Dear Montgomery County Councilmembers:

I am writing to you to express my ***strong support for Thrive Montgomery 2050***.

As Thrive 2050 is a general plan, it represents the highest and most general level planning for public and private land use in the county. As Thrive itself states, " It provides direction for decisions about land use, transportation, and related issues under local government influence, but it does not change zoning or other detailed land use regulations. Its recommendations also touch on the objectives and actions of other public and private entities that are responsible for implementing and providing land use related services and amenities" (pg. 6). Thrive provides a vision and goal for the county that will be implemented in other future planning activity; it is the first step to work towards that vision and meeting those goals, but it itself is not intended to create the goals while also creating, implementing, and enforcing policies. Thrive instead provides metrics and tools for future activities to meet those goals. I raise this distinction because there has been some concern in the county that "Thrive itself" will not meet its goals which demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of what a general plan is.

Thrive Responds to the Climate Crisis

While Thrive is only a general plan and not an environmental plan, land-use is a critical issue when it comes to the environment Thrive approaches the climate crisis from 2 main angles: 1) mitigating the human contribution to climate change through transit-oriented, urbanist development and 2) implementing standards for climate resilience to ensure our county remains livable as we face the consequences of human-caused climate change.

Thrive prioritizes new development in areas already developed, infill development, near transit. One of the major reasons I believe this style of development is critical is that transportation is the largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions (Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions | US EPA). As Thrive states, **private cars accounted for about 75% of all trips taken in the county** in 2018. If Montgomery County is going to take the climate crisis seriously, it must act to limit driving alone and the need for residents to depend on private vehicles to do anything and everything.

Thrive's vision for transit-oriented development is described as "complete communities". Over the 20th and 21st centuries, American life moved away from developing and living in actual communities and instead moved towards suburban-style life. This meant that through a style of zoning known as "euclidean zoning" people would live in a residential-only area. Houses--and only houses--would be allowed in new residential areas, so there would be no businesses nearby for people to work at or patronize. It also means that most people ***must*** drive in order to get to work, get groceries, run a quick errand, or go out to eat. Thrive's Complete Community vision means moving away from Euclidean-style zoning so people can live near where they work and have access to more amenities. This would result in fewer car trips, fewer greenhouse gases, and a reduced contribution to climate change.

Thrive introduces a vision for greater environmental resilience so the county can deal with the effects of climate change better. While some are concerned that Thrive will worsen storm drainage and other related issues, Thrive actually introduces new guidance for addressing these issues.

I believe Montgomery County needs to adopt Thrive Montgomery as a first step in addressing climate change.

Thrive Responds to the Housing Crisis

As the nation is--and has been--facing a housing crisis, Montgomery County is facing a choice about what to do about housing.

Take this article about housing in Wheaton as an example of the housing crisis in the county. The article details how the Wheaton Regional Park Neighborhood Association feels like their community is overcrowded by immigrants and has been meeting to discuss how the county's existing zoning policies should be more strictly enforced to prevent those people from living where they currently live. This article demonstrates the dilemma Montgomery County faces: should the county evolve to meet the needs of the people already living here and will come here for jobs or should we use zoning to kick people out and keep them out.

Instead of excluding people, Thrive proposes developing housing that meets the needs of the variety of people who live in the county.

There is a concern in the county that any new development and housing might gentrify neighborhoods and displace people in the community, but the unfortunate reality is that **neighborhoods are already gentrifying and people are already being displaced**. As documented in Thrive, the county has been experiencing a net negative migration of people 25-40. Younger people cannot afford to stay here and leave, while younger people cannot afford to move here and cannot move in. **If the county wants to prevent displacement, it needs to adopt policies to provide housing that meet people's needs and are affordable and attainable.** Thrive 2050 is the first step to doing that.

I believe Montgomery County needs to adopt Thrive Montgomery 2050 as a first step in addressing the housing needs of the people living and working in the county.

Thrive Addresses Historic Inequities

While land use may not appear to be an issue involving race or equity, land use is actually a major factor in inequality in the United States. As John A. Powell, a professor at Berkeley Law and Director of the Othering and Belonging Institute, points out:

"Geography does the work of Jim Crow."

What Professor Powell meant by this comment is that so much about where people live affects their life: their opportunity for education, jobs, transportation, the quality of their environment, and even their health. More and more researchers are exposing how historic policies which determined where minoritized populations live affect all aspects of their life. Poorer and minoritized populations are more

likely to live in concentrated poverty, in food deserts without access to fresh food, in heat islands with little shade and experience hotter temperatures. Whiter and wealthier areas meanwhile enjoy better quality education and other public investment meaning greater opportunity.

While Montgomery County has seen some dramatic changes where sundown towns have transformed into racially integrated communities without any racial majority such as Silver Spring, **there remain wealthy communities in the county which have a white majority 2-3 x's the size of the white populations in neighboring communities**. This kind of division is not good for the county nor anyone in the county. By legalizing different housing types in transit-rich areas, Thrive provides opportunities to diversify parts of the county which is healthy for everyone in the county by creating a more inclusive culture.

Finally, one of the aspects of Thrive that I found most exciting is the introduction of **data collection to monitor and control for displacement**. There is a great amount of concern that new developments, regardless of the size, may lead to displacing people in the county, certainly a merited concern. However, Thrive introduces using data about neighborhood and demographic change for evaluating projects to mitigate displacement; moreover it includes **the creation of a public dashboard about neighborhood change**, so that members of the public will be able to monitor displacement ourselves and hold the responsible parties accountable. I hope you understand the importance of collecting and making that data available.

I believe that Montgomery County needs to adopt Thrive Montgomery 2050 as a first step to address the historic inequities in the county.

The present and future have many challenges for the county, yet these challenges can also be opportunities for the county to create a better, healthier, greener, and more equitable community. I hope that you will support Thrive Montgomery 2050, and work to support its goals and visions.

Benjamin Bradley
Silver Spring, MD