

December 14 2021 Written Testimony from Elaine Roecklein

To: President Gabe Albornoz

Members of the Montgomery County Council

PLEASE PUT MY TESTIMONY INTO THE PUBLIC RECORD:

I recently learned our Planning Board was re-imagining the General Plan for our County and developing the attainable housing ZTA.

I have read THRIVE and have many serious concerns. My main concern deals with the Housing Element. Although, I believe we as a society should provide Affordable Housing, I question the methods promoted to achieve this. We currently have over 44,300 approved housing units in the pipeline and Staff of Montgomery Planning has identified an addition 83,000 potential units that can be built. THRIVE recommends using "missing middle" to build housing supply. Even though the Silver Spring Study has identified this new type of housing, 3-4 unit buildings, built one at a time does not produce "affordability". It will only increase housing costs, and create numerous unintended consequences which will cost taxpayers in the long run. The issues that will need to be addressed are storm water run-off and dismantlement of naturally occurring affordable housing. There is an accompanying document, that you will not vote on with Thrive. It's called the Action Report. It addresses some but not all of the potential consequences. It may not provide legislative relief for many years to come, if at all. We cannot predict what future County Council members will feel appropriate down the road. How wise is it to promote housing before addressing the necessary consequences of these actions? This is like putting the cart before the horse and is a glaring flaw.

Also, after reading the Transportation and compact community sections, I have serious doubts about the findings and the estimated costs. Over 75% of the population rely on cars. Period. It's the American way. In spite of this fact, THRIVE recommends removing many roads and road improvements from old Master Plans. So, how can we potentially double our density yet only rely on buses when less than 5% of the population use buses? Can we really expect Americans, in a major metropolitan area to wean themselves off of automobiles? This is highly unlikely. Just think of NYC and LA. Wasn't the Washington Metropolitan area considered #3 in traffic congestion just behind LA and NYC? As our population grows, so will our traffic woes.

Another concern is THRIVE will result in the displacement of people who currently enjoy NOAH (Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing) the loss of tree canopy and open green spaces. It seems to me that no green space, park, tree or shrub is safe in Montgomery County. There is building everywhere. Given all of the above, I am concerned that unforeseen expenses will lead to significant increases to Taxes. This has happened in other parts of the Country where up-zoning has been implemented. THRIVE is incomplete and will result in a diminished quality of life for lower income and middle-income folks in our beloved Montgomery County.

In conclusion: Where blanket up-zoning has been used in other communities,

gentrification-displacement of people of color, replaced with whites and Asians has occurred. Taxes have increased, traffic has increased. Lower income folks, African Americans and Hispanics have been pushed out. Gentrification has taken over. At the moment, Montgomery County is well diversified. Those of us who live here value that diversity. It's one of the reasons why I love living here because I enjoy living in a diverse community. Let's work on another plan to keep it that way.

Please do NOT approve THRIVE. Please send it back to Planning and start the process over. I am asking for meaningful public engagement and participation on THRIVE. Lastly, I would request that there should be more metrics in the way of public discourse. I would suggest a County- wide poll on the subject. This way there will be no doubt as to where the public stands on the matter of THRIVE.

Thank you and Sincerely,

Elaine Roecklein

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