



Comments from the Fair Access Committee on the Thrive Montgomery Plan December, 2021

The new draft master plan includes three important areas of focus – the promotion of the Ag Reserve, attention to equity in policy and planning, and supporting “15-minute communities” – that speak directly to the failure of the county for decades to invest in facilities, programs and services to serve the residents in the Western County.

The plan contains provisions intended to promote interest in and access to the Ag Reserve. Preserving the health of the Reserve is not just about helping promote agriculture and open lands. The health and welfare of those who live in the Reserve must be a priority. Preventing investment in buildings should not mean the county fails to invest in the people who live in the Ag Reserve but that is just what has happened. **The Ag Reserve is not really thriving if many of those who live there do not have access to county resources that enrich lives.**

The plan focuses on equity, a worthy and positive goal. It views equity largely through the lens of racial and economic disparities. However, there is another equity failure, the failure to ensure that all citizens have access to basic services, programs and facilities the county has deemed important no matter where they live. Western County residents are far from services like community and senior centers, medical services of many kinds, and a wide range of county programs that cannot be offered without facilities.

The draft plan promotes the idea of “fifteen-minute communities”, communities with convenient and nearby access to most county services. Poolesville has no community center, no senior center, only one doctor’s office, a swimming pool that sits unused for 8 months out of the year. Poolesville is one of the most walkable, compact communities in the county and is right in the middle of the Ag Reserve. **Investing in county facilities in Poolesville will help preserve the Ag Reserve by reducing the need for citizens to drive long distances all over the county to access facilities and programs and encouraging people elsewhere to come to Poolesville for programs.**