises might uncover imbalances.

Review word choices. For example, on Page 13 “Specifically, Montgomery County in 2050 is made up of a web of Complete Communities connected by vibrant corridors.” Not sure vibrant is a good word choice, it is pleasing but perhaps out of place and misused. We suggest “efficient, low cost, safe, environmentally sound corridors”. The current slide on themes picks up on the idea.

Are we really still separating corridors from communities? Are we not saying corridor cities / communities and the corridors are one and the same? Are complete corridors a thing?

Do we end up with a complete County or a collection of complete places? If the collection of very nice things we envision in the plan result in a hodgepodge quilted mosaic, we may well have missed the mark. The transitions between density gradients, glaring corridor deficiencies, pockets of neglect, improving the school’s role in the community, and the elevation of the east are needed for balance and completeness at the county level.

Drop the second word in the outcomes. Go with: Healthy, Equitable, Resilient. A Healthy, Equitable, Resilient county. A place where Healthy, Equitable, Resilient behaviors are habitual and facilitated by the built environment.

Develop Expressive Graphics. Use pictures and graphics to convey Outcomes and Precepts. Provide clear understanding of plan intent without slogging through pages of dense non-plain English text. (The Securities and Exchange Commission provides a guide to the use of plain English.)

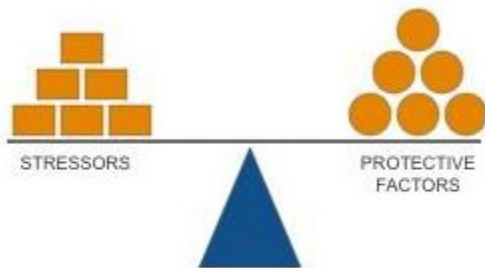
Make the concepts clear enough so people of all ages and backgrounds can comprehend the gist of the plan. Using pleasing artistic expressions should be supplemental not primary. The graphics should clearly convey the Outcomes and Precepts and match the threads in the narrative. The General Plan may have greater appeal if it can be expressed visually.

Outcome related graphics we cobbled together from browsing around the internet follow. They are cut and pasted parts and may have use restrictions. They are presented as examples of things we think might work well.

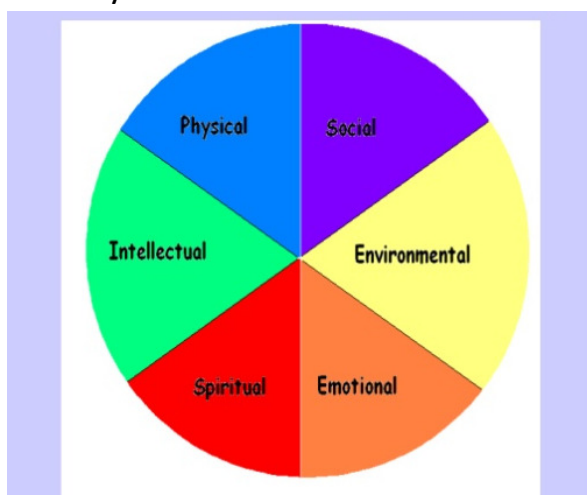
Equitable



Resilient



Healthy



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The words in Healthy could be replaced with pictures and the word choices in Resilience could be changed.

Risks to the General Plan

Lack of bold public policy ideas reduces the GP's role as a guide for change. Ideas such as no-cost pervasive frequent transit and mobility, a super dense mega city, pre-K through 16 education, using school facilities for community activities as much as they are used for educational uses are some suggestions. Much of the advantage of education is lost without a supportive out of school environment. Schools serve us best when they do not stand alone. The decades long unconscionable achievement gap needs to end and the GP's role in helping communities rise is vital. These kinds of public policy ideas help inform and navigate the inherent tensions of progress.

The GP lacks a detailed analysis and historical perspective on coordination, contrasts, competition, and adversity stemming from the plans of our neighboring counties.

Solving for the past and longing to undo past missteps is not a plan nor does it adequately account for poor implementation. The current state must be addressed or the plan remains an unachievable island of ideas not an implementable vision. The difference between vision and hallucination is execution. A sample discussion of where we may be falling prey to these pitfalls and solution set bias is in the transportation section.

Given the projected less than one percent compound annual population growth rate it is hard to see where any momentum, funding, or other necessary preconditions for changes will exist. The same underfunding that turned wedges and corridors (with webs) into a series of alternating inverted wedges and a single failed corridor seem destined to continue.

By concentrating the meager growth in higher density areas there may be opportunity to realize some improvements in very small slices of the county. The rest of the county is destined to be overrun by the mass momentum of errors of the past. The more fortunate areas may be largely protected. Concentrating growth in the corridors does raise the risk of continuing the current pattern of a deficient bloated corridor development and increased corridor overflow.

Precepts

Design precepts are buried throughout the documents and especially in Chapter 8 of the Vision, Goals, Policies and Actions document. Precepts should be highlighted on a page or two. We think the precepts rank right up there with Outcomes as they are the principles in action that get you to the outcomes. Precepts are what lives between vision, outcomes, goals and actions. Enumerate the precepts along with Outcomes, Issues, Goals, Policies, and Actions. Precepts are applicable statements of vision.

Precepts found:

- Infill
- Completeness
- Focused Compaction
- Separation of People Spaces and Transportation Infrastructure
- Green Corridors
- Active Lifestyles
- Fifteen Minute Living

We think there are many more and they should be surfaced.

Precepts missing or needing more emphasis:

- Caring
- Collaboration
- Communicating
- Measuring / Instrumentation / Monitoring / Reporting
- Repair deficient implementation of previous plans

- Regionalism
- Crime Prevention

A discussion of the opposing yet complimentary nature of selected precepts would help inform decisions about proper balance. It is about coexistence and balance not tradeoffs.

Some examples of complimentary opposing precepts:

Equity versus Diversity

Cultural Communities versus Diversity

Fifteen Minute Living versus Slow Living

Locally Complete Communities versus Economies of Scale

Security versus Convenience

TRANSPORTATION

Places like Pike and Rose are nice but still maintain a heavy mixing of people and cars where large amounts of cars are traversing on the same plane as people with fast wheeled transportation and people all competing for the same ground. We should promote multiplanar places where the buildings are on “stilts” with main entrances and walk spaces on a mezzanine level and transportation access is at ground level or put the transportation layer underground.

Current draft GP language around cars may look misguided thirty years from now. Cars have been and continue to be polluters and killers, yet it seems likely in thirty years cars will be far less damaging. Not planning for cars in high density zones is fine, but broad generalized myopic statements are a disservice to the robustness of a plan. Especially true in our county where the density gradient is as granular and wide as it is anywhere else. Given we are not greenfield, have limited funds, and have many car centric places and car centric people **we should not stop planning for cars.**

Transportation technology and the essence of work are rapidly developing in transformative ways. Spending billions on multi decade mobility solutions is by

definition skating to where the puck has been. A concerted management approach to the pipeline of Science, Technology, and Public Policy around transportation would result in greater public benefit at lower cost.

Communities should not have to face the state alone. MCDOT should facilitate the interaction between communities and the state. Just because the state is “in charge” of certain roads does not mean MCDOT cannot provide direct meaningful oversight and overall management. MCDOT should consider using its request systems to accept and track work items related to state roads and provide liaison to citizens. The same principles apply to community’s advocating for a convergence of standards of design, construction, and maintenance of state and county roads.

The Darnestown Civic Association has given detailed testimony on the Growth Policy and CSDG related to our roads. To recap, one of the biggest challenges we have in Darnestown today is corridor overflow. The lack of adequate corridor capacity has dramatically increased traffic in our community. We are overrun with people cutting through our community on their long journey to and from places nowhere near us in the county, some originating as far away as Frederick County and beyond. Overflow traffic worsens pre-existing safety issues for vehicle occupants, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Bike lanes in Travilah and on MD-28 in the 2002 Potomac Subregion Master Plan were never built although there are some bikeable shoulders on MD-28. Seneca Road and the county portion of River Road are in desperate need of bikeable shoulders with slower speed limits and would make an excellent demonstration project.

Darnestown - Our Place

Every place is unique for its natural features, built environment, heritage, and its social, economic, and political activities.

We are actively developing a comprehensive description of Darnestown. We hope it expands to include a complete vision of our future and a map to get there. We look forward to collaborating with Montgomery Planning as we develop our vision and hope to soon share an early draft.

Darnestown's sixteen square miles and its immediate surrounds are densely-packed with a high degree of natural variety, heritage and social proximity.

We don't envision a miniature city as our village. Too many village plans look like urban cores. We think bigger set-backs, lower densities, wider vistas, parks, micro green corridors, nature scaping with native plants, open spaces, less impervious surfaces.

Our idea is to live immersively and sustainably in a natural environment not escape to one nearby. Clustering and compaction defeats the relationship with nature. The land supports the people living on it and the people care for the land and are stewards of the natural environment.

Perhaps these words begin to define what we mean by rural residential.

November 19, 2020 - Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Planning Board Public Hearing

Yes. Thank you. Hello everyone. The Darnestown Civic Association wishes to thank Chair Anderson, Vice Chair Fani-Gonzalez, and the rest of the board for allowing us to testify today. We also wish to thank Director Wright, Assistant Director Stern and the entire Montgomery Planning staff for their exceptional work as stewards of our future. We enjoy the results of your work every day as we live our lives in Montgomery County.

While reviewing the draft of the proposed new plan before us and after reviewing previously submitted public testimonies, previous plan drafts, notes from previous Planning Board sessions, a County Council PHED committee session

which ended wonderfully with a discussion about the importance of history in planning the future, revisiting various community and advisory board presentations, and a re-read of the 1993 Refinements we and perhaps others arrived at a startling conclusion: the proposed new plan has less overarching protections for the environment and against sprawl than the plan it intends to replace.

The similarities between the 1993 Refinement and the proposed new plan are astounding.

The 1993 Refinement had many of the same elements as are contained in the proposed new plan, some worded a little differently but most of the foundational ideas are similar; redevelopment is now infill, physically concentrated centers is now compaction, community identity is now complete communities, and protection of the environment, regionalism and other precepts are all in both plans.

The proposed new plan is packed full of goodness. What it misses and its inability to contain the trajectory of future development is alarming. Most importantly it contains less protections for vital resources and communities than the 1993 Refinements.

An example from the narratives:

The 1993 Refinement states: “reduce development pressure on rural open space areas and farmland”

The proposed new plan states: “Montgomery County has always responded to development pressures by adjusting its land use framework and creating new, and updating its existing, master plans.”

What is worrisome are the important protections being dropped. They are not simply hiding in the proposed new plan, and even if they were hiding in vaguely worded obscurely placed narrative they are not well crafted goals policies and

actions tightly worded to avoid circumvention by special interests who look to exploit the natural tensions of competing goals, policies, and actions.

As much goodness as is in the new plan, we are now focused on what is not in the new plan regarding traffic, the environment, and sprawl facilitated by sewer envelope expansion and roads. The new plan promotes many more desirable paths forward than its predecessors and if implemented take pressure off sensitive and strategic protected areas. Promoting preferred practices is not enough. Harmful practices must be banned or required to meet extremely difficult hurdles to be approved. Promoting infill and compaction near transit is not enough, you also have to protect against sprawl where it is likely to occur.

We have heard the new general plan is not a road map. Perhaps, but the use of guard rails and stringent rules of the road can and should be laid down in the new general plan.

We need easy to understand wording. We need the big important main points to be at the beginning. Clear statements are needed about how the plan will carve a path to the desired outcomes and prevent undesirable and unintended outcomes. We need a logically cohesive and compelling complimentary set of policies. Protections against sprawl and for the environment need to be upfront, concise, explicit, and take precedence.

The 1993 Refinement has a section in each chapter highlighting the changes from the previous plan. We suggest you provide the same cross reference for the proposed new plan.

We also suggest you provide an index of changes to guide us through the differences from the current draft to next draft. It is unlikely most of have the tools and the time to work though entire drafts compiling and cross checking whether the changes we saw in the last version made it into the next version. It is unnerving to know there could be significant changes across nearly four hundred goals, policies and actions.

The words “Limit expansion of new roads and of the sewer and water system to direct new development to areas served by existing infrastructure.” were dropped from policy 6.1.3 between the 6/11/20 draft and the current draft and the policy number was changed to 6.1.4. The wording may have needed improvement and granularity but its deletion spoke to volumes to us.

The sixteen square mile area of Darnestown where I live represents around three percent of the county’s total land area. Darnestown is surrounded by critical watersheds, heritage areas and green corridors and is especially threatened by anything other than strong increases in protections regarding infrastructure expansion, especially sewer and roads and plans that increase direct traffic or create overflow cut-through traffic from failed corridor level capacity.

We have found areas in the county like ours, not identical but similar. In fact, these are the very same areas we have been advocating for since our initial testimony submitted on January 16, 2020.

When we first began considering a new general plan we imagined a recognition of the Rural West Residential Wedge of Darnestown, Travilah and Boyds and envisioned something similar for our contemporaries in the Rural East.

We now have broadened our efforts to directly advocate for a wide area including our Rural West neighbors, our counterparts in the Rural East and most areas in the Agricultural Reserve. We have refined and focused the area we are advocating for as being defined as the area outside the current sewer envelope.

The 1993 Refinement recognized these same areas as being unique and vital and were named The Wedge; part Agricultural, part Rural Residential. Rural Residential is an important transition zone and buffer between widely divergent gradients.

Right now, as we parse the currently in-force 1993 Refinement and the 2021 proposed new plan we are at risk.

Last week on November 10, 2020 I submitted to you two must have items for the proposed new plan simply titled “Two Must-Have Items”. **The first item seeks to control development and traffic outside the sewer envelope to protect the environment and reduce sprawl. The second item seeks acknowledgement of Rural Communities as a viable, desirable, vital, wholly appropriate, important type of development, place making, and way of life.**

Our two items are narrow, well defined and focused. The proposed new plan protections as they stand today are fragile and vague as mentioned above. We have submitted specific draft language and suggested its prominent placement in the new plan.

We look forward to working with staff to develop map overlays showing MPOHT, sewer categories, state tiers, special protections areas, and zoning to make the must have items easy to visually grasp.

We also look forward to continuing to help shape the collaborative nature of planning and lay the ground work for the efforts described in the civic capacity Goal 2.2 of the proposed new plan.

Thank you for your time and in advance for including our must have items.

December 9, 2020 - Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Planning Board Public Hearing – Coalition Accord on Rural Communities

I am honored to submit for the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Public Hearing record the attached 2020 Coalition Accord on Rural Communities (The Accord) as testimony.

As reflected in The Accord the signatories to date are Darnestown Civic Association (DCA), Montgomery Countryside Alliance (MCA), Boyds Civic Association (BCA), West Montgomery County Citizens Association (WMCCA), and Sugarloaf Citizens Association (SCA).

Invitations to prospective signatories are ongoing.

The 2020 Coalition Accord on Rural Communities controls development and traffic outside the sewer envelope to protect the environment and reduce sprawl.

The Accord builds community support across the county to achieve three objectives:

- Extremely restrict expansion of the current sewer envelope.
(helps stop dense development in rural areas and protects natural resources)
 - Mitigate current and prevent future highway and arterial level non-transit traffic in areas outside the current sewer envelope. (reduces traffic in rural areas)
 - Acknowledgement of Rural Communities as a viable, desirable, vital, wholly appropriate, important type of development, place making, and way of life.
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