

July 9, 2021

Written Testimony: Planning Board Draft of the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan

Dear Council President Hucker and members of the Montgomery County Council,

As a resident of the County, a registered dietitian, and an individual with a decade of experience working at a local food security non-profit, I would like to echo some of the testimony provided by the Montgomery County Food Council regarding the Thrive 2050 draft plan. Specifically, I want to underscore the importance of a plan that includes food as one of the key elements of a thriving community. I do not believe that this draft plan applies the critical food systems lens required for community health and security.

The American Planning Association's Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning, includes a list of factors that explain the hoped for awareness among planners that the food system is indeed significant. I feel this document summarizes well the reasons why I feel it is so critical to have a master plan for Montgomery County that considers food as a basic human necessity. The policy guide asserts that:

- food system activities take up a significant amount of urban and regional land
- planners can play a role to help reduce the rising incidence of hunger as well as the incidence of diet-related chronic diseases
- the food system represents an important part of community and regional economies
- the food Americans eat takes a considerable amount of fossil fuel energy to produce, process, transport, and dispose of.
- pollution of ground and surface water, caused by the overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture adversely affects drinking water supplies
- access to healthy foods in low-income areas is an increasing problem for which urban and other forms of local agriculture can offer an important solution

Additionally, I have seen how the County Council mobilized a robust response in support of the County's food producers at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful for the hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in the capacity of our local farms. If the food economy and food access are considered in this master plan, we will be able to take full advantage of these investments and capitalize on these efforts to produce more food in the County for all County residents.

To support our growing local food and beverage sector we need shared use kitchens, cut and wash facilities and processing equipment for farm produce, meat, and grains, and aggregation and distribution infrastructure, as well as long-term access to affordable farmland and protected land leases, are needed for local small businesses to accommodate expanding local procurement opportunities and to address future crises. These kinds of infrastructure

improvement need to be planned for in concert with housing, transportation, and other land use efforts.

If we do not establish **food** as a priority lens for all County planning efforts, we are simply not doing all we can to support a resilient food system and, thus, a more vibrant and healthy Montgomery County for the next 30 years and the years to come.

Thank you,

Jenna Umbriac MS, RD

District 1 Resident