



**Commission on People with Disabilities
Meeting Minutes
February 9, 2022**

****MEETING WAS HELD VIA ZOOM ****

Welcome and Approval of January 2022 Meeting Minutes

Seth Morgan, Chair, convened the meeting. A motion was made to approve the January 2022 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the January 2022 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as written. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cpwd.

Thrive 2050: Montgomery Park and Planning – Khalid Afzal, Special Projects Manager, General Plan Update, Montgomery County Planning Department and Marybeth Dugan, Program Access (Inclusion Services) M-NCPPC, Montgomery Parks

Website: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/master-plan-list/general-plans/thrive-montgomery-2050/>

PowerPoint: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CPWD/ThriveMontgomery2050.pdf>

Khalid Afzal reviewed the PowerPoint presentation with the Commission.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a general plan for the County with a 30-year horizon. It sets a vision for the County and encompasses broad, County-wide policy recommendations for land use, zoning, housing, the economy, equity, transportation, parks and open space, the environment, and historic resources. These recommendations provide guidance for future master plans, County and state capital improvement processes, and other public and private initiatives that influence land use and planning in the County. None of the plan's zoning-related recommendations can be implemented without a sectional map amendment, district map amendment, or a zoning text amendment approved by the County Council.

This plan outlines strategies to accommodate growth in ways that not only make room for new residents but also improve the quality of life for the people who are already here. It anticipates a County that inevitably will become more urban, more diverse, and more interconnected. It makes a case for why and how we need to take steps to become more prosperous, equitable, and resilient as we use growth and redevelopment to create places that are more economically competitive, foster a stronger sense of trust and inclusiveness among people from different backgrounds, and improve environmental quality and public health in the process. The ideas and recommendations in this plan are therefore organized to achieve three overarching objectives: economic health and competitiveness, community (racial and social) equity, and environmental resilience and sustainability.

The County's population is projected to grow by approximately 200,000 people over the next 30 years, and these policies and practices are critical to not only accommodating this growth but also to achieving Thrive Montgomery 2050's key objectives as well as combating and adapting to climate change. Nearly 85 percent of the county's land is already developed or otherwise constrained. If we fail to maintain effective barriers to sprawl, we will paint ourselves into a corner where space for farming, recreation, and resource management is exhausted along with space for additional growth. We must encourage compact, infill development and redevelopment to accommodate anticipated population growth in a way that supports dense, vibrant, energized communities. The strategy of concentrating growth within nodes along corridors will direct population and employment to locations served by infrastructure, services, and amenities – including transit – and create focused centers of activity. This focus will in

turn reduce the cost of public infrastructure and deliver more favorable returns on both public and private investment. Compact, infill development and redevelopment also align with the increasing desire of residents, businesses and employers seeking walkable, transit-oriented communities, as demonstrated by transit-oriented areas across the region and country.

In addition to transit-oriented, mixed-use development, the concept of “15-minute living” has emerged as a way of reimagining existing communities to maximize their attractiveness and efficiency by locating living spaces in each neighborhood or district within walking distance of services, infrastructure, facilities, and amenities that serve the daily needs of the people who live there. While a rigid application of 15-minute living is unlikely to be practical in every part of the county, the concept is a useful way to think about how to build complete communities and should be an organizing principle in planning for their success.

The County is expected to add over 60,000 new households by 2040. Weak supply is driving the price of housing up for both renters and those who want to own their home. The number of households spending at least 30 percent of income on housing costs has continued to grow. Housing price increases have outpaced growth in incomes, leading some people to leave the county in search of more affordable places to live. Homeownership rates have been in decline, especially for adults under the age of 35. The obstacles faced by young workers in finding housing they can afford makes it harder for employers to attract and retain the employees they need, damaging our economic competitiveness. Without more housing in general and an increase in the availability of smaller, less expensive housing in particular, housing will become less affordable and attainable to a broad swath of the county’s residents. Some will leave the county, either commuting long distances from home to work or departing the region in search of a more affordable place to live. Others will struggle with the burden of paying their rent or mortgage, reducing their standard of living.

Khalid noted that action items are listed in a separate document as new action items will continue to be added over the course of the plan. The Planning Board transmitted its draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050 to the council in Spring 2021. The Council’s Planning, Housing, & Economic Development (PHED) Committee has completed its review of Thrive Montgomery 2050 and full Council work sessions are expected next month.

The floor was opened to questions.

Seth asked if the plan takes into consideration limiting the size of buildings in high density areas so sidewalks could be expanded to make it less dangerous for persons with disabilities and pedestrians in general. Khalid said the County in its more recent plans has been working to address these issues outside of high-density areas, especially along major corridors such as Georgia Avenue and Veirs Mill Road. These road areas have been expanded over time as traffic has increased without much regard for pedestrians. There is no separation of the road and the sidewalk. The Planning Department has raised this issue with the State Highway Administration (SHA), which controls these major roads. For the last several years, it has been a rule within the Planning Department that a green panel separating the sidewalk and the road surface must be installed anytime there is a road project or a private project along these roads. Khalid said Thrive 2050 really focuses on the issue of pedestrian safety, pedestrian accessibility, and the pedestrian network. The County does not want to expand roads anymore. Thrive 2050 discusses finding ways to use existing right-of-way curb-to-curb distance for more of these facilities. In some instances, this will involve taking away traffic lanes as experience shows larger roads were designed beyond needed capacity. Larger lanes encourage speeding and Thrive 2050 supports reducing speeds in down County areas and in Complete Communities by reducing lane width. Downtown Silver Spring and in some areas of Bethesda the County has installed bike lanes in what were previously curb lanes. Some of these roads have not experienced traffic issues with having a traffic lane taken away. Bus stops have been reconfigured and designed differently to allow larger crossing distances. With these policies and guidance detailed in Thrive 2050, SHA and developers will understand the County’s goals and direction moving forward.

Seth added that one of the issues with narrowing down roads and installing bicycle lanes is increases the danger risk persons with disabilities who drive as they now have to exit into traffic when they park their vehicle. Some individuals need more space in order to access their wheelchair or other mobility device or for their service animal.

Day Al-Mohamed, Commissioner, asked about the various levels of housing and what percentage of accessible housing would be included at each level. Betsy added that accessible housing means there is a no step entrance and at least one door that is wider for a person who uses a wheelchair to access the building. Khalid said the chapter on Design, Arts and Culture does give guidance that the County must meet minimum ADA requirements and that accessibility should be thought of at every level and age. Current requirements requires all newly constructed units to have a ramp. The issue is 80% to 90% of the housing stock is already built, especially when it comes to single family homes. Single family homes are not required to have a no-step entrance. The County's voluntary Design for Life standards have some standards for accessible housing

Trish Gallalee, Vice-Chair, said Thrive 2050 references race in regard to affordable housing, but it does not reference persons with disabilities. Equity should include all typically disadvantaged groups. It should not be assumed that persons with disabilities all fall into the low-income category. They make up the middle- and higher-income levels as well. Trish added that all units should be made accessible in order to allow friends and family to visit who may need that accommodation. Khalid agreed and said accessibility should be incorporated everywhere whether it's affordable or high-income housing, facilities, libraries, retail, and whether you are a visitor or living there. The Design chapter does detail those environments must be accessible for all abilities.

Jeneva Stone, Commissioner, agreed with Trish's remarks. She detailed her experience with finding a home to renovate to make it accessible and accommodate her son who uses a wheelchair. She noted that such renovations required a larger house with more space that could accommodate the type of accessibility features needed. More square footage costs more money on top of already expensive renovations. There is a significant cost difference when discussing affordability and accessibility. Jeneva added that there is a significant pedestrian issue on Wisconsin Avenue where SHA has installed crosswalks between traffic lights where pedestrians have to cross six lanes of traffic. Pedestrians must rely on traffic to stop in order to cross. Due to these pedestrian safety concerns especially while out with her son Jeneva is driving more than walking.

Tonya Gilchrist, Commissioner, agreed with Trish's and Jeneva's comments. She uses a power wheelchair and has modified her home in Silver Spring to make it wheelchair accessible. She asked if Thrive 2050 if persons with disabilities are included in all aspects of the plan or if they are specifically mentioned among equitable communities. Tonya also asked if there was a separate list of zoning text amendments. Khalid said there is no separate section within Thrive 2050 for disability issues. Those issues are included throughout the recommendations wherever appropriate. There is no list of zoning text amendments at this point. In order to move forward with the plan changes to zoning ordinances, subdivision codes, building codes, and forest conservation codes may need to be made. It is currently unknown what those changes will be until the plan has been analyzed. Tonya said zoning text amendments for buildings that may be rezoned into flats, duplexes or triplexes should be include wheelchair accessibility.

Outgoing Commissioner: Marybeth Dugan

Seth presented Marybeth Dugan with a certificate of appreciation and thanked her for her time on the Commission. Marybeth has represented Montgomery Parks since 2019. She is retiring from Montgomery Parks after 44 years in the field of parks and recreation. Bob Green, Senior ADA Compliance Project Manager, will be taking over as the ex-officio representative from Montgomery Parks.

Chair and Vice-Chair Report

Seth reported that the County Council Transportation & Environment (T&E) and Health & Human Services (HHS) Committees will be holding a joint meeting on February 14 to discuss the Transportation Services Improvement Fund (TSIF) as well as transportation barriers to medical appointments. Seth will be attending on behalf of the Commission and will give a report at the next Commission meeting.

The Steering Committee will not meet this month. The regularly scheduled meeting will instead be a new member orientation to be held Wednesday February 16 from 5pm to 6:30pm. All new Commission members as well as Commissioner who would like a refresher are encouraged to attend.

ADA Update – Matt Barkley, ADA Compliance Manager

Matt reported the Commission raised some concerns about accessing COVID test kits and N95 masks that were being offered at libraries across the County. Betsy said there was language on the County's website that referred to 'homebound' residents rather than residents with disabilities or older adults that are unable to pick up the test kits or masks. Matt said he worked with staff and the language has been updated on the County's COVID website to include how to request an accommodation under the ADA and to remove the term 'homebound'.

Ex-Officio Member Reports

Denise Isreal, Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), reported that as of January 16, 2022, Ride On has reduced overall services by 9% due to driver shortages from COVID-19 cases or exposure. Ride On Flex, extRa, and Flash Blue routes are all suspended. The Flash Orange route is on a reduced schedule. MCDOT is actively recruiting for part- and full-time drivers. Ride On bus stations at the Rockville and Shady Grove Metro Stations have reopened. Masks are still required on all County buses through March 18, 2022, due to the extended Transportation Security Administration (TSA) mandate. Ride On service remains free to all passengers until July 2, 2022.

SmarTrip® Cards issued before 2012 need to be replaced by March 1. If the serial number on the back of your card does not include "0167," it needs to be replaced. For [step-by-step instructions](#) on how to replace old cards or transfer balances including SmartBenefits to another card, visit the [SmarTrip Card Replacement](#) page. Customers can easily replace their old farecards by mail, online, phone or in-person, and transfer any balance to a new or existing SmarTrip® card or virtual card through [SmarTrip mobile pay](#) for iOS and Android.

Announcements

None.

Meeting adjourned – 7:30pm

Montgomery County Commission on People with Disabilities March 2022 Meeting and Events Calendar

Full Commission Meeting – Wednesday, March 9

6pm to 7:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Developmental Disability Advisory Committee (DDAC) – Monday, March 14

4pm to 5:30pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Steering Committee Meeting – Wednesday, March 16

5pm to 6pm to be held via Zoom – link to be announced

Submitted by: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I
Betsy Tolbert Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

