

Jill Goebel

Woodside Park, Silver Spring MD

RECEIVED
2021 SEP 14 PM 3:41:04

"The Voice"

September 8 2021

TO: County Council - Please insert in
permanent record on Thrive and AH.

We are sending this courtesy copy of Woodside Park's *The Voice* for
your reading.

Please see the articles on pages 4, 5, and 6 on future development in
the *Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan* and *Attainable Housing*, and on "*The
Costs of Change*," considering Woodside Park's environmental assets
and impacts arising from densification, written by longtime residents
Cynthia Mackie and Roberta Faul-Zeitler. The opinions are those of the
authors.

An editor's error resulted in the mistitling of the article ***The Direction
for Woodside Park: Will We Thrive?*** (as ...Will We Survive). We regret
the error.

Sincerely yours,

RFZ

Robert Oshel, Vice President, Woodside Park Civic Association
robert.oshel@gmail.com

Cynthia Mackie
cmackie1223@gmail.com

Roberta Faul-Zeitler
faulzeitler@verizon.net

Thank you!
RFZ

The Direction for Woodside Park: Will We Survive?

Roberta Faul-Zeitler

Earlier this summer 200 Woodside Park residents signed a joint letter of testimony to the County Council, voicing concerns about the shortcomings of the draft Thrive Montgomery 2050 (TM 2050) countywide general plan, offering suggestions, and asking for a better process to engage residents fully.

A few Woodside Park residents also competed for a very limited number of slots (about 100 total) for a pair of Zoom public hearings on the Thrive draft before the County Council in June. Each speaker got 2 minutes. That amounts to 200 minutes of community input to advise Councilmembers on a planning, housing and development plan intended to shape where and how people live in Montgomery County over the next 30 years. 100 people permitted to speak to the plan out of a population of over 1 million residents.

(See the sidebar on the East Side Coalition formed by neighborhoods in Silver Spring and Wheaton to address planning and zoning issues.)

Thrive During the Pandemic

Nearly half of the 3-year Thrive Montgomery 2050 planning period has been during the pandemic, seriously limiting public events and engagement with Council/Planning Board and their staffs. Civic leaders confirm that many residents know little about TM2050 and how it will affect them.

One thing has not changed: the determination of the Planning Board and the Council – despite the opposition of County Executive Marc Elrich and a whole swath of the public –to finalize TM 2050 in the coming months.

TM2050 is only one part of the quintet of initiatives moving forward concurrently :

- Attainable Housing, the latest iteration of the former Missing Middle housing narrative, will create urban density near “activity centers” within a mile of Metro and the Purple line, along corridors like Colesville, Georgia, Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues, going 500 feet into our neighborhood’s side streets, and; as well as by-right construction of duplexes, triplexes and quads in all areas of our neighborhood.
- A Zoning Text Amendment still under consideration would eliminate all single family home zoning (except R200 zoning).
- The Silver Spring Downtown Master Plan (in progress) annexes 118 residential acres by action of the Planning Board in 2020, from Woodside Park and other nearby communities, with no justification, for future development –expanding the Downtown by 35%;

- When all of the above is completed, planners intend to establish a Silver Spring Communities master plan with whatever pieces are left of neighborhoods from the former North & West Silver Spring Master Plan of 2000.

What Does All This Mean?

Councilmembers appear committed to the idea that more new housing is a core principle to achieve future economic growth in the County. It’s supposed to attract new businesses and employees, and act as an accelerator – “build it and they will come.” However, the County does not have an operative economic development plan. Why not? And the economic competitiveness chapter in the Thrive plan was removed from the draft with no explanation.

Why are developers holding back on already-approved projects? There are 33,000 residential housing units countywide approved by the Planning Board. All that’s needed is a building permit, and a project can go ahead. You won’t find this news in the Thrive draft or Attainable Housing documents.

“Attainable Housing” now supersedes the former concepts of affordable housing and missing middle housing. The narrative and details change often: There’s a rewrite, changes are discussed, okayed in Planning Board work sessions, and earlier proposals are reversed or eliminated. One example: The Planning Board Chair stated recently he sees no need for “pattern books” to be used by developers, as originally proposed by the planning staff, to ensure general compatibility for duplexes and quads built in each neighborhood: height, setbacks, massing, front door placement, parking space location, and the like. The goalpost keeps being moved. It’s impossible for residents to keep up.

There’s an estimated 30 million square feet of buildable capacity in White Oak and Downtown Silver Spring, both offering access to transit. Do we need to densify every so-called “transit corridor” because it might someday have a Bus Rapid Transit line?

Real estate developers in a recent briefing indicate they don’t favor housing developments on small lots (6,000 sf) and suggested a townhouse duplex might cost \$712,000. Is this affordable housing – or is it the rationale for aggregation of whole blocks, to be divided up with triplexes, quads and apartment buildings?

Where’s the data on underutilized and vacant commercial buildings (and strip malls) in Downtown and the county? All of this building stock should be under active consideration for adaptive reuse as residential units. One of our own neighbors spearheaded a successful office building conversion to 102 condo units in the Downtown.

Will the Council ensure that policies they approve protect homeowners from displacement in existing affordable housing areas, including along transit corridors in Wheaton, Twinbrook, and Aspen Hill?

Direction Cont'd.

Which Way Forward?

The pandemic has created an unclear way forward for many communities in the near term, and possibly longer. "[It] led to the worst U.S. recession in history and millions of people are still out of jobs." (NPR)

Equally surprising, a record 4 million workers in the U.S. quit their jobs in April of this year (The New Yorker, August 16). The Great Resignation is a reality and a trend. Knowledge workers are rethinking what they want to do and where they want to live (see coverage by Entrepreneur, Forbes, The New Yorker).

There's an opportunity now for Montgomery County officials: Take a pause, leave politics aside, and engage with neighborhoods and people from all walks of life in the county – together, planning for a future where everyone can thrive.

(Roberta Faul-Zeitler has been a resident of Woodside Park since 1995.)

Resources

Thrive Montgomery2050 General Plan (final draft)

General plan for the County with a 30-year horizon. Earlier drafts contained chapters on the environment and economic development that have been removed.

https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/THRIVE-Planning-Board-Draft-2021-Pages_web.pdf

Attainable Housing Report

Successor to "Missing Middle Housing," it was prepared by the housing division of Montgomery Planning. This document is revised during "work sessions" with the Planning Board. (Sessions available live and on video on the MNCP-PC web site)

https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/item7_Attainable-Housing-Strategies-06.17.21_Final.pdf

Downtown Silver Spring and Adjacent Communities Master Plan web site

<https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/communities/downcounty/silver-spring/silver-spring-downtown-plan/>

East Side Coalition was recently formed by neighborhoods in Silver Spring and Wheaton to present alternatives to the County Council and Planning Board. For more information, contact Bob Oshel, Brenda Freeman, or Bobbie Faul-Zeitler.

Montgomery County Council: Write to the Council to share your concerns and suggestions for the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan. This email address reaches every Councilmember.

County.council@montgomerycountymd.gov



Suggested housing scales – duplex, triplex, quads, small apartment buildings in the Attainable Housing Report. Courtesy of Montgomery Planning.

What are the Costs of Change

Cynthia Mackie

What should Woodside Park (WP) look like in the future? Change is always inevitable and it is important to look with eyes wide open at the costs and benefits of the changes which we can influence. I want to lay out some basic information on the potential environmental costs to increasing density in a well-established old neighborhood such as ours, such as proposed in the County's Thrive Montgomery 2050 plan and related Planning Board intention to increase "attainable housing." It is more difficult to minimize the negative environmental impact in WP because increased housing development contends with what we already have in terms of houses, roads, and our green space (trees, lawns, parks and forest remnants). Filling in with more housing means removing that green space and absorbing substantial increases in car traffic. While there are socio-economic trade-offs to increasing density, I am focused here on the potential environmental costs.

As an ecologist with an international forestry and climate change background, I have volunteered for nearly 3 years to an expert workgroup advising the County on climate change. The workgroup recommendations contributed to the County's newly minted Climate Action Plan. Links to these documents and others mentioned below are provided in the sidebar.

My main focus here is tree canopy. This is the layer of vegetation that covers the ground when viewed from above. The County has done several assessments of tree canopy and has found that the benefits to communities, as one would expect, include improved water quality and decreased sediment load going into our rivers and streams (and the Bay), less residential energy consumption, lower heat wave temperatures, reduced air pollution, improved habitat for native animals, and increased aesthetic benefits that enhance property values. There is a myriad of County programs designed to retain and expand tree canopy cover based on this. More recently, analyses have shown the carbon value of existing trees and the emissions from removing trees, as well as the role trees and other vegetation play in moderating extreme events that are worsening with climate change (such as flooding and drought). These have prompted the County to include land use as an important feature of the Climate Action Plan.

Costs of Change Cont'd.

I have taken a quick look at WP's tree canopy using a tool called iTree, available to the public to estimate these values. WP has 68.22% tree canopy, with the rest of our land under impervious roads and buildings (18.04%) and 13.75% "plantable land" (lawns and open green space). The portion of our neighborhood closest to downtown Silver Spring has less canopy than the section abutting Dale Drive. Some of the values of the trees making up the canopy are:

Carbon Storage	\$813,940	4,772.5 short tons
Carbon Sequestration	\$9,263/year	138.8 tons/year
Air Pollution Removal	\$277/year	415.4 lb/year
Avoided water runoff	\$13,505/year	

Other values involve protecting human health and are more difficult to assess quickly and are tied to air pollution and extreme heat events, as well as overall well-being. In the County's Climate Action Plan is an overlay analysis of where communities are most vulnerable to particular health related risks to air toxics, extreme heat and other stressors. Our neighborhood is surrounded by higher risk communities, mostly due to their socio-economic status and the poorer environmental conditions they are living in, particularly less tree canopy. For those who are passionate about biodiversity and wildlife, such as myself, our WP vegetation plays a crucial role for habitat.

If we take the present day conditions in WP and project what might happen under Thrive 2050, the attainable housing initiative and related changes to zoning ordinances, we can make a rough estimate that we would increase by at least 30% the impervious land by building more housing, larger multiple-unit housing, more parking spaces on lots and possibly widening roads/installing sidewalks.

Of that, let's say very conservatively there's a 15% reduction in tree canopy, which would mean: \$122,091 loss in carbon storage (715.9 short tons carbon) and \$3,457/year loss in environmental services like carbon sequestration and avoided water run-off. The changes might actually be substantially more if all the current proposals are accepted, perhaps double of this rough estimate.

Added to that are increases in health risks, costs of heating and cooling, loss of biodiversity and a very dramatic change in the character of the neighborhood. The environmental benefits of mature trees cannot be replaced easily, it takes 20 years or more to get a sapling to a size that offers full environmental services.

What is the best way to avoid pulling our neighborhood into a higher risk health category? It might be preferable to enhance the conditions in existing high-risk areas such as Wheaton and increase the stock of attainable housing in areas of Silver Spring where the trade-offs are less costly to the environment (see the letter from some Woodside Park neighbors opposing the Thrive 20250 draft which lists some of these). At minimum, we should look at the trade-offs carefully as we envision the future of Woodside Park.

Information Sources

iTree Report I created of our neighborhood:

<https://landscape.itreetools.org/report/82fc9a8e-73dc-4a51-b59f-f7215d50af9e/>

Climate Work Group Recommendations and County Climate Action Plan

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/green/climate/index.html>

Existing Planning Board and County Tree Planting Programs

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/green/trees/tree-montgomery.html>

Stream health conditions are monitored by the County and are in variable condition, see this link for a graphic summary: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/water/streams/water-shed-health.html>

Joseph E. Frew, D.D.S.

9604 Colesville Road

Washington Consumers' Checkbook

"TOP DENTISTS"

**Call to
schedule your
appointment!
301-585-3800**

**Free Dental
Implant
Consultation!**



Comprehensive and Aesthetic Dental Care

- Dental Implants
- Single Visit Crowns - CEREC
- Teeth Whitening
- Non-surgical gum Treatment
- Emergency Treatment
- Tooth Extractions
- Root Canals
- Dentures
- Friendly, Caring & Relaxed Environment