

Oral and Written Testimony – Montgomery Thrive 2050 – Support with Amendments

My name is Laura Stewart, and I am speaking as a Silver Spring resident. Thank you for this opportunity to provide my support of the goals stated in Thrive Montgomery 2050. We need more affordable and deeply affordable housing, connected by safe routes to jobs, great schools, and welcoming environments. I support density, while also preserving and adding urban “natural green (not plastic) infrastructure” when possible. In order to achieve these goals, we need clear funding guidelines to ensure that we not only provide shelter, but also spaces for residents to truly thrive.

The plan states, “the county’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP) should be aligned with Thrive Montgomery 2050’s recommendations to make our neighborhoods more attractive for private development by providing high quality transit, sidewalks and a walkable grid of streets, great urban parks, and high-performing and racially integrated schools.” and “Other changes are needed in terms of financial incentives, tax reform and investment.” Yet there is very little in the plan that state the kind of reform we need to do in order to fund this ideal CIP.

In recent years, we haven’t made necessary investment for the current population and therefore are already starting from a deficit. Today, there are 200 requests for sidewalks, yet we can only afford 9 projects a year. We cut the CIP for 3 straight years and had to delay the new elementary school to relieve Clarksburg ES, now slated to receive up to 19 portable classrooms. The last vote on the Growth and Infrastructure Policy showed an unwillingness from this council to raise the revenue to truly invest in livable, walkable communities. Instead, the council cut revenue sources and refused to implement a progressive recordation tax as suggested by the Planning Board. I was disappointed that I did not see one reference to progressive tax policy in this document. If we are going to be committed to equity, we need to start a real conversation on an equitable way to pay for an increase in investment in order to achieve Thrive Montgomery’s goals.

Laura Stewart

Silver Spring Resident

Relevant Infrastructure Improvement Passages and Suggestions:

In introduction Page 8: For example, the county’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP) should be aligned with Thrive Montgomery 2050’s recommendations to make our neighborhoods more attractive for private development by providing high quality transit, sidewalks and a walkable grid of streets, great urban parks, and high-performing and racially integrated schools. The combination of these kinds of investments is a reliable long-term strategy for attracting workers to well-designed and planned complete communities, which in turn will entice businesses and employers to locate here. **The policies that fund and the distributions of these investments should be implemented in an equitable manner.**

Page 22: Promote and prioritize public investment in infrastructure along growth corridors and leverage it to attract future private investment in a compact form.

- Consider new methods of financing public infrastructure, such as value capture, tax increment financing, and other mechanisms to facilitate investment and provision of appropriate infrastructure in areas identified as appropriate for more intensive development.

- Consider expanding progressive tax policy in order to generate additional revenue to fund Montgomery Thrive infrastructure priorities.

Page 25: It is important to note that form alone will not create more jobs. Increased density, great transit options and a regulatory environment that supports investment are all required. Other changes are needed in terms of financial incentives, tax reform that generates adequate capital revenue, and greater investment in infrastructure.

Page 27: A compact form of infill development or redevelopment can reduce stormwater runoff and heat island effect by using green infrastructure, green roofs, green recreation areas, and other green cover, as well as building design and orientation to reduce urban temperatures.

Page 82: Public infrastructure is provided mainly through the county's Capital Improvements Program (CIP), but the private sector makes important contributions pursuant to the county's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance as incorporated into the Growth and Infrastructure Policy and impact tax law, which require property developers to build, dedicate, or provide money for parks, roads, schools, and affordable housing. These rules are the mechanism by which new development generates revenue for the public sector to fund infrastructure improvements, unless they are in impact tax exempted opportunity zones. New sources of funding and more effective use of county assets, such as public land and right-of-way, also may be needed. The combination of such public and private investments is the most reliable long-term strategy for attracting new residents, businesses, and a skilled workforce to high-quality Complete Communities.