

July 9, 2021

TO: The Montgomery County Council

RE: **Thrive Montgomery 2050 Draft Plan**

FROM: **Residents and Property Owners in Woodside Park, Silver Spring MD**

**UPDATED Testimony/Letter to the Montgomery County Council
From Woodside Park Residents and Neighbors, Silver Spring MD
On Thrive Montgomery 2050 Draft Plan**

PLEASE NOTE UPDATED SIGNATURE LIST: now totaling 197 Woodside Park homeowners and residents, is at the end of this letter. (7 pages)

The 197 signers of this letter are residents, homeowners, and neighbors of Woodside Park, a nearly 100-year-old Silver Spring community. We are deeply concerned about how elements of the draft Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan (TM2050) undermine the wellbeing of our community. We want a voice in how our neighborhood and the county will be shaped in the future under the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan and other master plans.

We stand with the Neighborhood Coalition of towns and communities countywide that are sharing with you legitimate concerns and recommendation on the draft plan.

This has been a terrible year to be in the County that once prided itself on civic engagement. We are used to in-person gatherings, listening to neighbors at in-person workshops, access to planning offices and to research documents. Instead of hitting the “pause” button to address the worst public health crisis in a century, the Planning Board – and now the County Council --have been assiduous in moving the Thrive Montgomery 2050 General Plan ahead to completion. It is a process that’s totally anomalous to normal community dialogue and input.

Woodside Park has been split into three parts for future planning and development. These changes were arranged arbitrarily by the Planning Board between 2017 and June 2020, with little to no public notice given to Woodside Park’s civic organization or to the households that are now affected.

During scoping deliberations by Planning Board members in 2017, a major portion of the west side of Woodside Park (between Georgia Avenue and Woodland Drive) was “moved” into the Montgomery Hills/Forest Glen Master Plan, and is now referred to as “Woodside.”

In June 2020, Woodside Park residents opposed the annexation of parts of the east side of our community into Silver Spring’s Downtown. The Planning Board ignored our testimony with virtually no discussion, and approved a 35% boundary increase in the size of Downtown Silver Spring, with no rationale. Real estate law firms are now offering their services to property owners and developers to achieve “the highest and best use” of the land our homes sit on.

Thrive Montgomery 2050, as an aspirational blueprint, seems almost wholly focused on population growth and the need for housing close to transit. Under the draft plan, the County will be reshaped to address projected population growth--and housing needs-- by eliminating all single family zoning for

more dense development; new, denser development along selected major corridors, including two that border our neighborhood, Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road; a new, not-yet-defined “vocabulary” of building types to achieve equitable housing for all; and the creation of 32 “complete communities” that make it possible to shop and live within a 15 minute walk.

Several of plan’s elements deeply undermine the character, natural assets and future stability of Woodside Park, with extreme levels of density.

Some crucial underpinnings of TM2050 have been eliminated or ignored. The much-needed chapter on economic development was removed from the draft. Neighborhood compatibility—a longtime component of County master plans and zoning— has been redefined as “vague” and to be eliminated. Climate change as a critical aspect of the County’s sustainability gets short shrift in this draft.

The policies recommended in TM2050 will destroy the character of Woodside Park—and the future of every home in the neighborhood by adding extreme density to the perimeter and the interior.

Reasonable people agree – as we do-- that affordable/or attainable housing would allow singles, empty nesters and first-time buyers to have housing that is appropriate to their needs and incomes. The question is: Where to situate and build substantial new housing, with equitable opportunities at various (and even subsidized) price points?

- **The original Silver Spring Downtown core** has 16 million square feet of development capacity remaining of the original 40 million square feet: it’s a canvas waiting for vision and bold action, with room for potentially 15,000 new residential units, including adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized office buildings.
- **Fenton Village** --from Fenton Street to Georgia, through all the side streets-- is a large district ready for a residential renaissance: infill housing of varied sizes and prices to create a 24/7 vibe, with energy and safety by having people on the streets 18 hours a day.
- **The Silver Spring Downtown Parking District** has garages that total 502,000+ square feet of surface area (ground level); additional surface parking lots yield 95,165 square feet more. Many are ageing and underutilized. That’s 12.6 acres of land in prime locations – close to public transit in Silver Spring– that can be master planned as mixed residential areas, with low-rise apartments, bungalows, quads and townhouses of varied sizes and price points.
- **Percontee’s White Oak development area** of 300 acres along Route 29 is a blank canvas that can be master planned for a vibrant, inclusive and sustainable New Town, with varied housing and amenities; the BRT Flash Bus available can take commuters to the Purple Line and Metro’s Ft. Totten Station.

None of these options will Balkanize future residents into undesirable locations—it places them in the midst of amenities and public transit. These locations should be the county’s first choice for equitable and affordable housing.

We have three further recommendations:

- **Mandate the use of the traditional master and sector planning processes** to specify zoning changes that will achieve both public buy-in and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach now proposed in the draft TM2050 plan.
- **Neighborhood compatibility standards** referred to in the Neighborhood Coalition letter must be reinstated in the final TM2050 plan. These would be created for each community and frame what happens in terms of density, maximum height, setbacks, side and rear lines, materials and styles keeping with the character of our neighborhood.
- **Aggregation of land or properties: Quantifiable and enforceable process and limits** need to be set for developers and all aggregators (lawyer front men, real estate companies and landowners) on how they acquire and aggregate land or property in Woodside Park (and elsewhere).

Housing is NOT home ownership. Are you serious about solving inequity ? Look to the [Philadelphia Accelerator Fund](#) -- public-private partnership designed to provide flexible funds to minority developers facing [systemic barriers](#) to traditional bank financing—with a goal of \$100 million by the end of 2021

We are asking the County Council to make a responsible decision: return the draft Thrive Montgomery 2050 plan to the Planning Board for rethinking and major revisions. Honest civic engagement means giving a voice – and more choice —to the County’s residents and taxpayers.

Signed below by: (197 homeowners and residents of Woodside Park, Silver Spring MD)

1. Ago Ambre
2. Aade Ambre
3. Brenda Freeman
4. Roberta Faul-Zeitler
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6. Lea Stern, M.D.
7. Roger Barlow
8. Matthew Dixon
9. Amy Dixon
10. Christopher Bublitz
11. Marjorie Hoffman
12. Nick Gilbert
13. Deborah Gilbert
14. Dr. Raymond Hayes
15. Elizabeth Hayes
16. Marian Dirda
17. Jimmy McPherson
18. Carol Frick
19. Amelia Watkins
20. LaVeeda Garlington
21. Omar Teitelbaum
22. Abigail Glenn-Chase
23. John Francis
24. Nancy Avalon
25. John Murray McCombs

26. Mary Wileden
27. Roberta G. Steinman
28. John Parrish
29. Susan Miles
30. Rob Williams
31. Arun Mallikarjunan
32. Suba Mallikarjunan
33. Dr. Thomas Gallant
34. Rosemarie Gallant
35. Frank Weathers, Jr.
36. Chris Schlemmon
37. Alike Nagpaul
38. Andy Alderice
39. Ping Chang
40. Debbie Kaye
41. Dan Doherty
42. Jen Doherty
43. Graham Anderson
44. Robert Dean, M.D., US Army Ret.
45. Steven Schuster
46. Michelle Schuster
47. Charles Vest
48. Jill Vest
49. Paula Doulaveris
50. Richard Birdsong
51. Joel Bailey
52. Theo Anderson
53. Rosa Gwinn
54. Bob Oshel
55. Kay Oshel
56. Meg Stallings
57. Cynthia Mackie
58. Jim Tarrant
59. Mayra Davalos
60. Monte Jackel
61. Rebecca Gorski
62. Mary Beth Wertime,
63. Tjip Walker
64. Jennifer Iba
65. Terry Rudd
66. Patrick A. Sidwell
67. Christine Morgan
68. Connie Raab
69. Ross Bettinger
70. Shira Bettinger
71. Roger Lewis
72. Lynne Haims
73. Beatrice Hoppe

74. Aaron Hoppe
75. Eric Platt.
76. Linda Platt
77. Sandi Zeese
78. Dawn Leaf
79. Lou Razzetti
80. Francie Hester
81. Diane Case
82. Merrilyn Gibson
83. Dean Gibson
84. Liora Moriel
85. Susan Kirshner
86. Chris Hatch
87. Sandra Colombini
88. Jon Lourie
89. Sue Kirchhoff
90. David Dickerson
91. Meg Dickerson
92. Bill Madert
93. Lucy Madert
94. Katherine Anthony
95. Bob Braganza
96. Ricky Albores
97. Maryann Penna
98. Eric Svendson
99. Rosanne Skirble
- 100.E. Josephine Nippard
- 101.Karen Schafer
- 102.Grace Boeringer
- 103.Peter Hoffman
- 104.Roberta Hoffman
- 105.Ellen Paul
- 106.Lori Chatman
- 107.Melanie F. Dolan
- 108.Chuck Dolan
- 109.Bernard Dorr
- 110.Irene Dorr
- 111.Katrina Niemann
- 112.Maida Schifter
- 113.Ralph Tryon
- 114.Eva Brown
- 115.Barbara Warner
- 116.Clair Maklan
- 117.David Maklan
- 118.Sharon Horowitz
- 119.Alan Horowitz
- 120.Ben Berman
- 121.Sue Fierston

122.Madlyn G. McPherson
123.Jaime Blech
124.Lynne Marks
125.Tina Sung
126.Harry Furukawa
127.Stuart Kern
128.Rosemarie Kelley
129.Isaac Marks
130.Zana Marks
131.Helen Ramsey
132.Alan Ramsey
133.Carol Crawford
134.Carla Holt
135.Les Holt
136.Julie Ringol Good
137.Lee C. Heiman
138.L. Courtney Smith
139.Carolyn Davis
140.Anna Sabin
141.Jim Sabin
142.Andrea Littell
143.Kristine Aono
144.L. Val Giddings
145.Jackie Martin
146.John Martin
147.Daniel Wolf
148.Rachel Scher
149.Adina Gewirtz
150.Daniel Gewirtz
151.Stephen Adise
152.Gale Frank-Adise
153.Saiping Tso
154.Arthur Daemmrch
155.Joshua Buursma
156.Liz Richardson
157.Robert Kaufmann
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159.Monica Kerns
160.Tom Ruth
161.Carole Giunta
162.Karin Leff
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164.Bridget M. Stewart
165.Eric J. Stewart
166.Nancy Nelkin
167.Bill Chafin
168.Heather Chafin
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170. Francesca Macchiarini
171. Theone M. Relos
172. Denise Sherer
173. Chuck Sherer
174. Sydney Trent
175. Bruce Seeman
176. Kalyani Chadha
177. Samir Khuller
178. James Gormally
179. Clara Hill
180. Betsy Gressler
181. Diane Raynes
182. John Miller
183. Abbi Lichtenstein
184. Michaela Johnson
185. Carolyn Weber
186. Eduardo Aponte
187. Kate O'Neill
188. Trevor O'Neill
189. Madeline Svendson
190. Larry Good
191. Randall Swisher
192. Carol Schaffer
193. William Moore
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(END)

This letter is being transmitted via email by Roberta Faul-Zeitler, on behalf of the signers.