

Doug Ryan

Testimony to The Montgomery County Council

Thrive Montgomery 2050

December 14, 2021

Good evening, Council President Albornoz and members of the Montgomery County Council.

My name is Doug Ryan; I have lived in the county for 24 years, where my wife and I are homeowners, first in Kensington and now in Bethesda. Our kids graduated from county schools.

I am also an affordable housing expert and advocate with 30 years of experience, including 13 years on staff at the Housing Opportunities Commission and five as a member of the county's Commission on Human Rights. I support Thrive Montgomery 2050 to incubate the inclusive county so many of us want. Without housing, of all sizes and types, that inclusivity will continue to slip away.

Thrive does not change land use policy. It's a framework that reflects the county's demographic changes over the last five decades.

We need to build more housing. We need new housing near Metro, near bus lines, and on major corridors. Today's new, modest housing becomes tomorrow's naturally occurring affordable housing – if we build it.

We need housing innovation: We need to explicitly encourage community land trusts, factory-built housing, and limited-equity cooperatives to lower costs and barriers to entry.

We are proud that our 1974 MPDU policy became a model for the nation. Yet, in 2020, it produced just 244 new units, not nearly enough of the starter homes or modest rentals that we need.

Yes, we need more deeply subsidized housing. We need to lobby Washington, Annapolis, and Rockville to get there. I've done this for years.

Thrive lays the groundwork for more affordable homes. We can't build more affordable housing without density. The math simply doesn't work.

Thrive, of course, is beyond housing. Thrive embraces the social infrastructure – libraries, parks, community centers – that connects us. These assets, more than mere amenities, lead to improved public health, better public safety, and more engaged residents.

Too many issues divide the nation right now. A local plan for a framework to position the county for the next generation shouldn't.

This is not new. Robert Whitten, then-president of the American City Planning Institute, said this 99 years ago: "Bankers and leading businessmen should live in one part of town; storekeepers, clerks, and technicians in another; and working people in yet others where they would enjoy the association with neighbors more or less of their own kind."

That is not the Montgomery County we think we live in, but it is becoming more and more the reality. Thrive Montgomery 2050 can move us forward. I encourage the Council to approve the general plan.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak about this vital topic and our county's future.