Thank you for the opportunity to briefly comment on my concerns about the Thrive. I am a life-long resident of Montgomery County where I attended Kennedy High School.

As someone that grew up with a strong awareness of the “Rock Creek Divide,” I was disappointed to see Kennedy mentioned in the Thrive document as having some of the worst educational attainment statistics in the county. It’s clear to see that the county has failed to invest in the eastern half of the county – and the effects are evident in the lack of educational and job opportunities for people. Yet, the Thrive document, as presented, doesn’t address these problems and, in effect, puts the cart before the horse by moving straight into attainable housing (the next issue to be addressed – shortly after Thrive is considered), and without fleshing out or developing a timeline for the topics raised in the Thrive “action report.” By passing this incomplete document, it will create additional challenges for populations that are already struggling with high ESOL populations in schools and high mobility, while also increasing taxes for current homeowners.

I have yet to see a complete fiscal impact statement describing the expected consequences of Thrive – particularly those of countywide upzoning for the county’s annual revenues and expenditures. I would also like to see the issue of residential tax increases associated with up-zoning addressed. The specifics, related to these financial concerns, seem to be missing from the document.

I also wanted to briefly address the issue of transportation – specifically access to transit. Thrive sets up neighborhoods over a mile from metro to be targeted for rezoning – with the assumption that the majority of residents moving into these neighborhoods will use transit to get to work but fails to address how it will make that happen. There is no discussion of incentives to use transit, or how increased density will impact traffic - just an assumption that people will give up their cars and stop driving to work. In a county where 75% of people use their own vehicle to get to work and 5% of people use a bus, that simply isn’t practical and doesn’t deal with the real world.

And, as a 20-year rider of metro, I have to say that I am disappointed at how little the county has done (over the years) to deal with issues with mass transit. I won’t go into metro here, because management and maintenance of the system isn’t the responsibility (or fault) of Montgomery county. However, I will say that bus service from many neighborhoods is either terrible or non-existent. I have lived all over Montgomery County and this has been universally the case everywhere (except for the city of Rockville). I would like to see improvements made to transit BEFORE density is increased in single family neighborhoods. Thrive relies heavily on mass transit but doesn’t discuss what changes will be implemented to increase ridership – like having
bus service that runs every 15 minutes (on time), with stops where they are needed, during rush hour.

The areas of the county that will be most negatively impacted by Thrive are the ones that can least deal with more difficulty. I would urge the County Council to take the time to more fully work through the action report so that all the impacts of multiplex housing can be addressed with a plan BEFORE rezoning plans move forward and communities are stuck dealing with the impacts. Rather than allowing “by-right” multiplex housing, master and sector planning could be used. Not every neighborhood is the same.

Finally, I wanted to address my financial concerns. Across the river, the silver line is being constructed to run past Dulles airport. You can see all the new businesses moving into that area, and where the region’s recently-arrived middle class residents are moving. I, and many smarter people than myself, are really concerned about where things are headed - in terms of Montgomery county’s finances. The 2018 Housing Needs Study states that – between 2010 and 2018, the county only gained slightly more than 5% of all household wealth of new residents to the DMV. Middle class working stiffs, like myself, simply aren’t moving to our county anymore, and that wouldn’t be a huge issue if we had more tax revenue coming in – but we aren’t generating the kind of money that we need to be. Thrive doesn’t address any of the issues around our shrinking middle-class tax base and is going to leave the county’s residents carrying an even higher tax burden. What is needed is a plan that encourages the kind of development that draws residents and employers to the county. Rather than jumping directly to rezoning single family neighborhoods, the county could be focusing its efforts into re-purposing the large amount of empty commercial space or providing incentives to employers to move into the county.

I would urge the Council to take the time to address the bumps in the road ahead by more fully developing, and moving forward, on the Action Report before passing Thrive. Thank you for your time and consideration of my comments!

-Jennifer Klang

Kensington, MD 20895