



Committee: PHED

Committee Review: Completed

Staff: Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst

Gene Smith, Legislative Analyst

Keith Levchenko, Senior Legislative Analyst

Selena Singleton, Racial Equity and Social Justice Manager

Purpose: Discussion – no vote expected

Keywords: #Thrive, Montgomery 2050, M-NCPPC

AGENDA ITEM #1

September 22, 2022

Discussion

SUBJECT

The Council will discuss new chapters to be added to the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050. Thrive Montgomery 2050 contains the text and supporting maps for a comprehensive amendment to current the General Plan (On Wedges and Corridors) for the County. 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.

EXPECTED ATTENDEES

Casey Anderson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board

Gwen Wright, Director, Montgomery Planning Department

Tanya Stern, Deputy Director, Planning Department

COUNCIL DECISION POINTS & COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

- N/A

DESCRIPTION/ISSUE

On April 8, 2021, the Montgomery County Planning Board approved the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Planning Board Draft. The Plan was transmitted to the Council on April 13, 2021. Following two public hearings, one on June 17 and another on June 29, the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee held nine worksessions on the Plan. The Committee completed its review on October 25 incorporating its recommended changes into a PHED Committee Draft.

Before beginning its work, the Council held two listening sessions with close to 150 speakers and asked the five Regional Service Center Advisory Boards to host discussions about Thrive at their January meetings. In addition, the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) responded to a request for an equity analysis of the plan with a recommendation to seek consultant assistance with targeted outreach on Plan recommendations. The Consultant team was selected after an informal solicitation process. On September 13 and 20, the consultant team, made up of staff from Nspiregreen and Public Engagement Associates, briefed the Council on their outreach efforts, findings, and recommendations.

Today staff will discuss the new chapters on the economy, the environment, and racial equity and social justice.

SUMMARY OF KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

- Content and potential edits to the new chapters: Economic Competitiveness, Environmental Health and Resilience, and Racial Equity and Social Justice.

Attachments:

Staff Report	Pages 1-5
Chapter: Economic Competitiveness	© 1-6
Chapter: Environmental Health and Resilience	© 7-12
Chapter: Racial Equity and Social Justice	© 13-26
Comments: Coalition for Smarter Growth	© 27-33
Comments: Greater Greater Washington	© 34-39
Potential Edits to the Draft Chapters	© 41-42
Draft Chapter on Racial equity and Social Justice submitted by Planning Dept	© 43-49

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MEMORANDUM

September 20, 2022

TO: County Council

FROM: Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst
Gene Smith, Legislative Analyst
Keith Levchenko, Senior Legislative Analyst
Selena Mendy Singleton, Racial Equity and Social Justice Manager

SUBJECT: Thrive Montgomery 2050

PURPOSE: Worksession on the PHED Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050

Background

Last week the Council received a briefing on the racial equity and social justice review of the PHED Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050. During this briefing, the Council received detailed information regarding the mobilization and outreach efforts of the consultant team, including comments from community members, the results of a questionnaire, and recommendations for future outreach efforts, in general.

Given the breadth of information and interest by the Council, the consultant team did not have time to provide their recommendations on the policy chapters of Thrive nor to present their chapter on racial equity and social justice. A continuation of the consultant briefing is scheduled for Tuesday September 20.

New Chapters to be Added to the PHED Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050

In addition to the new chapter on racial equity and social justice requested of the consultant, the Council asked Council staff and Planning staff to work together to draft new chapters on the environment and the economy. Each new chapter addresses one of the three overarching objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050. As such, all three chapters are seen as “setting the stage” for the policies and practices recommended in the policy chapters that follow.

Chapter on the Economy

Attached on © 1-6 is the proposed new chapter, *Economic Competitiveness*. It provides the reader an overview of the economic strengths and challenges facing the County today. Below are excerpts from the chapter highlighting the key themes of improving the County's economic competitiveness by creating places and communities where residents and businesses want to locate, providing transportation to access these places, and enough housing to accommodate a growing and diverse population.

- Thrive Montgomery 2050 emphasizes quality of place, amenities, and infrastructure instead of focusing on policies to attract specific types of employers or development designed to accommodate certain employment uses.
- The county has several mechanisms to address these issues. Thrive Montgomery 2050 complements economic development initiatives developed by other organizations, such as the Economic Development Strategic Plan developed by Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) and business-supportive legislation adopted by the Montgomery County Council.
- Thrive Montgomery 2050 recognizes the importance of abundant housing choices and convenient regional transportation options to maintaining a competitive workforce and workforce development has been recognized as key to making Montgomery County economically strong.
- Thrive Montgomery 2050 states that by providing attractive housing options that are physically and economically accessible to people with a wide range of incomes, skills, and preferences, the County can help ensure that the workers that employers need will find housing that they find appealing, convenient, and affordable.

Comments

The Council received comments from the Coalition for Smarter Growth, see © 27-33. One comment suggested the chapter provide more attention to how the County's economy can grow in a way that ensures prosperity is felt by and opportunities are provided for all.

Following the briefing by Nspiregreen, Council staff and Planning edited the economy chapter (prior to posting) to further include recognition of the County's diverse workforce and the need for safe and efficient transportation infrastructure – for all modes of travel appreciating the County's economy is made up of service and tradespeople for whom car travel is a necessity. **Attached on © 40 are additional edits to the conclusion section of the chapter to reinforce the objective of inclusive economic prosperity and growth.**

Chapter on the Environment

Attached on © 7- 12, is the proposed new chapter, *Environmental Health and Resilience*. It notes the challenges of building resiliency in the face climate change, emphasizing three aspects of environmental stewardship and performance: mitigating and adapting to climate change, focusing on environmental justice, and protecting and improving human health. Below are excerpts from the chapter highlighting the need for policies to address climate change, resilience and environmental justice.

- Thrive Montgomery's recommendations are designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, help the County adapt to the effects of climate change impacts that are already

evident and growing worse, and improve the County's ability to bounce back from major disruptions.

- The Plan recommends examining land use decisions to identify vulnerable communities that have become receiving areas for unwanted and potentially harmful land uses, and that have not received equitable investments in environmentally beneficial green infrastructure.
- And it promotes policies that reflect the growing body of research demonstrating the physical and mental health benefits of reducing air pollution and extreme heat and providing facilities and opportunities for walking and biking.
- Thrive Montgomery 2050 was drafted in parallel with the county's 2021 Climate Action Plan (CAP). Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a high-level land use document that focuses on long-range planning and policies to guide the physical development of the county, while the CAP recommends specific near-term actions to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 and to mitigate or adapt to the effects of increased heat and flooding, high winds, and drought.

Comments

As noted above, the Council received comments from the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG), see © 27-33. One comment suggested the include more context-setting and data about the current state of environmental health and resilience in Montgomery County, including information regarding the county's adoption of an emergency resolution related to climate change and subsequent target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035. **Attached on © 41 is an edit to include such a reference.**

CSG also recommended this chapter elaborate on forest and tree protections, waterways and stream protections, green infrastructure, and the importance of the Agricultural Reserve.

Council Staff believes the draft Environmental Health and Resilience chapter provides a good summary of the County's environmental priorities in areas such as climate change, forest preservation, stormwater management, and water and air quality and how Thrive Montgomery's land-use concepts will help support the County's environmental stewardship in these areas.

Further edits and clarifications can be made to this chapter prior to final Council action as additional comments are received from the environmental community and others.

Chapter on Racial Equity and Social Justice

Attached on © 13-26, is the consultant proposed chapter, *Racial Equity and Social Justice*. It provides context for including this type of chapter in the general plan. It touches on justice in planning, historical land use in Montgomery County, including Wedges and Corridors, housing environmental justice and transportation. Below are excerpts from the chapter.

- To make planning more equitable we have to acknowledge the systems of racial discrimination and privilege which reinforce disparate outcomes for Montgomery County households. Planning alone cannot end racism and segregation or prevent the erosion of cultural communities that wish to remain intact, it can however be an important tool to

begin the work of dismantling long-established systems of privilege.

- Communities that face historic challenges need special attention paid to community development and stabilization to ensure that existing social networks and institutions are strengthened so that it is not harder for the existing community to survive in the reimagined one, but they feel a central part of it.
- Conversely, established areas need to create opportunities for less privileged to access the schools, jobs, natural resources, and other benefits through housing opportunity and improved physical access.
- Thrive's number one transportation priority is connecting low-income communities to job areas, but the housing strategy should also seek to provide workforce housing locally. Consequently, areas of high wealth and business activity such as Bethesda should also include sufficient workforce and low-income housing to support housing choices for people who work in the area.
- As we look towards the future, and grapple with issues like climate change we need to be deliberate in protecting the County's vulnerable residents to ensure they do not have their life challenges compounded by disproportionate exposure to environmental threats.
- The County has a tremendous opportunity, with Thrive, to develop partnerships with its communities that it can leverage to rebuild trust, strengthen relationships, and celebrate everything that is great about the region. Planning should seek to leverage and strengthen the existing social networks and identify opportunities to empower local actors to be directly involved in the work of community development.

Comments

Council staff notes that the maps on pages 49, 51, and 53, while providing lots of interesting information, are difficult to read. Staff will work with the consultants to provide a series of maps for each intended illustration.

As noted above, the Council received comments from the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG), see © 27-33. One suggestion is to focus less on theory and generalized planning history and more on the specific community development history of Montgomery County that led to today's inequality.

Planning staff also drafted a chapter on Racial Equity and Social Justice (see © 43-49); this draft was provided to the consultant team for their use in drafting the Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) chapter contained in the RESJ Report.

Council staff have two proposed changes in response:

1. Given the time available for further drafting and revision, rather than adding a section on the development history of Montgomery County, text could be added to the chapter recommending more specific community development history be provide as part of every master plan. In fact, the Planning Department has been including such a section in recent master plan; however, text in the general plan could indicate an expectation for this to continue.
2. Council could also consider, at a future date, how it may want to clarify the current Racial Equity and Social Justice legislation which requires Planning to "consider" racial equity and social justice issues in its master plans.

In addition to the general comment regarding specific historical context, CSG suggests the text related to Compact Growth and Environmental Justice places too great an emphasis on the potential for negative externalities as a result of growth, in fact noting the draft chapter states them as inevitable. **Attached on © 42 are modest edits to this section.**

Last, CSG feels the section on transportation focuses too heavily on drivers and not enough on other inequalities in the County's transportation system. They suggest a significant revision of this section. **Council staff is not inclined to diminish the message conveyed in the Racial Equity and Social Justice chapter as written by the consultant; however, staff will evaluate and provide any suggested edits to the Council as an addendum or prior to an upcoming worksession.**

The Council also received comments from Greater Greater Washington regarding this chapter, see © 34-39. A few comments are global in nature, several others are specific to language in the chapter. **Having received these comments late yesterday, Council staff has not had sufficient time to evaluate them for specific revisions to the draft. Council staff will prepare any suggested edits and provide them to Council prior to a future worksession.**

ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Montgomery County is in the 99th percentile of all counties in the United States in terms of household income, household net worth and educational attainment, and the county's gross economic output exceeds \$81 billion a year - more than 13 states. These statistics, however, do not tell the whole story. The County's economic performance has been mixed at best since the Great Recession of 2008. Job growth over the past two decades has been slow and household incomes have been flat. These trends, if unaddressed, threaten Montgomery County's future success. The county has several mechanisms to address these issues. Thrive Montgomery 2050 complements economic development initiatives developed by other organizations, such as the Economic Development Strategic Plan developed by Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC)¹ and business-supportive legislation adopted by the Montgomery County Council.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is primarily focused on land use, so it addresses only the aspects of economic development with a strong connection to real estate and public infrastructure. Thrive's recommendations are designed to strengthen the County's ability to compete for economic opportunities by creating great places. Employers want to locate and expand in places where their employees want to live and work. Well-designed "complete" communities that include a mix of uses and forms with safe and attractive walking and biking infrastructure along with public amenities such as parks and recreational facilities are essential to ensuring the quality of life that employers want and that residents deserve. Quality of place is not a comprehensive economic strategy, but it is a solid foundation for success.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 emphasizes quality of place, amenities, and infrastructure instead of focusing on policies to attract specific types of employers or development designed to accommodate certain employment uses. There is limited value in trying to predict how factors such as technological change or a pandemic, might impact the demand for office space or other aspects of land use and transportation planning. The county has an excess of office space in existing buildings, and flexible zoning already in place in major business districts to accommodate just about any demand that may emerge for development or redevelopment of office buildings in the near to intermediate term. This puts the County in a position to respond and adapt to market changes.

It is also vital to recognize that housing is a critical form of infrastructure that supports efforts to attract and retain the workforce that employers need. Thrive Montgomery 2050 recognizes the importance of abundant housing choices and convenient regional transportation options to maintaining a competitive workforce and workforce development has been recognized as key to making Montgomery County economically strong. By providing attractive housing options that are physically and economically accessible to people with a wide range of incomes, skills, and

¹ The Montgomery County Economic Development Strategic Plan aligns its vision and priorities with the four pillars of the County's Economic Development Platform in its four strategic priorities: (1) Accelerate innovation, economic drivers, and entrepreneurship; (2) Provide greater workforce and educational opportunities; (3) Build livable communities that connect residents to jobs; and (4) Create an inclusive economy for shared prosperity. The plan is slated to be updated every two years.

preferences, we can help ensure that the workers that employers need will find housing that they find appealing, convenient, and affordable. In addition, by investing in transportation and communications networks, we can help our residents take advantage of all of the economic and educational opportunities the county and region have to offer.

Montgomery County's Economic Performance: the Good, the Bad, and the Future

Montgomery County continues to benefit from proximity to the nation's capital, which draws skilled, educated, and motivated people from all over the world, but the total number of jobs in Montgomery County grew by only five percent between 2004 to 2019 even as 20 similarly sized counties grew their employment base by an average of 21 percent.

Household incomes in Montgomery County grew by 14% from 2009 to 2019, a slower rate than the rest of the region. Despite a median household income of \$111,812, more than one-fifth of households make less than \$50,000 and almost two-fifths of public school students qualify for free or reduced meals.

This weak growth in household incomes and the number of high-paying jobs shrinks the County's tax base, limiting the County's ability to provide and maintain high quality infrastructure, amenities, and services. It also limits the ability of many county residents to buy homes, a key tool for building household wealth and investing in the community. This is particularly the case for younger households and households earning less than the median household income, who struggle to afford a home and put down roots. Montgomery County is capturing a smaller share of young adults than similar jurisdictions across the country.

The Aging of the Workforce and Implications for the Tax Base

All of this is happening at a time when large numbers of residents are reaching retirement age, creating the region's highest elder-adult dependency ratio. Unless the County can attract and retain more young adults, the aging of the workforce will put pressure on the tax base as the proportion of Montgomery County residents in retirement grows and the percentage of residents in their peaking earning years shrinks.

This demographic shift means that the county's economic performance will have to get better just to maintain current levels of tax revenue and the services it funds, thus making economic competitiveness an even more pressing concern.

Strength in Hospitality and Life Sciences

Despite our challenges, Montgomery County retains significant assets that will help us compete for economic opportunities in the future. For example, Montgomery County is home to companies representing 50 percent of the market capitalization of the entire national hospitality sector, and the Washington area is consistently ranked as one of the top life science clusters in

the nation, with bio-health businesses located in the Great Seneca Science Corridor and in several transit-oriented downtowns throughout the County.

Our strength in pharmaceutical research and related fields has sparked a wave of investment in vaccine development. The University of Maryland is leading ground-breaking research in emerging fields such as quantum computing, the National Institutes of Health and Food and Drug Administration are overseeing development of new drugs and medical devices, and several local companies stand to benefit from a focus on testing, prevention, and treatment of infectious disease.

Human Capital: Montgomery County's Ace in the Hole

Perhaps even more important than Montgomery County's strengths in any particular sector is our diverse workforce. Montgomery County has a highly educated workforce. Among adults in the county age 25 and over, 58% of people have a bachelor's degree, compared to 41% in Maryland, and only 31% in the United States overall in 2019. The County also has residents who work in service industries that support all kinds of businesses and residents, from restaurant workers and landscapers to laboratory and clerical staff. The future of employment and the prospects for growth in any particular field are difficult to predict, so the availability of people with a wide range of knowledge and skills may prove to be our most valuable asset of all.

Thrive Montgomery Establishes the Building Blocks for Places that Prosper

How can a land use plan support economic competitiveness? Thrive focuses on three specific areas: quality of place; transportation; and housing.

Great Places are Magnets for People, Businesses, and Jobs

People are instinctively drawn to vibrant centers of activity that have a sense of place with lots of things to do. They enjoy living and working in places that facilitate social interaction and where walking and biking feels safe and appealing and where travel between their homes and other destinations is accessible and easy - be it by car, bike, or transit. Employers making decisions about where to locate are increasingly responsive to these preferences, giving communities that can satisfy them a crucial competitive edge.

Developing neighborhoods and districts with the features and qualities that support the emergence of more vibrant communities is easier said than done. Even the most progressive policies on land use, transportation, housing and public amenities are likely to fall short unless they are integrated into a cohesive framework. That's why Thrive Montgomery 2050 recommends strategies that reinforce each other, using compact form as the foundation, "complete communities" and 15-minute living as basic orienting objectives, attention to the aesthetic and functional aspects of design, and the importance of increased housing and transportation options as important criteria for implementation. Each of these topics is discussed at length in the policy chapters of Thrive Montgomery 2050.

In addition, Thrive considers parks to be infrastructure for economic development. World-class places require world-class parks, recreation, and cultural amenities. Look to Central Park in New York, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, Millennium Park in Chicago, or Hyde Park in London and the significance of great urban parks becomes clear. In fact, parks and related amenities are regularly cited as among the most important factors influencing business decisions about where to relocate or expand. Multiple studies have shown that parks increase adjacent property values by 5 percent to 20 percent, providing incentives for property owners to contribute to the creation of public parks or to build privately-owned, publicly-accessible spaces for recreation and gathering. Likewise, taxpayer-funded investment in parks and related programming and amenities delivers strong economic returns to the public. These topics are discussed in greater detail in Thrive’s chapter on Parks and Recreation.

Finally, the forms of growth and the creation of quality places promoted by Thrive are economically sustainable. The intuition that compact development leads to efficient use of infrastructure—and has the potential to reduce both private household and infrastructure costs—has been supported by decades of research. Almost all high-quality studies comparing the infrastructure and service costs of spread out development to those of compact communities have shown that compact urbanism reduces cost burdens on the public sector. For example, a study comparing infrastructure expenditures of 283 counties over a ten-year period found that counties with compact growth patterns spent less than less densely developed counties (controlling for size and property values) on total direct infrastructure costs and capital facilities, as well as several subcategories of infrastructure and services including roads, trash collection, police, fire, parks and recreation, education, and libraries.² In addition to lowering costs, compact development also tends to increase municipal revenues,³ strengthening the case for focusing growth in nodes and along corridors.

Walkable, Bikeable, Transit-Connected Places Expand Economic Opportunity

Just about any other form of daily transportation—walking, biking, or riding a bus or train—is potentially less expensive (monetarily) than driving a single-occupancy vehicle, both on a personal basis and in terms of public spending. The two comprehensive reviews of the voluminous literature on the relationship between the built environment and travel behavior conducted in the past decade agree that features of compact development such as household density, job accessibility, and intersection and street network density, reduce driving.⁴

In addition, better transit connections to job centers make the County a more attractive choice for employers by making it easier for their current and future employees to get to work. With drive times and pass-through automobile traffic predicted to continue growing, investments in transit can significantly increase our “commute shed” and avoid ever-longer drives to and from work, which makes Montgomery County economically competitive.

² Carruthers, J. I., & Ulfarsson, G. F. (2003). Urban sprawl and the cost of public services. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 30(4), 503-522.

³ Litman, T. (2021). *Understanding smart growth savings*. Victoria Transport Policy Institute. https://www.vtpi.org/sg_save.pdf

A higher priority for investments in transit, walking, rolling, and bicycling infrastructure is critical to building complete communities that have the amenities, sense of place, and level of activity that more and more people of all backgrounds and ages seek. Transit improvements exert a kind of gravitational pull on real estate development by creating incentives and opportunities to locate a variety of uses, services, and activities close to station locations – and to each other.

Housing for the Workforce Needed for a Strong Economy

Increasing the supply of new housing near transit, jobs, and amenities may help to improve the quality of life for everyone in the county while helping to attract and retain the broadly skilled workforce that employers need, making the county more economically competitive. The increased demand for walkable neighborhoods with a mix of uses – especially near transit – is well documented. Housing in “Walkable Urban Places (WalkUPs)”, command prices 71 percent higher per square foot than other locations in the Washington area, reflecting both the desirability and relative shortage of these kinds of places. By concentrating more housing of different sizes and types near high-quality transit corridors, we can provide housing that will help keep the most productive workers in the county, curb escalating prices in the most desirable locations, and improve accessibility of jobs, transportation, and services while being mindful not to displace current residents.

Conversely, if we don’t have enough housing, workers will continue bidding up the cost of existing residences until only the very affluent will be able to afford decent housing in convenient locations. Lower-and middle-income residents will either be priced out entirely or face crowded, substandard housing conditions in remote locations with long and difficult commutes. Without affordable and attainable housing dispersed throughout the county, we will never be able to attract and retain the broadly skilled workforce needed to effectively run businesses, regardless of their scale or economic sector.

Conclusion: Great Places as a Common Denominator for Economic Performance

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a comprehensive land use plan, not a comprehensive economic development plan, so it focuses on ways to help create the kind of places where people with diverse choices want to live and work rather than workforce development, financial incentives for business relocation and retention, or other important topics related to economic competitiveness. *It is not intended as a substitute for the county’s broader economic programs, policies and plans, but in an era with limited demand for new office construction and a strong market preference for locating businesses in high-quality, mixed-use, walkable, and transit-oriented areas, it is one of the best strategies available to local government for growing our work force and our tax base.*

In making decisions about how to allocate scarce resources available for subsidies, incentives and workforce development, the tension between reinforcing existing strengths and looking for ways to diversify into new sectors often presents difficult choices. Fortunately, the kinds of infrastructure, services and amenities that make a place appealing to employees and employers are generally not sector-specific. Put another way, the things that will make Montgomery County attractive to people working in life sciences or hospitality are the same things that draw people in other fields and at a variety of skill-levels.

The recommendations in the following chapters lay the groundwork for economic development initiatives undertaken by other entities. For example, the County's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) should be aligned with Thrive Montgomery 2050's recommendations to make our neighborhoods more attractive for private development by providing high quality transit, sidewalks and a walkable grid of streets, great urban parks, and high-performing and racially integrated schools. The combination of these kinds of investments is a reliable long-term method for attracting workers and their employers to well-designed and planned complete communities.

The purpose of the various policy recommendations in this plan is less about identifying new locations for large government or corporate tenants and more about making parts of the county that already have been developed or planned more attractive and accessible to residents and workers, which in turn will help attract employers.

The Role of Regionalism in Strengthening and Diversifying Our Job Base

Even as we focus on bolstering our competitive position in sectors such as hospitality and life sciences, we also need to diversify our job base, and improve connections to centers of employment and innovation throughout the region. Montgomery County is part of a dynamic regional economy with a rich mix of public institutions and private companies.

Many residents of the Washington region travel to, from or through Montgomery County to reach jobs or homes in other jurisdictions within the region. The effects of decisions about housing, environmental stewardship, economic development, and other issues in any DC-area jurisdiction are felt by its neighbors. We enjoy many benefits from cooperation with our neighbors, but also compete against them for opportunities, and consensus on how to address regional problems is often elusive. Montgomery County is an integral part of the larger region and must find ways to work more effectively with other area governments to make us all stronger.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

Montgomery County has been a leader in the adoption of forward-thinking policies that emphasize land preservation for resource conservation and agriculture, protection of our streams, forests, specimen trees, wetlands, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Much of our success has resulted from the long-range vision cast in our General Plan. The “Wedges and Corridors” concept of development has focused most development along our major transportation corridors and created the large Agricultural Reserve that provides critical environmental services, such as watershed protection, habitat preservation, biodiversity conservation, and the protection of forests and open spaces that filter air and water pollution and sequester and store carbon.

However, climate change has exacerbated existing environmental challenges, and it requires us to refocus our planning framework on sustainability and resilience. This is all the more important because communities with larger populations of people of color and low-income communities are more vulnerable to the worst impacts of climate change due to past and present patterns of discrimination.

Building Resiliency and Sustainability

Thrive Montgomery builds on the “Wedges and Corridors” concept and refines and updates the corridor growth strategy to reflect Montgomery County’s status as a mature, 21st century jurisdiction. This pattern of growth is the primary way that Montgomery County can effectively address climate change.

Thrive supports the well-established “smart growth” strategy of creating dense, compact development with mixed uses, served by transportation infrastructure and design approaches that encourage walking and biking and transit use, concentrated in areas where existing infrastructure can support additional development while minimizing environmental impacts. This land use pattern can reduce driving, which will reduce emissions from the operation of internal combustion engines now and reduce demand on the power grid in the future as more of our power for both building use and transportation will be supplied by clean, renewable energy sources. These kinds of compact, mixed-use communities are also becoming more desirable places for people to live and creation of these types of communities strengthens our economic competitiveness.

Of course, not even the most progressive transportation planning and growth strategies will be able to resolve every environmental challenge facing the county. Thrive Montgomery 2050 builds on the tradition of robust conservation and protection of the natural environment, continuing to prioritize protection of air and water quality and preservation of the County’s biological diversity as key elements of its environmental vision. Climate change adds new concerns to be addressed in each of these areas. In response to our growing understanding of human impacts on the

environment and the role of our history in creating an inequitable society, Thrive Montgomery 2050 emphasizes three aspects of environmental stewardship and performance: mitigating and adapting to climate change, focusing on environmental justice, and protecting and improving human health.

- Climate change: Thrive Montgomery's recommendations are designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, help the County adapt to the effects of climate change impacts that are already evident and growing worse, and improve the County's ability to bounce back from major disruptions. The most significant proposals to address climate change include:
 - Air Quality: Most air pollution in Montgomery County is produced by the burning of fossil fuels. Rising temperatures can exacerbate the effect of this pollution by increasing ground-level ozone generation, among other things. Strategies for reducing air pollution and improving air quality overlap with Thrive's recommendations on climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.
 - Water Quality, Flooding, and Drinking Water Supply: Climate change adds new concerns around water quality, flooding, and the supply of potable water. More severe storms interspersed with more frequent droughts make management of Montgomery County's watersheds imperative both to reduce flooding and to protect our water supply. Thrive Montgomery 2050's smart growth strategies such as compact development will protect the large watersheds and aquifers in the Agricultural Reserve and promote opportunities to improve stormwater management and green infrastructure in redevelopment projects. Opportunities for additional off-river water supplies for the region should also be explored.
 - Biological diversity: Worldwide concern is growing over the continuing loss of biological diversity, with most species extinctions resulting from habitat damage. The decline of species diversity is exacerbated by the changing climate. Most of Montgomery County's critical habitats are either within existing parks or in the Agricultural Reserve. Thrive Montgomery 2050 focuses new growth in existing development nodes and corridors, preserving habitat in stream valley parks, regional parks, and outlying areas of the County. Recommendations for parks and forests renew our commitment to environmental stewardship, including support for biodiversity through habitat management practices such as the control of invasive species.
- Environmental justice: Thrive Montgomery 2050 recommends examining land use decisions to identify vulnerable communities that have become receiving areas for unwanted and potentially harmful land uses, and that have not received equitable investments in environmentally beneficial green infrastructure.
- Human health: Thrive Montgomery 2050 promotes policies that reflect the growing body of research demonstrating the physical and mental health benefits of reducing air pollution and extreme heat and providing facilities and opportunities for walking and biking. In addition,

stronger support for active recreation can facilitate social interaction and community-building while improving physical health.

To address these issues, Thrive Montgomery prioritizes policies and practices that address climate mitigation, adaptation, and creation of community resilience. It facilitates the transition to renewable energy generation, distributed energy systems, modernization of the power grid, and energy conservation. It recommends incorporating green infrastructure into our urban areas, paying particular attention to our equity focus areas. It supports improvements in our organic waste management systems, including food waste composting and other natural solutions to address climate change. The plan also anticipates the need to improve the resilience of public and private infrastructure to withstand more severe weather and protect us from the effects of environmental degradation. These recommendations appear throughout the plan and are consistent with the County’s Climate Action Plan.

Key Aspects of Thrive’s Focus on Environmental Resilience

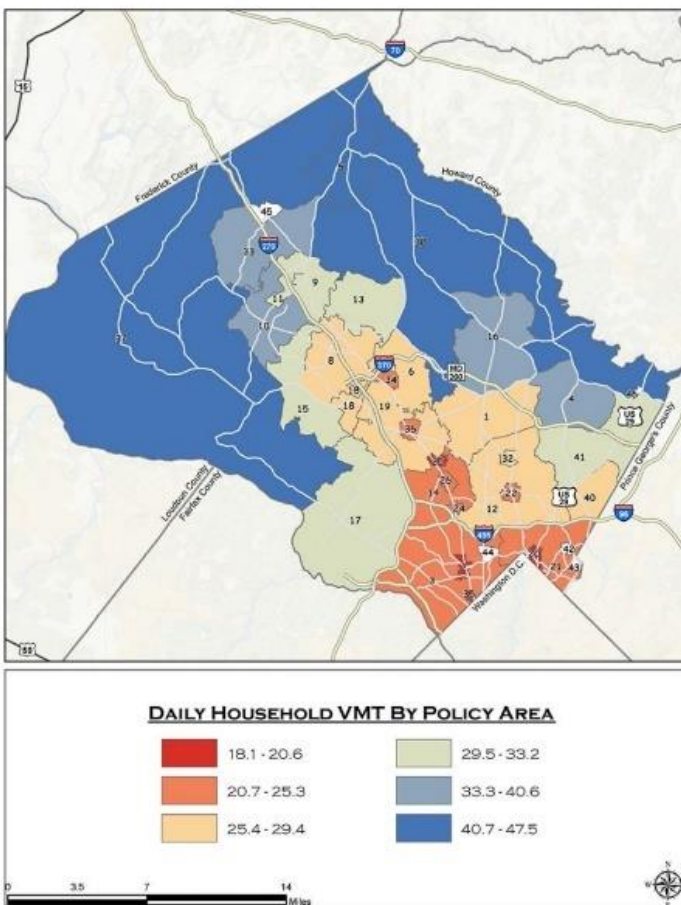
Reducing sprawl, which degrades air and water quality, is a central theme of Thrive. The chart below compares the environmental impact of different development patterns: (1) the least compact – low density sprawl, (2) a more compact footprint (typically mixed-use) and (3) the most compact form, usually associated with large cities. The data shows that a starting point for improving the environmental performance of the built environment is compact form – that is, keeping our growth footprint from spreading outward.

Comparing neighborhoods

	Urban High density - public access	Compact Mixed use - multifamily	Sprawl Low density - single family
Annual Carbon Emissions Average for a household's transportation and heating in Bay area.	6 metric tons	10 metric tons	21 metric tons
Land Consumption Net area for 100 units of housing.	2 acres	7 acres	30 acres
Household VMT Average per house based on odometer readings.	7,300 miles/year	12,200 miles/year	30,000 miles/year
Walk Score Measures walkable proximity of local commercial destinations. 100 points represents best access.	98	74	46

Source: Peter Calthorpe, "Urbanism in the Age of Climate Change," 2013 • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Thrive urges a reorientation of public and private investment around walkable, bikeable, transit-oriented development. Focused growth and a mix of uses reduces driving even in places not served by high quality transit. As shown in the chart below, people who live closest to Metrorail stations drive much less than people who live farther away. These areas, shown in dark red, are within walking distance to high-quality transit service as well as numerous services and establishments. More surprisingly, perhaps, is the fact that households in the orange areas inside the Beltway and up the I-270 corridor also generate relatively low vehicle miles traveled (VMT), even though they are not in a central business district or located next to a Metro station. People who live in these areas are not within walking distance of Metrorail and most are unlikely to feel that they can give up their cars – but most of their daily needs are just a short drive away because of a robust mix of uses in these communities. As a result, people in these areas drive more than people who live within walking distance of Metrorail but far less than people who live farther away from major centers of activity.



The intended result of Thrive’s focus on compact growth and complete communities is to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and to meet environmental goals. Even with conversions to electric cars, driving puts strains on our infrastructure and potentially on our electric grid – which will need to accommodate more building energy use as structures move away from using natural gas.

Other environmental resilience recommendations in Thrive flow from this focus on compact growth and complete communities. For example, new compact development along corridors that provides modern stormwater management allows for a continued emphasis on open space preservation elsewhere in the County. This combination of improved stormwater management through redevelopment with green infrastructure and public investment along with continued protection of stream valleys and larger watersheds in our parks and in the Agricultural Reserve creates a comprehensive approach to protecting the County's water resources. Thrive also includes urban design recommendations that will promote site and building energy efficiency and adaptations for combatting urban heat island effect.

As noted above, parks serve an environmental function through protection of open space and natural resources. They also contribute to physical and mental health by providing facilities and opportunities for walking, biking and other forms of active recreation. Stronger support for active recreation can facilitate social interaction and community-building while improving physical health.

Relationship Between the Climate Action Plan and Thrive Montgomery 2050

Thrive Montgomery 2050 was drafted in parallel with the county's 2021 Climate Action Plan (CAP). Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a high-level land use document that focuses on long- range planning and policies to guide the physical development of the county, while the CAP recommends specific near-term actions to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 and to mitigate or adapt to the effects of increased heat and flooding, high winds, and drought. Thrive Montgomery 2050 incorporates a wide range of recommendations related to climate change and its connection to land use, transportation, and parks. The Planning and Parks Departments will implement recommendations in the CAP that are within the scope of the M-NCPPC's responsibilities. Together these plans constitute a comprehensive approach to climate change at the local level. Specific strategies, recommendations, and performance measures to implement the sustainability and resilience goals of Thrive Montgomery are contained in each chapter.

Conclusion: A Comprehensive and Coordinated Approach to a Sustainable Future

The environmental challenges facing our county are driven by many factors, some local and some that stretch far beyond our borders and control. Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a land use document and is clear eyed about what this discipline can do to mitigate the effects of climate change. Accommodating growth in compact, transit-served developments, using redevelopment and infill to upgrade the environmental performance of buildings and sites, and mixing and collocating uses in Complete Communities along with increased support for walking, biking, and transit are among the most powerful strategies at our disposal.

The approach recommended by this plan also will enable the county to preserve parks and large tracts of land in the Agricultural Reserve that provide critical environmental services, including

habitat preservation, watershed and water supply protection, air and water quality improvement, and carbon sequestration and storage. This pattern of development, first established in the original “Wedges and Corridors” plan, continues to provide a strong framework for addressing climate change and fostering environmental resilience.

The interconnection of land use, transportation, climate change/sustainability, and equity requires us to develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach to growth instead of the more compartmentalized way of approaching each topic. The nature of the severe and changing climate impacts that are becoming more prevalent and may grow worse will require a shared understanding among all decisionmakers of the overlap between land use, transportation, housing, parks, and the environment that is necessary for a comprehensive and well-coordinated approach to achieving our environmental sustainability and resilience goals.



Racial Equity and
Social Justice

Plan Chapter

Introduction

Planning for Racial Equity and Social Justice

Urban Planning is the process by which communities build consensus around a shared vision for the future. Planning, like other tools, must be wielded carefully or its use can unintentionally [or intentionally] establish far-reaching consequences that disadvantage those who are not fully considered during the process...

Context

The modern planning profession was born out of social movements like the 'Tenement House Reform' movement which broadly exposed substandard living conditions endured by immigrant and working-class residents in New York City in the late 19th century. The resulting Tenement House Act of 1901 established one of the first laws governing how buildings should be constructed and regulated to account for human health and safety. Since that time, countless academics, organizers, politicians, and agitators alike have contributed to establishing urban planning as the 'epistemological field of study' which informs how so many of the decisions that impact our lives are made. Planning is the tool that the state wields when exercising its 'police power' to regulate and govern the development of land and infrastructure through plans, codes, and ordinances, and their associated administrative processes. As such, planning decisions have significant and cross-cutting impacts; how and where things are built (or not built) directly correlates to the physical quality of place and the quality of life for inhabitants. It is precisely because of the tremendous importance of planning why **who** gets to participate in the planning process matters so much in determining future outcomes.

Historically, there has frequently been an atmosphere of distrust around planning because there are often limited opportunities for everyday citizens to participate and truly be empowered in making the important decisions regarding the future growth and development of their communities. This dynamic is compounded by a legacy of exclusion reinforced through racism and classism. Generally speaking, power and decision-making authority in planning has been reserved for those with either direct political access, or those with privileges associated with wealth, education, race, and/or social status. This imbalance has contributed to a dynamic where the interests of 'capital' have often trumped the interest of the public good. While capitalism's market theory has its merits, one of its flaws is that there is no mechanism by which externalities (like pollution) get paid for. Planning's prescriptions are designed to correct for market failure[s] when the market is not able to correct itself. As such, planning is one of the primary tools available to us to deal with the problems of racial inequities and social injustices, which most often show up in the form of segregation, poverty, and its associated impacts.

This chapter will seek to identify how Montgomery County can improve the overall quality of life for ALL residents, deliberately achieve [more] equitable outcomes, and unwrite past injustices which adversely impact historically disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

Survey before Plan

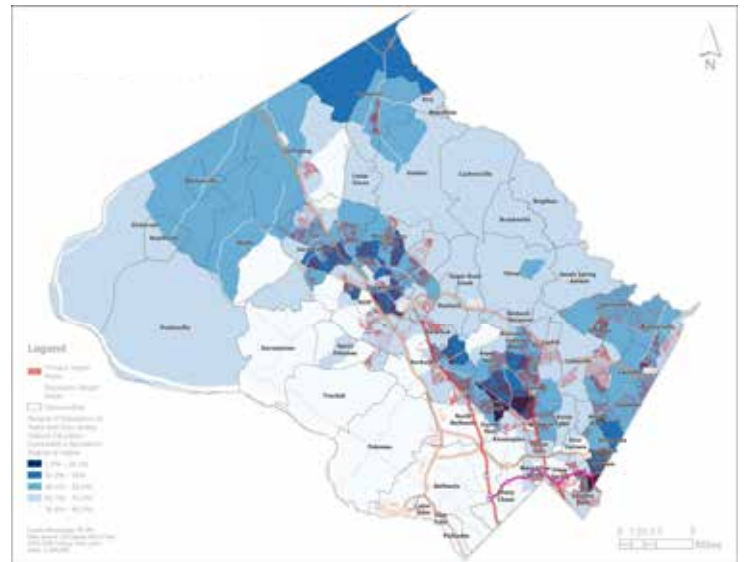
Foundational to planning theory is the work of Patrick Geddes, a planning pioneer, who theorized that you must 'survey before you plan'. The underlying idea is that before you can apply a prescription, you must thoroughly understand and diagnose the issues. Meaningful public engagement is the prerequisite to building the transparency, trust, and collaborative relationships with communities that are needed to establish the two-way learning process which supports holistic planning solutions. Without careful consultation with the community, it is unlikely that a comprehensive understanding of place can be achieved. John Forester, preeminent urban planning professor who writes on participatory planning processes emphasizes that the ears are the practitioners most useful tool, and that listening [is] the most important planning exercise.

Two Americas

During the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech about the "Two Americas" which highlighted the legacy of racial and economic oppression and the plight of poor people and how their lived experiences juxtapose with the promise of America as the land of opportunity, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Unfortunately, for the decades since this speech was given there are still significant swaths of the black, indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) communities that continue to be 'stuck' in cyclical poverty. The persistent challenges of social and economic mobility is clearly highlighted in the land use and economic patterns observed in Montgomery County, today.

In 2022, across America, we are still seeing communities of color disproportionately dealing with eroding infrastructure, substandard living conditions, and environmental justice issues like unsafe drinking water. These neighborhoods do not exist by coincidence, they were 'carved out' on the map, years ago, by people who wielded the 'dark side' of planning's power.

Too often, when these communities are finally paid attention, the original residents are displaced and unable to benefit. The cycle of divestment and real estate speculation in communities of color has been well documented over time, making 'Gentrification' one of the hottest issues impacting urban America today.



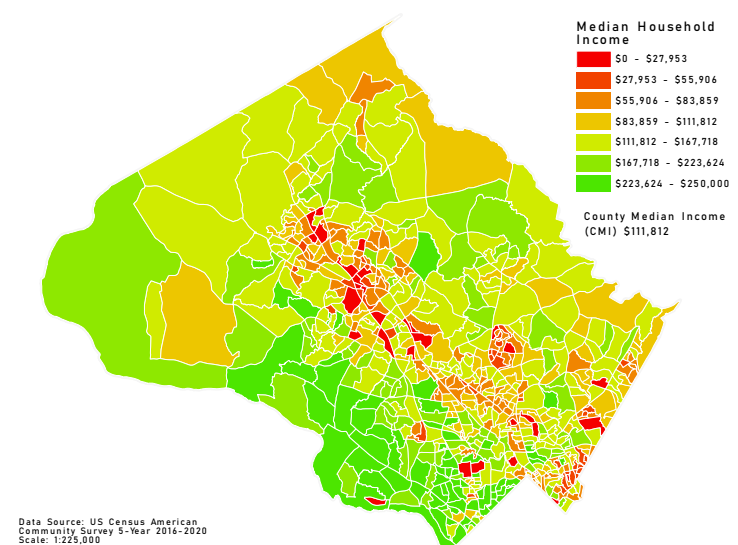
Educational Attainment

This map depicts Educational Attainment by showing, at the census tract level, the percent of the population 25 years and over who has at least obtained a bachelor's degree.

Census tracts with the low proportions (20.2%-36%) of those holding a bachelor's degree or higher are concentrated in tracts within Germantown, Montgomery Village, and Gaithersburg.

The Rock Creek, Wheaton, and Oakview communities have tracts with the lowest proportion (1.4%-20.1%) of the population holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

The tracts with lowest concentrations of educational attainment are also those that overlay the primary and secondary target areas with high concentrations of BIPOC and LMI residents.



Median Household Income

It is no coincidence that the Median Household Income map "follows" the education attainment map. The highly educated communities in East County far outpace incomes in other parts of the County.

Racial Equity

Racial equity work seeks to **heal**; implementation of its ideals requires an honest and careful examination of history to inform deliberate actions aimed at repairing past injustices which have disproportionately impacted black and indigenous communities in America. The legacy of racist policies, and the land-uses they influenced reverberate throughout the entire spectrum of communities of color with Latin/x, Asian, and other BIPOC communities experiencing different, but familiar challenges as their predecessors. Addressing racial equity requires an honest look at root causes of social problems and recognizing that some form of restitution is required to fix them.

To make planning more equitable we have to acknowledge the systems of racial discrimination and privilege which reinforce disparate outcomes for Montgomery County households. Planning alone cannot end racism and segregation, or prevent the erosion of cultural communities that wish to remain intact, it can however be an important tool to begin the work of dismantling long-established systems of privilege.

Social Justice

In a planning sense, wealth affords you the opportunity for exclusion: to live in an environment where you do not have to interact with poor people. However, due to the time value of money, the compound nature of wealth creation, and other factors the wealth gap between 'haves' and 'have-nots' is growing. This imbalance creates a strain on society which makes it unstable.

Social justice is a process by which working class people begin to access the privileges only enjoyed by the historically privileged class[es], to afford healthy lifestyles and to experience education and built environments which inspire them to lead happier and more productive lives. In modern times, this is becoming increasingly important as more and more people are finding it hard to thrive economically. As the County plans for the future, special attention needs to be paid to the hidden costs of poverty and determine ways to design communities to reduce problems associated with public health, crime, housing instability, food insecurity, and segregation.

“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.” – Nelson Mandela

Justice in Planning

A Right to the City?

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights (Harvey 23).

Property and Pacification

Quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy. The postmodernist penchant for encouraging the formation of market niches—in both consumer habits and cultural forms—surrounds the contemporary urban experience with an aura of freedom of choice, provided you have the money. Shopping malls, multiplexes and box stores proliferate, as do fast-food and artisanal market-places. We now have, as urban sociologist Sharon Zukin puts it, ‘pacification by cappuccino’ (Harvey 31).

Source: David Harvey, *Rebel Cities*

As inflation heats up, 64% of Americans are now living paycheck to paycheck

PUBLISHED TUE, MAR 8 2022 8:40 AM EST
UPDATED TUE, MAR 8 2022 9:20 AM EST

Jessica Dickler
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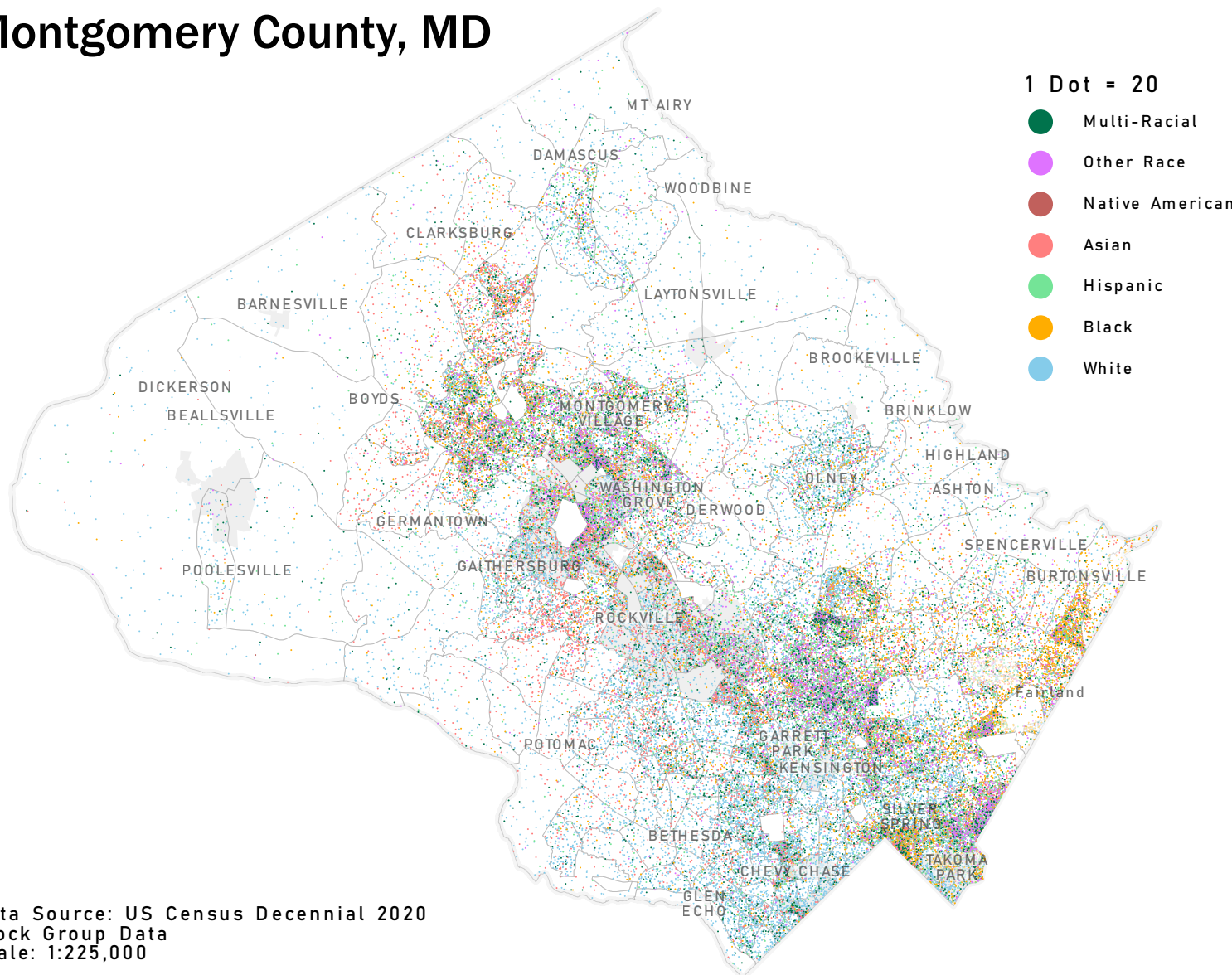
WATCH LIVE

KEY POINTS

- The increased cost of living is straining households nearly across the board.
- Almost two-thirds of Americans are now living paycheck to paycheck, according to one report.

Source: CNBC, Life Changes

Montgomery County, MD



Race & Ethnicity

This dot density map depicts the racial make-up of Montgomery County through showing the concentration and location of racial groups. The data, retrieved from the latest US Decennial census (2020), is depicted at the block group level with one dot representing twenty individuals. The order of racial groups was organized from least predominant to most predominant to ensure the visibility of less reoccurring dots and the representation of these groups. Some noticeable concentration of individual racial groups includes:

- High representation of Whites in Glen Echo, Chevy Chase and Kensington;
- High representation of Blacks in East Montgomery communities of Burtonsville, Fairland, Calverton, and Colesville;
- High representation of Asians around Rockville, Gaithersburg, Germantown, and Clarksburg;
- High representation of Hispanics around Montgomery Village, Washington Grove, Rockville, and Glenmont.

Areas like Silver Spring, Montgomery Village, Washington Grove, Wheaton, Glenmont, and Takoma Park contain a more diverse and concentrated population.

Areas that have greater density tend to have greater racial and ethnic diversity. In contrast, areas such as Boyds, Clarksburg, and Colesville has a diverse racial and ethnic make-up even at lesser densities.

Areas that have a high concentration of those identifying "Other Race" often also have those of more than one race or "Multi-Racial" close by.

Examining History (From Plan Draft)

After the Civil War, African Americans suffered from all forms of discrimination (social, housing, education, employment, commerce, health, etc.). The resulting alienation led to the creation of self-reliant kinship communities in many parts of Montgomery County in the late 19th century. A significant part of the history of racial injustice and discrimination suffered by African Americans includes the formation and subsequent decline (in some cases, destruction) of kinship communities in the early 20th century.

Over time, these communities suffered from lack of public investment in infrastructure such as new roads, sewer and water, schools, health clinics, and other public amenities and services needed to be viable places to live. Some communities suffered the devastating impacts of urban renewal policies of the 1960s. Others faced pressure to sell their houses or farms to developers for housing subdivisions. These communities declined because of an accumulation of racially-motivated actions paired with social, political, and economic circumstances. The very few of these communities that survived in some way include Ken-Gar in Kensington, Lyttonsville in Silver Spring, River Road in Bethesda, Scotland in Potomac, Stewartown in Gaithersburg, and Tobytown in Travilah.

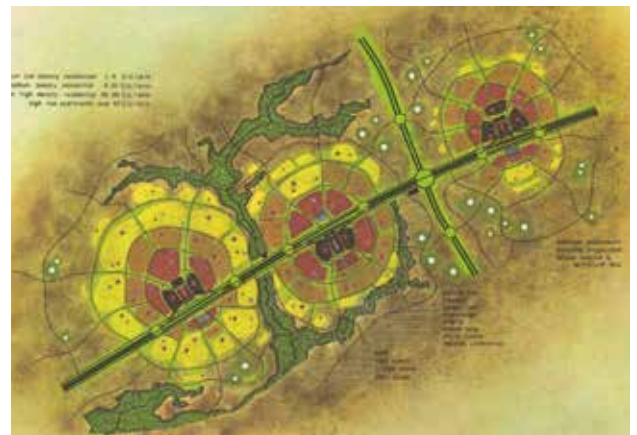
From the 1890s to the 1920s, the first suburban subdivisions in Silver Spring and Chevy Chase used racial covenants prohibiting African Americans and other racial and religious groups from purchasing land or homes. Well into the mid-20th century, these types of covenants were placed in the land records. Even after the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 to end these practices, a development pattern of segregation continued. Injustices were evident in unfair banking and lending practices; federal immigration policies; unequal public investment in schools, parks and other public facilities; and siting a disproportionately high number of undesirable uses, such as landfills, near communities of color.

In Montgomery County, the legacy of such discriminatory policies and the exclusionary zoning and other land use controls led to neighborhoods defined by income, race, and housing types. As a result of these practices and other societal factors, a significant quality of life gaps exist for various racial and ethnic groups in the county.

Urban renewal policies which may have been designed to address 'blight' were popularly coined "Negro removal" because the aftermath of efforts resulted in the disbandment of communities and created economic and social losses for African Americans and exacerbated psychological trauma.

On Wedges and Corridors (WAC)

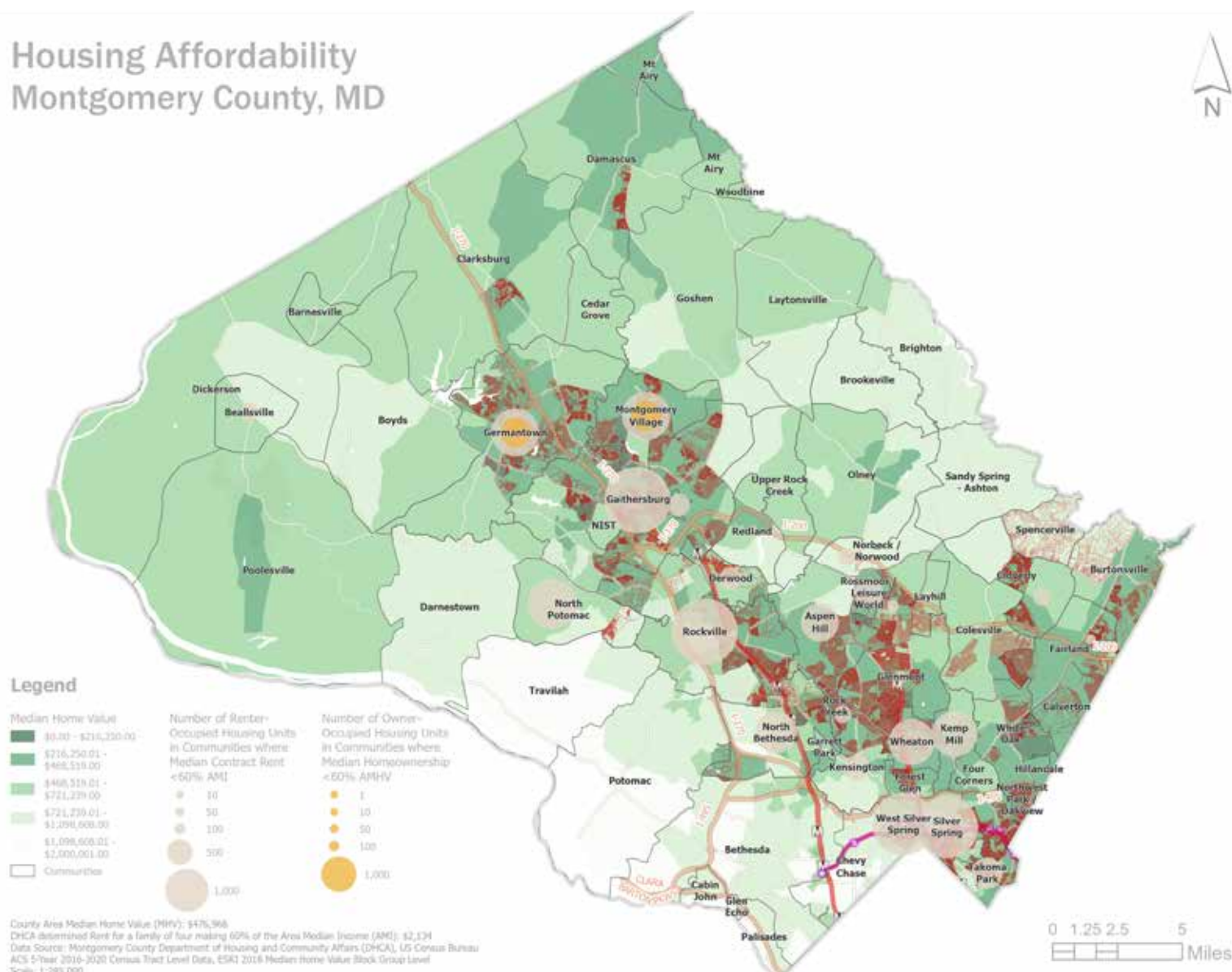
Thrive seeks to "modernize" the old Wedges and Corridors Plan. While it is prudent to not throw the proverbial "baby out with the bathwater," the WAC plan created "land use patterns... which left neighborhoods disconnected and reinforced segregation along racial and economic lines." If the old had plan adverse outcomes for historically disadvantaged groups, how do we address/mitigate its failures? What does "modernization" of the Wedges and Corridors Plan look like?



Wedges and Corridors Plan

To address segregation and economic inequality established in past zoning/land use planning, deliberate mechanisms need to be introduced to create racially and economically inclusive communities. Planning needs to consider social and economic consequences of efforts to integrate. Communities that face historic challenges need special attention paid to community development and stabilization to ensure that existing social networks and institutions are strengthened so that it is not harder for the existing community to survive in the reimagined one, but they feel a central part of it. Conversely, established areas need to create opportunities for less privileged to access the schools, jobs, natural resources, and other benefits through housing opportunity and improved physical access.

Housing Affordability Montgomery County, MD



Housing Affordability

This map depicts various layers including median home values, number of renter-occupied housing units where rent is less than 60-percent of area median income (AMI), and number of owner-occupied housing units where median homeownership is less than 60-percent of area median home value (AMHV). Data from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCA) shows \$2,134 as the rent for a family of four making 60% of AMI.

High concentrations of homes with MHVs at or below the County MHV (\$476,966) appears to make up most of the housing stock of census tracts in Germantown, Montgomery Village, and Gaithersburg. Communities in east Montgomery County such as White Oak and Calverton also have MHVs at or below the County MHV (\$476,966).

The availability of affordable rental housing units, shown here as less than 60-percent of AMI, are shown most prominently in Gaithersburg, Rockville, Silver Spring, and West Silver Spring. Each of these communities have over a thousand units where rent is less than 60-percent of AMI.

Owner-occupied Housing Units with an AMHV less than the County AMHV (\$476,966) are only present in Germantown and Montgomery Village.

The data clearly shows that access to affordable housing is going to be one of the biggest challenges faced by Montgomery County in the future. As such, real planning innovation will be required to protect working families from displacement.

Housing

Thrive's housing prescriptions to address racial equity and social justice largely center on a strategy to integrate communities with high concentrations of minorities and/or poverty with new development that attracts multi-racial and higher income households into the area. The strategies seek to integrate (gentrify) communities while simultaneously protecting existing residents from displacement. The idea of development without displacement is an exciting one, but these ideas, in practice are often acting in direct opposition of each other. Development without deliberate community and neighborhood conservation efforts will almost certainly result in (some) displacement. So, instead of ignoring this possibility, let's determine where people can go. Undoubtedly, many residents who currently occupy a community where they have historical, cultural, spiritual, and other ties (kindship) will want to remain in their home community. However, there will be some residents who may like to move to a more affluent area. Traditionally, planning documents are written to support **Housing Choice** as a strategic goal for future outcomes. When we juxtapose this idea with regional housing markets, it would seem that in order to balance the integration of low-income neighborhoods, some accommodation for rebalancing should be made to ensure that economic benefits begin to reach historically disadvantaged populations. As such, integration should be a two-way process, by which there should be a parallel strategy of making accommodation for low-income housing in areas which are already wealthy and thus providing new residents who want the choice of living somewhere else to achieve immediate access to communities that have close proximity to jobs, good education, etc. If we are going to promote development in the growth areas with new market-rate housing, there should also be provision of new low-income housing in high income areas to allow for housing choice in different markets.

The justification for this strategy is doubled when you consider that to support economic competitiveness and sustainability Thrive's number one transportation priority is connecting low-income communities to job areas, but the housing strategy should also seek to provide workforce housing locally. Consequently, areas of high wealth and business activity such as Bethesda should also include sufficient workforce and low-income housing to support housing choices for people who work in the area. Future planning should conduct detailed market analysis of labor markets and determine thresholds by which area plans should promote low-income, workforce,

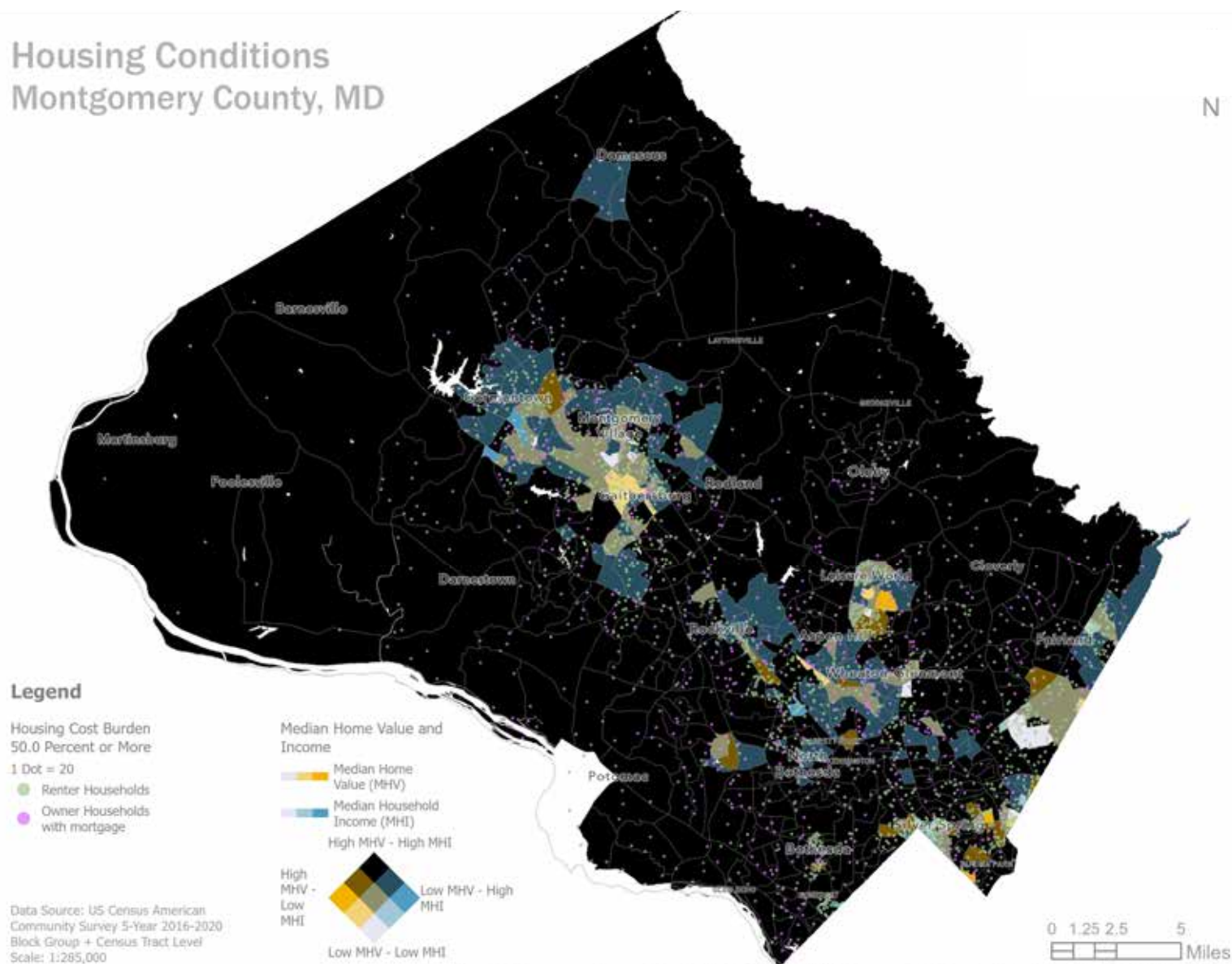
and middle-class housing options to support a truly local community where commuting is "optional" because the mathematical possibility of the local workforce is reflected in the housing availability.

In our first focus group meeting with black and brown residents in East County, we heard a story as old as planning itself: several residents were embroiled in a legal case about their substandard housing conditions and alleged that the building inspector meant to enforce quality controls was being paid off. Almost every conversation we initiated on plan topics somehow found a way to veer off into issues of safety, crime, and feelings of neglect...

Residents of Montgomery County shared lots of challenging stories about their housing experiences. It is clear that many of the mechanisms put in place to help them are being offset by personal bias (racism) in the system or by individual actors. The County will need to be vigilant to seek accountability for all actors. Successfully addressing racism in housing will require deliberate action and systems of checks and balances.

Increase access to safe, affordable housing and promote wealth-building by confronting historical and ongoing harms and disparities caused by structural racism.

Housing Conditions Montgomery County, MD



Housing Conditions

This map shows housing conditions in terms of areas with high-to-low ranges of median home value (MHV) compared to high-to-low median household income (MHI). The map also shows renter and owner households who are experiencing a housing cost burden of 50 percent or more, defined as extremely cost burdened by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCA). This means that 50 percent or more of a household's income is devoted to housing-related costs.

Census tracts that are approaching solid gold color represent high MHV and low MHI, an indicator of unaffordable housing. Tracts in Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, and Leisure World shows signs of this unaffordable housing.

Census tracts showing a light gray color represents low MHV and low MHI, an indicator for low income but also low-cost housing. Even so, households experiencing extreme housing cost burden may also be present in these tracts. Tracts in Montgomery Village, Glenmont, and White Oak exhibit these housing conditions with all of these showing a high incident of renter households experiencing extreme housing cost burden.

More urban areas like Montgomery Village, Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, and Germantown have high concentrations of renter household experiencing extreme housing cost burden.

More rural areas like Damascus, Olney, and Cloverly have higher instances of owner households experiencing extreme housing cost burden.

Compact Growth

Encouraging growth in already developed areas, has ripple effects. Density brings economic opportunity, but it can also degrade the quality of natural resources, parks, schools, and neighborhoods. If the majority of new development will occur in urban areas where existing naturally occurring affordable housing exists, special attention needs to be paid to ensure that as the population density increases, residents maintain equitable access to parks, recreation, natural resources, and high quality places which influence quality of life. Additionally, as density increases, increased consideration needs to be made towards maintenance and operations of public spaces and institutions to ensure that effective stewardship is achieved and maintained.

Environmental Justice

As the County grows, special attention will need to be paid to Environmental Justice issues. Undoubtedly, new residents will put a strain on infrastructure and sustainable practices will need to be implemented to ensure that the County is able to maintain good air and water quality, preserve urban tree canopy, manage stormwater, and invest in renewable sources of energy. Analysis of environmental quality shows that residents of the Target Areas where the majority of BIPOC and Low-Income residents live are more likely to be exposed to poor environmental conditions and live next to polluting land uses. As we look towards the future, and grapple with issues like climate change we need to be deliberate in protecting the County's vulnerable residents to ensure they do not have their life challenges compounded by disproportionate exposure to environmental threats.

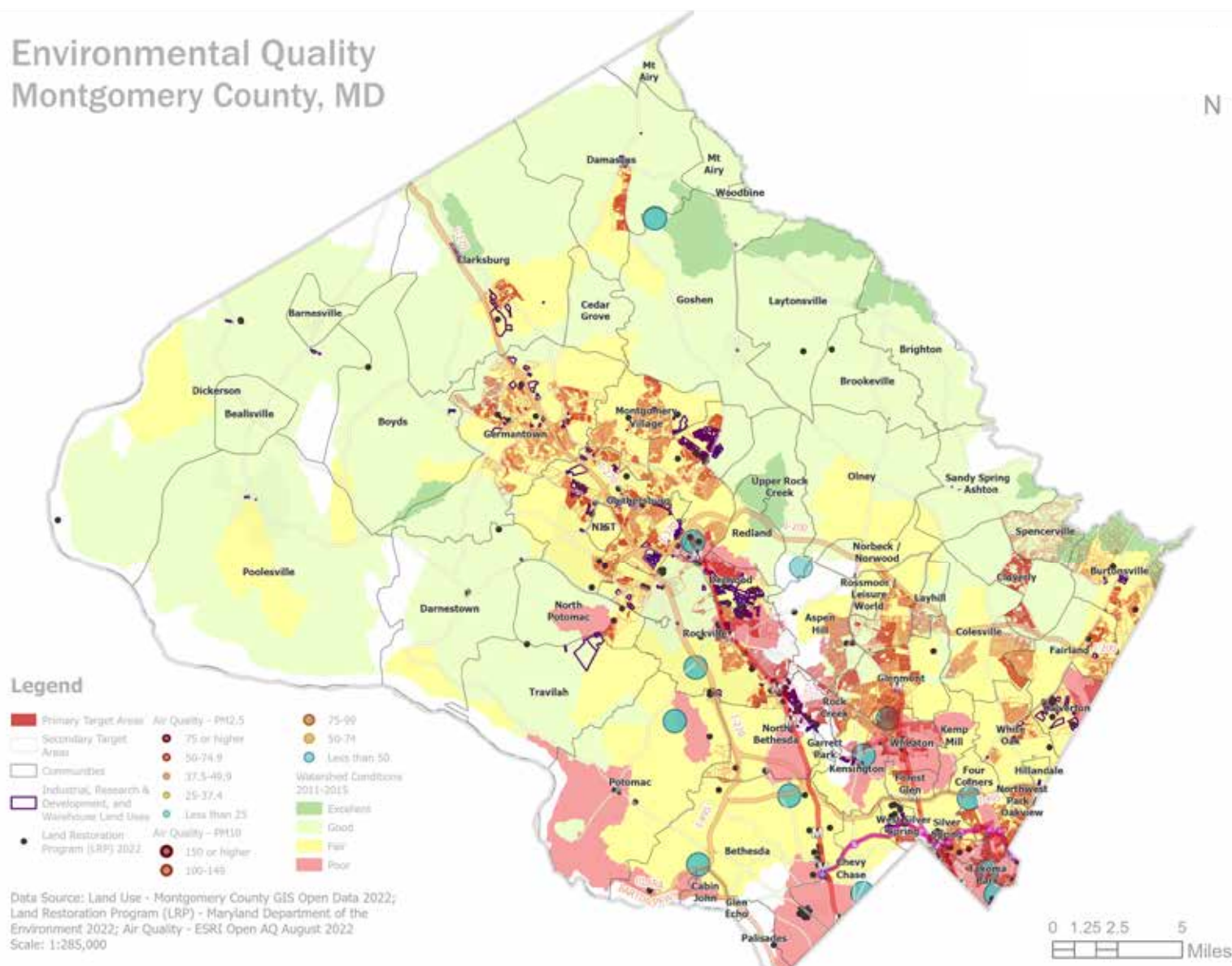
Transportation

The plight of the working class and many BIPOC people we talked to felt that the needs of working class families were not considered in the planning themes of Thrive. They felt that many of the “progressive” policies did not consider their current status in life and expressed how proposed changes would adversely impact their quality of life. Some people showed great resistance to the idea of '15-minute living' because they relied on their work vehicles to take them to different parts of the county where they had access to jobs. Many expressed that they rely on vehicle miles and parking availability to make a living. For some, getting a vehicle represented the possibility of financial independence. To others, the idea of riding a bike for leisure or to commute was seen as a luxury that comes with a level of economic empowerment they did not have yet. These sentiments are compounded by the long commutes even more traditional workers faced while using locally available transit options. There was a general sentiment that root issues needed to be addressed before new ideas could be successfully implemented.

Instead of welcoming these ideas as positive, they are often seen as a harbinger for gentrification and displacement. Ideas such as congestion pricing and reduced parking requirements that promote “good urbanism” are sometimes outside of the reality for working class people. There is a concern that shifting to this new way of life will make it harder for them to survive and in some instances this is true.

"I can't take my ladder on the Purple Line" - Montgomery County Resident

Environmental Quality Montgomery County, MD



Environmental Quality

This map depicts various layers that make up environmental quality conditions within Montgomery County. The layers include watershed conditions taken from 2011 through 2015, air quality measurements of particulate matter 2.5 and particulate matter (PM) 10, industrial land uses, and sites that qualify for the land restoration program (LRP).

A majority of the primary and secondary target areas are located within watersheds that are in fair to poor condition.

Target areas within watersheds experiencing poor conditions, like those in Derwood and Rockville, are adjacent to areas with industrial, research & development, and warehouse land uses. This land use category is associated with the processing of raw materials and hazardous substances, movement of heavy vehicles, and high impervious surfaces; functions that typically contribute to generation of pollutants, run-off, and poor watershed quality.

Target areas are also clustered around Land Restoration Program (LRP) sites, brownfield areas that are identified by the State of Maryland for restoration.

PM2.5 and PM10 values, as captured by the air quality monitors stationed throughout the County, show consistently low concentrations of particulate matter regardless of urban and rural typology.

Social Capital

In order for a shared sense of purpose to exist, it is not a one-way process. Communities where wealthy white residents are the norm also have to achieve integration and inclusivity. It could be argued that it is in fact more important for these communities to begin to see their communities as having a shared sense of purpose instead of only addressing racial and economic inequality at the "problem" side of the spectrum. Part of the inequality equation is the exclusivity of the wealthy, some of these doors need to start being opened to truly create a shared sense of purpose and belonging for ALL County residents. Exclusivity reinforces the racial and class divides within society.

Cultural Competence

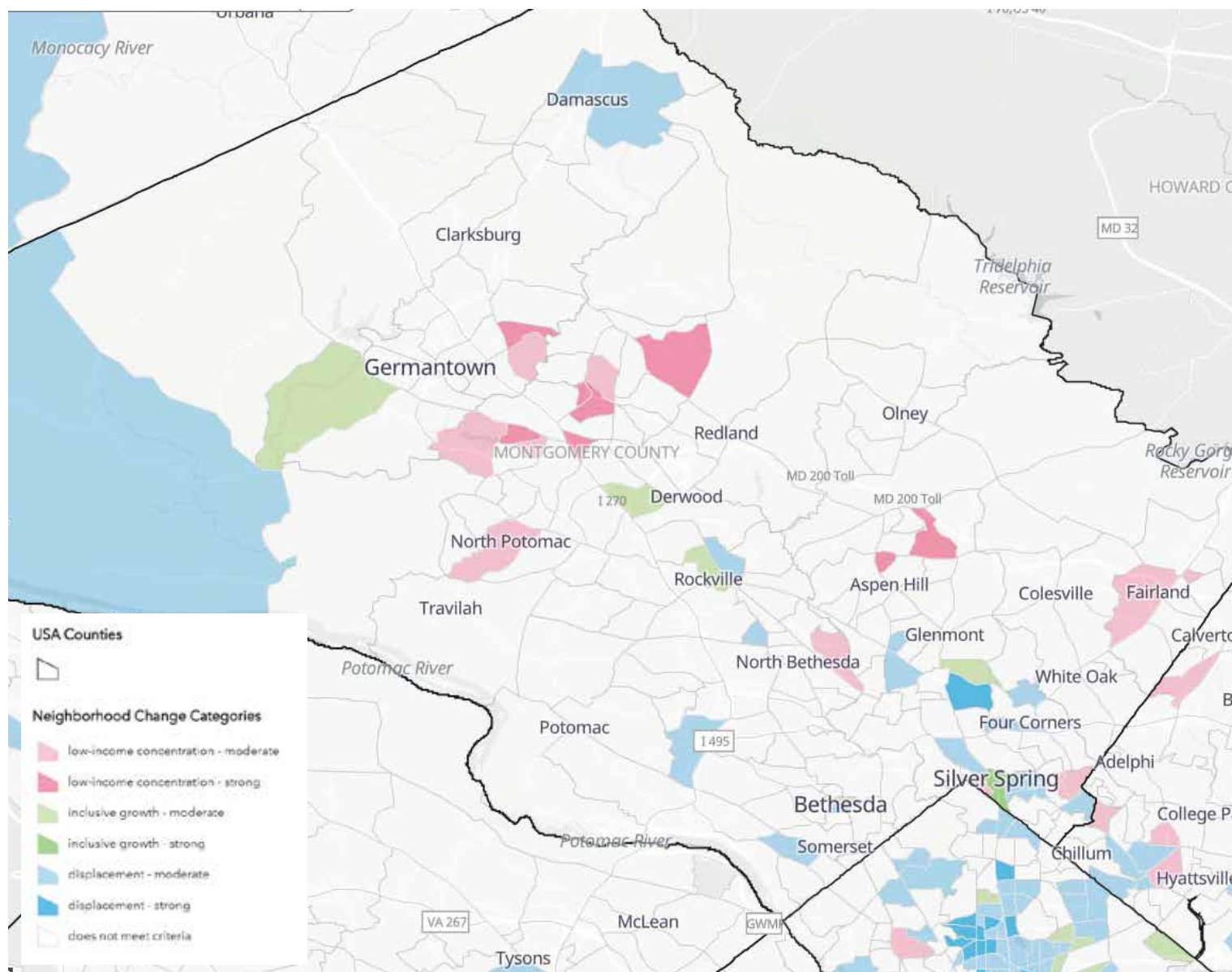
It is vital to have practitioners who can relate to the communities they serve. In executing planning in communities of color, practitioners must lead with deference. Being able to understand cultural cues and nuance plays a large role in comprehension and meaningful engagement. If communities feel that they are not being respected or understood, real conversations will not occur.

Community Development

The County has a tremendous opportunity, with Thrive, to develop partnerships with its communities that it can leverage to rebuild trust, strengthen relationships, and celebrate everything that is great about the region. Montgomery County has had success with diversifying by implementing inclusionary zoning in the 70's and 80's. Now, it is important to do the work to protect the existing communities. Planning should seek to leverage and strengthen the existing social networks and identify opportunities to empower local actors to be directly involved in the work of community development.

Economic Empowerment

Throughout the public engagement process, it was clear that displacement is a big fear for residents with less means, as they are witnessing escalating [home] prices. The vast majority of working class people expressed that they want access to better education and economic opportunity. Most people who struggle to make 'ends meet' prioritize economic advancement as their number one priority and planning for their communities should reflect that reality.



Neighborhood Change and Displacement Risk

The Montgomery County Planning Department is engaged in important work to understand the displacement risk in the County. These types of analysis need to be leveraged to understand how to protect neighborhoods and encourage Inclusive Growth. Across the board, low-income and BIPOC residents are very worried about displacement as a result of new development. More work needs to be put into understanding how to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing and establishing new affordable housing to ensure that Montgomery County doesn't lose the rich diversity, both racial and economic, to make it a complete community. If housing conditions continue on their trajectory, it is quite feasible that Montgomery County will cease to be a bedroom community, but a community that requires commuters from outside the region to staff its businesses. This dynamic would be in opposition to both the Equity and Sustainability goals of Thrive.

September 16, 2022

Montgomery County Council
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Ave, 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: CSG Comments on Thrive Montgomery 2050

Council President Alboroz and Councilmembers:

The Coalition for Smarter Growth supports the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development committee's unanimously approved draft of Thrive 2050 and the addition of the economy, environment, and equity chapters, and we recommend that the Council approve it this fall. Thrive creates a vital framework for future growth and evisions a county that is more affordable, walkable, prosperous, resilient, and racially and economically integrated. The plan recognizes that the best way to achieve is through inclusive smart growth, urbanism, and equitable transit-oriented development. At the same time, we urge you to further strengthen certain areas, as detailed in our comments below.

Because Thrive 2050 is a visionary document, words matter. To turn those words into a reality will be the job of the County Council for the next three decades. Thrive is, at its core, a land use document focused on community development and planning strategies, and should not be expected to act as a substitute for detailed climate action, funding for transit and safer streets and affordable housing, inclusive economic development, or action on inclusion and racial equity. Thrive is a jumping-off point to guide the county into the future — doing so while building off of your and your predecessors' work.

The fingerprints of the original *On Wedges & Corridors* plan can be seen in every land use, transportation, and housing decision in Montgomery County since 1969, for better or worse. Similarly, the decisions you will make in this document will have generational implications for how we live, work, and play. The world in 2050 will be very different no matter what — the question is whether we allow our communities to evolve in order to preserve what we value the most: diversity, sustainability, affordability, prosperity, equity, and social mobility.

We present the following recommendations for your consideration:

PHED COMMITTEE DRAFT:

1 - Introduction:

- **Explain why we're anticipating growth (page 6)**

Most of this plan is predicated on the fact that Montgomery County is projected to add approximately 200,000 people over the next 30 years. When hearing this, many residents ask why we have to accommodate such growth and cannot simply keep the population as-is. Thrive must have a stronger explanation as to why this growth is anticipated and why growth in walkable, transit-oriented communities is an opportunity to jumpstart the county's economy and reduce regional greenhouse gas emissions.

2 - Compact Growth

- **Refine the growth diagram (page 20)**

Generally, we believe the approach adopted by the PHED committee is sufficient, with some minor revisions:

- The centers identified should be a largely exhaustive list of the places where we want to prioritize growth, since one of the main principles of this chapter is to focus growth where there is already existing activity and infrastructure. To this end, Takoma Park should be listed as a large activity center due to its high quality transit infrastructure and central location bordering Washington, DC. Similarly, Long Branch, Takoma-Langley Crossroads, Lyttonsville, and the Connecticut Avenue Purple Line station area should all be listed as medium activity centers, given their proximity to jobs, transit, and amenities.
- We are concerned about listing VIVA White Oak / FDA as a large activity center, given the absence of high-capacity transit access. All other large activity centers are supported by a Metrorail station.

- **Focus primarily on centers, as well as corridors (pages 22, 28)**

We are excited by the new attention given to corridor-focused growth, especially previously disinvested corridors. However, the primary emphasis should continue to be on activity centers. Strong urban centers with clustered destinations are what make urban geometry work. To this end, we recommend the following line edits:

- Page 22: "Focus future land use and public infrastructure planning in activity centers and on growth corridors..."
- Page 22: "Promote and prioritize public investment in infrastructure in activity centers and along growth corridors and leverage..."
- Page 22: "Leverage federal, state and local incentive programs, publicly owned land and land investment opportunities for ~~corridor~~ infill development."
- Page 28: "Amount of infill development/redevelopment in activity centers and along major corridors"

- Page 28: “Proportion of new population, employment and housing within a mile (or half-mile) of activity centers and priority corridors”
- Page 28: “Public and private investment in infrastructure, services, and amenities in activity centers and along corridors...”

3 - Complete Communities - No comments

4 - Design, Arts, and Culture

- This chapter should specifically state the preservation of African-American historical spaces as a policy objective.

5 - Transportation and Communication Networks

- **Prioritize frequent, reliable transit in capital budgets, as well as local street connections**

The draft states on page 53 that the addition of local street connections should be a top priority in both capital budgets and development review. If this priority is going to be explicitly mentioned, then funding frequent, reliable transit service in both the capital and operating budget should be mentioned as well. We must also ensure that new local street connections are complete streets and don't further entrench our reliance on private vehicles.

- **Plan for electric cars and solar**

There is no discussion of the role of electric vehicles in either the draft plan or draft actions plan, and similar a lack of discussion around solar siting. Although shifting to electric vehicles will not change land use or the need to reduce and shorten vehicle trips, we must transition to EVs to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, which will require infrastructure upgrades and investments, like charging infrastructure for multi-family housing, that should be incorporated into Thrive. Solar siting will continue to be an issue and should be prioritized on existing rooftops, parking garages, and parking lots.

- **Refine measures of success:**

We recommend adding the following metrics: number of jobs accessible by transit and number of amenities accessible by transit.

6 - Affordable and Attainable Housing

- **Amplify the need for housing those with the lowest incomes**

The chapter is called “Affordable & Attainable Housing: More of Everything,” but spends most of the text explaining the need for more market rate housing and diverse housing types. While this is correct and we are grateful for this focus, we would like to see the chapter go into more detail about the housing needs of those who the market is very likely to still leave cost burdened. To serve those of the lowest incomes, the county will need to beef up its existing affordable housing programs and think more boldly and creatively about new programs. Below are some specific language recommendations:

- “Ensure that every area of the county welcomes an equitable share of income-restricted and social housing, especially in neighborhoods with high incomes, a high concentration of jobs, or high-capacity transit.”
- Add back language from staff working draft: “Continue to promote the policy of mixed-income housing development through the implementation of county policies, programs, regulations, and other tools and incentives.”
- “Identify and allocate additional revenue for the Housing Initiative Fund (HIF), rental assistance program, and other housing programs to meet the needs of low-income households.”
- Under the first goal regarding production of more housing: “As part of the commitment to the Housing First approach, develop strategies to build deeply affordable housing, provide permanent supportive housing, and legal counsel for evictions.”

- **Don’t leave out tenant rights**

We urge you to ensure the importance of strong tenant rights and protections. The county must ensure that all households have safe, healthy housing that meets their needs and are not left behind by land use changes that result in higher property values and increased rents. Below are some specific language recommendations:

- “Enforce and strengthen existing housing code regulations and renter protections to ensure healthy and fair housing.” We’d also support adding back language from the staff draft of the plan: “Protect tenants’ rights, improve living conditions in rental housing, and ensure renters’ contributions to the community are emphasized and valued.”
- Add back language from staff working draft: “Expand housing access through the elimination of fair housing barriers and enforcement of fair housing laws to protect residents from discrimination.”

- **Refine measures of success:**

We concur with JUFJ’s recommendations to add eviction rates and housing cost burden for renters and owners to the metrics section of the chapter. It would be best to see housing cost burden and many of the other currently listed metrics broken down by either planning area or census tract.

7 - Parks and Recreation - No comments

8 - Conclusion

- **Commit to evaluating the plan's progress regularly**

We cannot wait thirty years to determine whether or not the county is successful in Thrive's goals. Each chapter has identified metrics to measure progress, and those should be used to provide a regular report to the county's leaders and decision makers. The working draft recommended an evaluation every five years to track progress in achieving the plan's goals and envisioned outcomes, and the final draft of Thrive should do the same.

What's left out?

- There is no mention of protecting small or local businesses, streamlining development, decarbonizing buildings, or making it easier to add neighborhood retail into residential areas.

NSPIREGREEN RECOMMENDED CHANGES:

We largely agree with the recommended changes, especially those that are already core aspects of Thrive's vision, such as "focus density near transit stations" and "preserve naturally occurring affordable housing."

- *"Encouraged mixed-use zoning to integrate a balance of parking options to accommodate car-dependent residents."* We understand the needs of small contractors, but are concerned that this language could be construed as supporting increased parking at a time when the county is trying to move more residents to walking, biking, and using transit in an effort to meet its ambitious climate goals.
- *"Consider creating land uses such as lots for essential vehicles"* Similar to above, this language is unclear as to what it is proposing. Does "essential vehicles" refer to ambulances, school buses, county vehicles, or private work vehicles?
- It is unclear whether the sixth bullet point under the "Housing for All" section regarding "Missing Middle" is referring to housing typologies or income. We would recommend against including specific provisions regarding set-aside requirements for small and medium-sized multi-family housing often referred to as missing middle.

NSPIREGREEN DRAFT CHAPTER ON RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE:

Throughout the Thrive 2050 drafting and revision process, we have repeatedly called for more and stronger language around racial equity and social justice as it relates to community planning and development. Thus, we are excited to see the new chapter drafted by the Nspiregreen consultants. A dedicated chapter provides the context and time necessary to address such an important topic. Our primary suggestion is to focus less on theory and generalized planning history, and more on the specific community development history of Montgomery County that led today's inequality.

Housing: We strongly agree with its assertion that “integration should be a two-way process,” by providing infrastructure and amenity improvements, more housing options, and protections for existing residents in lower income neighborhoods, and in parallel creating more below market-rate housing in and better transportation connections to higher income neighborhoods. Thrive’s “Housing for All” and “More of Everything” approach is in alignment with this.

Compact Growth and Environmental Justice: This section approaches compact growth with caution, but does not heed the same caution towards sprawling growth, which can also “degrade the quality of natural resources, parks, schools, and neighborhoods.” There is nothing inherent about density bringing degradation, or, as stated in the environmental justice section, that new residents will “undoubtedly” put a strain on infrastructure. Preserving open space through compact growth, such as with the county’s fantastic Agricultural Reserve, and using existing infrastructure over building new infrastructure is the proven more sustainable route, which benefits all residents.

Transportation: We take great issue with the focus of this section being on drivers rather than the stark inequalities in our transportation system, such as the disproportionate rate at which Black and Hispanic pedestrians and cyclists are killed or injured on our roadways or how the bus system, consisting of 80% BIPOC riders, reaches a magnitude less jobs and takes significantly longer than driving. There are a host of inequities in our transportation system to focus on, and it’s disappointing that this section primarily covers parking and accessibility for work vehicles, rather than the potential for something like the Purple Line to bring new connections and access to communities that have long been cut off. Low-income residents and BIPOC residents are less likely to own their own vehicle and thus take advantage of parking-only transportation benefits and provisions. We recommend that this section undergo significant revisions.

NEW ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS CHAPTER:

This chapter reads as a defense of Thrive’s strategies rather than context-setting on where our economy is at currently and where it is possible to go with the policies of Thrive. Furthermore, the structure of this chapter, environment chapter, and equity chapter should mirror or parallel

one another. We would also like to see more discussion of how we can grow the economy in a way that ensures prosperity is felt by and opportunities are provided for all.

NEW ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE CHAPTER:

Similar to the Economic Competitiveness chapter, we would like to see this chapter include more context-setting and data about the current state of environmental health and resilience in Montgomery County. This should also include information regarding the county's adoption of an emergency resolution related to climate change and subsequent target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035.

We also recommend for this chapter to elaborate on forest and tree protections, waterways and stream protections, green infrastructure, and the importance of the Agricultural Reserve. We defer to our partner organizations for more specific language recommendations on these topics.

Sincerely,

Jane Lyons
Maryland Advocacy Manager
Coalition for Smarter Growth



Montgomery County Council
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

September 19, 2022

Dear Council President Albornoz and members of the Montgomery County Council:

My name is Dan Reed and I serve as the Regional Policy Director for [Greater Greater Washington](https://www.ggwash.org/), a nonprofit that works to advance racial, economic, and environmental justice in land use, transportation, and housing throughout Greater Washington.

Please find below our comments regarding the Racial Equity and Social Justice chapter of Thrive Montgomery 2050, which were presented at the County Council last week. This chapter represents several months of outreach regarding Thrive and includes important insights about residents' concerns, as well as meaningful recommendations to advance racial justice and social equity in the county's general plan. However, we have concerns about portions of this chapter, which mischaracterize recommendations within Thrive, do not accurately reflect the history or current conditions in Montgomery County, or are not sufficiently supported by research. In the subsequent pages you will find footnotes with additional information to support our comments, including references to the current PHED Committee draft.

This chapter will be part of a plan that decisionmakers will use for the next 30 years, and will be referenced by residents for years to come. We support the Council voting on and approving Thrive in October 2022 as currently scheduled, and recognize that there is limited time to make revisions. Our comments are intended to assist the Council in amending this chapter to make it a stronger addition to Thrive and support the county's stated goals to promote racial equity and social justice.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. I am happy to discuss any questions or concerns you have, and we look forward to working with you to make Thrive the best plan it can be for our county's future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Reed', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dan Reed
Regional Policy Director

The Washington, DC region is great >> and it can be greater.



Greater Greater Washington's comments on the Thrive Racial Equity and Social Justice chapter:

Global comments:

- This chapter discusses the experiences of African-American residents who have lived in the county for generations, and is an opportunity to expand to conversations about other components of Montgomery County's history—such as Black flight to the county in the late 20th century, the African diaspora, and Asian or Latin American immigration—and how those experiences have also shaped the county's built form.
- This chapter needs to further discuss the history of Wedges and Corridors, the reasons why such a philosophy created a racially and socioeconomically segregated county—including Harland Bartholomew's resistance to apartments in communities like Bethesda¹—and the reasons why Thrive seeks to build on that plan.
- This chapter could include language in the Planning Department Public Hearing draft regarding how “communities have become highly adept at using public process to block new housing.”² This is directly related to racial equity and social justice, as well-resourced communities have used the County's planning process to restrict access to them. This language was removed from later drafts due to opposition from many of those communities and County Executive Marc Elrich.³

Specific comments:

Page (45): *“In 2022, across America, we are still seeing communities of color disproportionately [sp] dealing with eroding infrastructure, substandard living conditions, and environmental justice issues like unsafe drinking water. These neighborhoods do not exist by coincidence, they were 'carved out' on the map, years ago, by people who wielded the 'dark side' of planning's power.*

Too often, when these communities are finally paid attention, the original residents are displaced and unable to benefit. The cycle of disinvestment and real estate speculation in communities of color has been well documented over time, making 'Gentrification' one of the hottest issues impacting Urban America today.”

This paragraph needs to be revised to reflect the on-the-ground conditions in Montgomery County today. Montgomery County is one of the wealthiest communities in the nation and home to some of the few majority Black and majority Latinx Census tracts that are also *affluent* Census tracts in the United States.⁴ Simultaneously, Montgomery Planning's own research shows that gentrification and displacement are happening primarily in a handful of places in the county, and that a more salient phenomenon is the

¹ <https://ggwash.org/view/70408/harland-bartholomew-the-man-who-zoned-washington-dc>

²

<https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Public-Hearing-Draft-Plan-Thrive-Montgomery-2050-final-10-5.pdf#page=87>

³

https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Item10_Attachment-3-Comments-Received-Since-June-11-2020.pdf#page=86

⁴

<https://ggwash.org/view/79489/prince-georges-countys-belt-of-high-income-majority-black-census-tracts-really-is-unique> (see map)



concentration of poverty and disinvestment⁵. Conditions such as “real estate speculation in communities of color” are not present in the county at the scale in which they’re described in this paragraph.

Page (46): *“Social justice is a process by which working class people begin to access the privileges only enjoyed by the historically privileged class[es], to afford healthy lifestyles and to experience education and built environments which inspire them to lead happier and more productive lives.”*

This is an appropriate place to discuss how Montgomery County has already attempted to address social justice, such as through the MPDU (Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit) program, which has been documented to produce positive results for students from lower-income backgrounds who have access to well-resourced neighborhoods and schools.⁶ This program is briefly discussed on page (54).

Page (46): *“Property and Pacification. Quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy. The postmodernist penchant for encouraging the formation of market niches—in both consumer habits and cultural forms—surrounds the contemporary urban experience with an aura of freedom of choice, provided you have the money. Shopping malls, multiplexes and box stores proliferate, as do fast-food and artisanal market-places. We now have, as urban sociologist Sharon Zukin puts it, ‘pacification by cappuccino’ (Harvey 31).”*

It is unclear how this quote reflects current conditions in Montgomery County or the concerns expressed by community members in public outreach, including for the Racial Equity and Social Justice chapter. A major complaint in BIPOC communities in the county, such as East County, is that there are not enough retail amenities. Places like Downtown Silver Spring are some of the most diverse gathering places in the region. Meanwhile, the county has two dead, or dying, shopping malls (Lakeforest and White Flint) and is seeking ways to redevelop them. Are the county’s efforts to redevelop these shopping malls, or to create more places like Downtown Silver Spring, “pacification by cappuccino” or providing the amenities that community members have asked for?

Page (50): *“Thrive’s housing prescriptions to address racial equity and social justice largely center on a strategy to integrate communities with high concentrations of minorities and/or poverty with new development that attracts multi-racial and higher income households into the area.”*

This paragraph misrepresents recommendations in the PHED Committee draft of Thrive recommendations regarding “Complete Communities,”⁷ which “include housing suitable for different household types, income levels, and preferences, helping to support racial and socioeconomic integration.” It recommends a variety of locations where more diverse kinds of housing can be built, but is not limited to majority-minority communities as described here. The plan describes Complete Communities as being located throughout

⁵

<https://montgomeryplanning.org/montgomery-planning-briefs-planning-board-on-neighborhood-change-analysis/>

⁶ <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/housing-policy-is-school-policy/>

⁷

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2021/PHED-CommitteeDraftThrive2050.pdf#page=30>



Montgomery County, including in more affluent or majority-white areas like Bethesda and Potomac as well as less affluent or majority-minority communities. The following paragraph in the Racial Equity chapter alludes to this.

Page (50): *“The strategies seek to integrate (gentrify) communities while simultaneously protecting existing residents from displacement. The idea of development without displacement is an exciting one, but these ideas, in practice are often acting in direct opposition of each other. Development without deliberate community and neighborhood conservation efforts will almost certainly result in (some) displacement.”*

This paragraph conflates two processes—gentrification and integration—which can be related to one another, but are usually described in opposition to one another. There is a growing body of research that shows that development does not automatically lead to gentrification or displacement. A study from NYU and Fannie Mae shows that new development does not increase rents for existing homes⁸. Additionally, research from both George Washington University⁹ and Montgomery Planning has identified downtown Silver Spring¹⁰ as a community where new housing has also occurred alongside increased racial and socioeconomic diversity. Similar to the study of MPDUs in Montgomery County, a paper from the Philadelphia Fed finds that incumbent residents in a community often stay while it experiences an influx of new investment, and can benefit from access to higher-quality amenities.¹¹ However, a piece from Vox notes that a much more common experience for lower-income or BIPOC communities is not gentrification, but concentrated poverty and disinvestment due to a lack of development.¹²

Page (53): *“Density brings economic opportunity, but it can also degrade the quality of natural resources, parks, schools, and neighborhoods.”*

This statement is unsupported. The EPA notes that “conventional housing development,” defined as suburban development on the region’s fringe, consumes significantly more rural land and generates more vehicle miles traveled, contributing to pollution,¹³ while higher-density development can protect water resources by conserving land and preventing development in ecologically sensitive areas¹⁴. The UC Berkeley CoolClimate Map identifies more densely populated, urban parts of the Washington metropolitan area as having the lowest carbon footprint, including Silver Spring and Takoma Park in Montgomery County.¹⁵ It is unclear if there has been research on the connection between density and the quality of parks, schools, or neighborhoods in Montgomery County.

⁸ <https://www.fanniemae.com/research-and-insights/do-new-housing-units-next-door-raise-your-rents>

⁹ <https://scholarspace.library.gwu.edu/work/ww72bc095>

¹⁰

<https://montgomeryplanning.org/montgomery-planning-briefs-planning-board-on-neighborhood-change-analysis/>

¹¹ <https://www.philadelphiafed.org/-/media/frbp/assets/working-papers/2019/wp19-30.pdf?la=en>

¹² <https://www.vox.com/22629826/gentrification-definition-housing-racism-segregation-cities>

¹³ <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-and-affordable-housing>

¹⁴ https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2014-03/documents/protect_water_higher_density1.pdf

¹⁵ <https://coolclimate.berkeley.edu/maps>



Page (53): *“Analysis of environmental quality shows that residents of the Target Areas where the majority of BIPOC and Low-Income residents live are more likely to be exposed to poor environmental conditions and live next to polluting land uses.”*

There is no description of what this analysis is or where it can be found.

Page (53): *“The plight of the working class and many BIPOC people we talked to felt that the needs of working class families were not considered in the planning themes of Thrive. They felt that many of the “progressive” policies did not consider their current status in life and expressed how proposed changes would adversely impact their quality of life. Some people showed great resistance to the idea of ‘15-minute living’ because they relied on their work vehicles to take them to different parts of the county where they had access to jobs. Many expressed that they rely on vehicle miles and parking availability to make a living. For some, getting a vehicle represented the possibility of financial independence. To others, the idea of riding a bike for leisure or to commute was seen as a luxury that comes with a level of economic empowerment they did not have yet.”*

We must acknowledge the very real concerns of Montgomery County residents, particularly those who are working class or BIPOC. It’s also important to acknowledge the role that cars play in people’s lives, particularly in spread-out suburban areas or due to the perceived social status a car can bring. As research from the DC Policy Center found, walking and bicycling rates are lower among Black DC residents and in less-affluent parts of the District farther from jobs and amenities.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, some may perceive active transportation as something for higher-income people, or people who aren’t Black.

At the same time, this section as written undermines the PHED Committee draft, which notes that the county’s current, auto-focused transportation system “limits access to jobs and opportunity, particularly for low-income residents who are more likely to depend on transit and makes our transportation system less adaptable and resilient.”¹⁷ We cannot ignore the role that public transit or active transportation already plays for working class or BIPOC individuals in Montgomery County. A 2020 Office of Legislative Oversight study found that 78% of Ride On patrons are people of color, 42% speak English as a second language, and 47% have an annual household income of less than \$30,000.¹⁸ Fifty-eight percent of Ride On users walk to the service, meaning that many low-income or BIPOC residents walk for at least a portion of their trip.

Meanwhile, 69% of Ride On riders have at least a Bachelor’s degree. While that does not mean transit access causes higher educational outcomes, it does align with findings from a Harvard study that access to transportation is the key indicator of someone’s ability to climb the economic ladder.¹⁹

Page (53): *“There is a concern that shifting to this new way of life will make it harder for them to survive and in some instances this is true.”*

¹⁶ <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/the-demographics-of-walking-and-biking-to-work/>

¹⁷

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2021/PHED-CommitteeDraftThrive2050.pdf#page=47>

¹⁸ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2020%20Reports/OLOReport2020-10.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html>



This comment ignores nearly 60 years of planning policy that supports urbanism in Montgomery County, in addition to the historically urban form of older communities such as Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Gaithersburg, and Rockville, which date to the late 19th and early 20th centuries and were primarily designed around walking and the Metropolitan Branch rail line (today's MARC Brunswick Line). Urbanism is not a new way of life for many Montgomery County residents, including low-income or BIPOC residents. In addition, Thrive does not dictate that everywhere in Montgomery County should be urban, or that should be the only choice for residents.

Page (53): *"I can't take my ladder on the Purple Line" - Montgomery County Resident*

This comment, while reflecting the sentiment of one Montgomery County resident with a specific business need, undermines a project that has been the County's main transportation priority for decades, and should be removed from this document.

Page (55): *"If housing conditions continue on their trajectory, it is quite feasible that Montgomery County will cease to be a bedroom community, but a community that requires commuters from outside the region to staff its businesses."*

This statement is incorrect. Montgomery County is not a bedroom community. It has the largest number of jobs of any county in Maryland, with 450,600 people employed here in March 2022.²⁰ In 2015, 49% of Montgomery County residents worked in the county, while 20% worked in Washington, DC and 9% in Northern Virginia. Meanwhile, just over half of the people employed in Montgomery County commute from somewhere else, with the largest shares coming from Prince George's County, Frederick County, and Washington, DC in that order.²¹

²⁰ https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/countyemploymentandwages_maryland.htm

²¹

https://mwejobs.maryland.gov/admin/gsipub/htmlarea/uploads/Montgomery_WorkforceRegion_Commuting_Patterns.pdf

Potential Edits to New Chapters

Economic Competitiveness Chapter

Conclusion: Great Places as a Common Denominator for Economic Performance

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a comprehensive land use plan, not a comprehensive economic development plan, so it focuses on ways to help create the kind of places where people with diverse choices want to live and work rather than workforce development, financial incentives for business relocation and retention, or other important topics related to economic competitiveness. It is not intended as a substitute for the County's broader economic programs, policies and plans, but in an era with limited demand for new office construction and a strong market preference for locating businesses in high-quality, mixed-use, walkable, and transit-oriented areas, it is one of the best strategies available to local government for growing our work force and our tax base.

In making decisions about how to allocate scarce resources available for subsidies, incentives and workforce development, the tension between reinforcing existing strengths and looking for ways to diversify into new sectors often presents difficult choices. Fortunately, the kinds of infrastructure, services and amenities that make a place appealing to employees and employers are generally not sector-specific. Put another way, the things that will make Montgomery County attractive to people working in life sciences, or hospitality are the same things that draw people in other fields and at a variety of skill-levels.

The recommendations in the following chapters lay the groundwork for economic development initiatives undertaken by other entities. For example, the County's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) should be aligned with Thrive Montgomery 2050's recommendations to make our neighborhoods more attractive for private development by providing high quality transportation networks, sidewalks and a walkable grid of streets, great urban parks, and high-performing and racially integrated schools. In addition, communities designed with sufficient affordable and accessible housing options integrated into our neighborhoods to limit displacement will ensure existing and new community members benefit from these improvements. The combination of these kinds of investments is a reliable long-term method for attracting and retaining workers and their employers to well-designed and planned complete communities.

The purpose of the various policy recommendations in this plan is less about identifying new locations for large government or corporate tenants and more about making parts of the county that already have been developed or planned more attractive and accessible to all residents and workers across all fields, which in turn will help attract employers.

Environmental Health, and Resilience

Relationship Between the Climate Action Plan and Thrive Montgomery 2050

Thrive Montgomery 2050 was drafted in parallel with the county's 2021 Climate Action Plan (CAP). Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a high-level land use document that focuses on long-range planning and policies to guide the physical development of the county, while the CAP recommends specific near-term actions to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 as called for in Council Resolution 18-974 "Emergency Climate Mobilization" adopted in December 2017, and to mitigate or adapt to the effects of increased heat and flooding, high winds, and drought. Thrive Montgomery 2050 incorporates a wide range of recommendations related to climate change and its connection to land use, transportation, and parks. The Planning and Parks Departments will implement recommendations in the CAP that are within the scope of the M-NCPPC's responsibilities. Together these plans constitute a comprehensive approach to climate change at the local level. Specific strategies, recommendations, and performance measures to implement the sustainability and resilience goals of Thrive Montgomery are contained in each chapter.

Racial Equity and Social Justice Chapter

Compact Growth

Encouraging growth in already developed areas, has ripple effects. Density brings economic opportunity, but it can also ~~degrade~~ impact the quality of natural resources, parks, schools, and neighborhoods. If the majority of new development will occur in urban areas where existing naturally occurring affordable housing exists, special attention needs to be paid to ensure that as the population density increases, residents maintain equitable access to parks, recreation, natural resources, and high-quality places which influence quality of life. Additionally, as density increases, increased consideration needs to be made towards maintenance and operations of public spaces and institutions to ensure that effective stewardship is achieved and maintained.

Environmental Justice

As the County grows, special attention will need to be paid to Environmental Justice issues. ~~Undoubtedly,~~ New residents ~~will put a~~ may strain ~~on existing infrastructure suggesting the need for sustainable practices will need to be implemented~~ to ensure that the County is able to maintain good air and water quality, preserve urban tree canopy, manage stormwater, and invest in renewable sources of energy. Analysis of environmental quality shows that residents of the Target Areas where the majority of BIPOC and Low-Income residents live are more likely to be exposed to poor environmental conditions and live next to polluting land uses. As we look towards the future, and grapple with issues like climate change we need to be deliberate in protecting the County's vulnerable residents to ensure they do not have their life challenges compounded by disproportionate exposure to environmental threats.

Racial Equity and Social Inclusion

DRAFT 08/19/22

Coming to Terms with Race and Inequality

Thrive Montgomery was drafted during a period of racial reckoning sparked by mistreatment of Black people at the hands of police. The killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain and others vividly demonstrated that the promise of fair treatment for African Americans remains unfulfilled. The result has been a renewed recognition of the need to confront the ongoing impact of racism and the legacy of slavery not just on law enforcement but on every aspect of our society.

The topics addressed by a comprehensive land use plan – housing, transportation, and public infrastructure such as schools, parks, and utilities – are just as important to achieving more equitable outcomes for people of every race and ethnicity as they are to strengthening the county’s economic and environmental performance. Progress depends on an unflinching, data-driven look at how our previous approaches to planning have played a role in exacerbating racial, social, and economic injustice.

Montgomery County has at times taken forward-thinking steps to address inequality, such as adoption of the nation’s first – and to this day, most successful – inclusionary zoning law, the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) program, which guarantees that income-restricted housing will be built in every part of county as part of market-rate development projects. We have failed, however, to prevent or correct many harmful trends, such as the de facto racial and socioeconomic segregation of our schools and a persistent racial wealth gap.

Patterns of discrimination – some intentional, some unintentional – have left too many communities geographically, economically, and socially isolated. After the Civil War and the end of slavery, African Americans suffered from pervasive discrimination and exploitation in the provision of economic and educational opportunities, housing, health care, and basic public services. The resulting alienation led to the creation of self-reliant kinship communities in many parts of Montgomery County in the late 19th century. Over time, these communities suffered from lack of public investment in infrastructure such as new roads, sewer and water, schools, health clinics, and other public amenities and services. Some communities were hurt by the urban renewal policies of the 1960s. Others faced pressure to sell their houses or farms to developers for new subdivisions.

Planning decisions and real estate development practices aggravated these injustices for most of the 20th century. Redlining and restrictive racial covenants created geographic and economic divisions that have left a legacy of injustice, that not only separated people by neighborhood or community, but also barred Black Americans from building wealth (the type of wealth used to invest in higher education, start businesses, and pass to heirs).

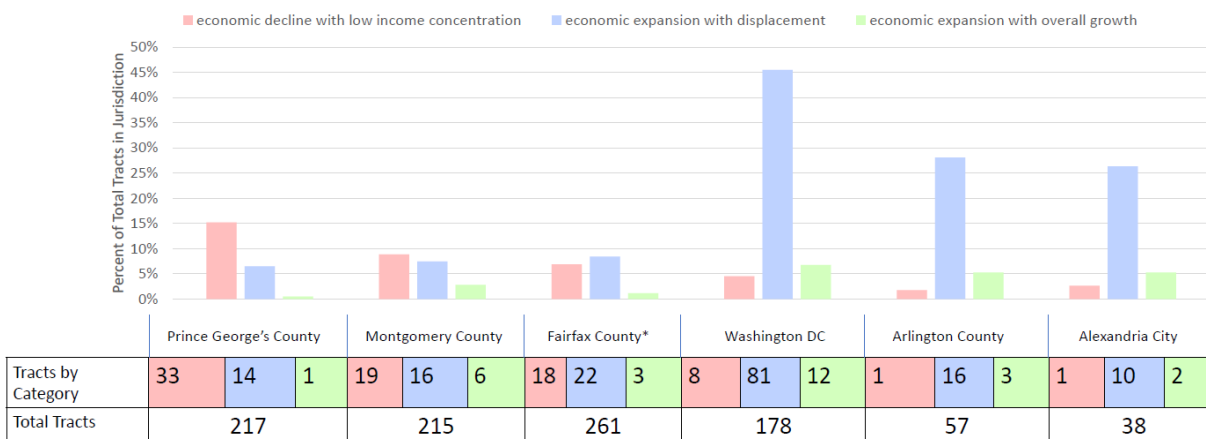
The effects of these efforts to separate people by race and class continue to be felt today and one of Thrive Montgomery’s primary goals is to address these inequities. Thrive works to do this by (1) making sure that communities in the Eastern part of the county generate opportunities and attract public and private investment; (2) designing places that strengthen community by emphasizing inclusion and bringing people together; (3) recommending ways to preserve and create new affordable housing and increase the diversity of housing types; and (4) focusing on transportation policies that will make all

forms of movement – walking, biking, rolling, driving, taking transit – safe and convenient.

Neighborhood Change: Racial and Income Demographics

A 2022 study by the Planning Department titled, *Neighborhood Change in Montgomery County and the Washington, DC Region*, shows that neighborhood exclusivity and pockets of poverty have been largely entrenched over the past 20 years, with fewer than one-fifth of census tracts experiencing significant changes in their income demographics. In other words, for the most part wealthy neighborhoods have stayed wealthy while poor neighborhoods have stayed poor. Displacement of low-income households has occurred in a handful of neighborhoods in Montgomery County, but disinvestment and the concentration of poverty are more common problems facing our community. In Arlington, Alexandria, and the District of Columbia displacement has been much more pervasive, but in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties more low-income residents – and more people of color – live in neighborhoods where affluent households are leaving and the number of low-income households is increasing.

Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties have more tracts with low-income concentration while DC and other nearby Virginia jurisdictions have more tract where displacement is occurring.



The departure of more affluent residents from neighborhoods previously considered highly desirable has contributed to the suburbanization of poverty and created new geographic barriers to equity and inclusion. The Wedges and Corridor plan’s focus on the I-270 corridor and related planning decisions exacerbated this problem by discouraging growth in the East County, while focusing public and private investment to the west. Areas with high concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities face financial precarity due to a prevalence of low wage jobs, lack of insurance coverage, limited access to capital, and a shortage of convenient and affordable transportation options. Not surprisingly, quality-of-life indicators in these areas tend to lag other parts of the county.

This separation of neighborhoods along lines defined by race and income has important consequences for access to educational opportunities and the life prospects of our county’s children. In 2019, three-quarters of Black, Hispanic, and English-learning students in Montgomery County Public Schools – along with more than 80 percent of all low-income students in the system – were enrolled in high-poverty-focus schools. By comparison, more than two-thirds of all white, Asian, and multi-racial students were enrolled in low-poverty schools.

As we seek a future that is more equitable and inclusive, improved access to infrastructure and amenities

in racially, socially, and economically isolated areas will not be enough. We also must facilitate the integration of neighborhoods by race and income, across all ages. Increasing the share of racially and economically mixed neighborhoods and schools across all parts of the county is critical to ensure that the inequities of the past will not be perpetuated in the future.

In parallel with steps to reduce inequity in the geographic distribution of resources and opportunities, Montgomery County must work to build a shared sense of purpose that can help strengthen efforts to promote respect for diversity, demonstrate the value of inclusion, and build a foundation for greater trust. This concept, often described by academics under the umbrella term “social capital,” can pay dividends not only in sustaining support for racial and social justice but in bolstering civic capacity more broadly.

How Thrive Montgomery 2050 addresses Racial Equity and Social Inclusion

Decisions about land use, transportation, and public infrastructure can play an important role in building a sense of community. Different measures of social capital, including trust in public and private institutions, political participation, whether neighbors know each other, and other indicia of connection and cohesion are influenced by qualities of the built environment. The design of our communities – including the mix of uses, the public realm and the transportation systems – can greatly influence levels of community cohesion and social interaction and can create social capital.

Racial Equity and Rebalancing the Geographic Distribution of Opportunity

The identification of and investment in growth corridors in the East County – particularly along Route 29 and the Georgia Avenue corridor along Metrorail’s Red Line – is vital to reversing decades of anemic growth and ensuring that the benefits of development are more equitably distributed across lines of geography, class, and race. Political opposition to development in the East County – most clearly expressed by the removal of the I-95/Route29 corridor in the 1993 Refinement of the Wedges and Corridors Plan from the areas identified as appropriate for growth – pushed public and private investment to the west. Subsequent public and private investment was focused along the I-270 corridor because this area appeared to offer the best prospects for growth and success. Meanwhile, the East County became relatively less attractive for employers and residents, feeding a cycle of stagnation.

This pattern is consistent with what real estate developer and scholar Christopher B. Leinberger has described as the phenomenon of the “favored quarter.” Leinberger observes that in many metropolitan areas, decisions about the geographic allocation of resources made decades in the past are reinforced and repeated. Once an area receives resources and attention from the government and private sector, Leinberger argues, future investment tends to follow in the same location, reinforcing its head start and leaving other areas farther behind. The evolution of the I-270 corridor as the “favored quarter” and accompanying limits on development in the East County were not the sole cause of the racial and economic divide between the eastern and western part of the county. The logic of the favored quarter, however, was and is a significant factor in reinforcing disparities in access to investment, infrastructure, and services as well as the concentration of poverty and diminished access to opportunity.

To reverse this trend, Thrive Montgomery recommends focusing investment and encouraging development along multiple corridors in the East County. The development recommended is in a compact form that is focused specifically along corridors and that establishes the foundation for complete communities that will create a more prosperous and equitable future.

Most of the new development that is recommended along corridors is located in areas currently underutilized with low scale retail and commercial development or covered by surface parking lots. It is always important to remain aware of the potential for displacement – and this plan calls for monitoring and addressing dislocation caused by rising real estate values – but public and private investment are essential to expanding economic opportunity for people and communities that have been left behind or economically and socially isolated. In fact, the Planning Department’s Neighborhood Change study found that neighborhoods with large amounts of new housing are less likely than to experience either displacement or concentration of poverty than neighborhoods where little housing is getting built.

“Completeness” and Equity: Diverse Places to Support Diverse People

The concept of Complete Communities calls for the development of a broad assortment of residential, retail, office, and live-work spaces designed to fit the needs of diverse individuals and businesses to support different kinds of work and employment arrangements. A wide variety of housing and employment types in close proximity to each other and with a robust mix of uses provides physical and economic space for renters, first-time homebuyers, or new business owners of differing means.

The process of creating more compact, complete and equitable communities requires attention to the details of design. Zoning codes that emphasize form-based standards will serve as predictable guides for change, address community concerns about the impact of growth on their quality of life and illustrate hard-to-define concepts such as “character” and “compatibility.” A shift away from these kinds of vague and subjective standards will help make regulatory decisions more equitable by applying more objective criteria in evaluating development proposals and their relationship to their surroundings. Clear rules governing acceptable form will encourage the introduction of different housing types and neighborhood-serving retail, facilitating the creation of mixed use and mixed income neighborhoods where essential services are within walking distance of most residences.

Building Places that Build Trust: Designing for Inclusion and Social Connection

A desire for human interaction cuts across lines of age, race and ethnicity, and class and is critical to the happiness of individuals as well as the collective well-being of a community. Encouraging different kinds of people to interact in public spaces is important to building a sense of community with shared interests and values. Arts and culture spaces and programming can help us better understand and appreciate each other, strengthening support for diversity and inclusion and building trust.

The quality and accessibility of parks is a basic component of equity in the delivery of public services. Parks are so integral to what makes a community desirable and healthy that ensuring equity in decisions about which land is acquired for parks in what part of the county and how that land is used is essential to achieving our goals for racial and socioeconomic justice. Well-designed and sited parks are one of the most straightforward ways to establish a clear sense of place. They invite people of all ages, cultures, incomes, and interests to gather and interact in ways not achieved in any other location or context. Not only do they foster social connectedness, but with healthy levels of civic engagement and social cohesion, they can act as community hubs.

Parks and recreation also are vital to improving health outcomes for all our residents. According to the

CDC, more than 60 percent of U.S. adults do not engage in the recommended amount of activity and approximately 25 percent of U.S. adults are not active at all. Because 90 percent of outdoor experiences happen close to home, parks - particularly in urban areas - play an important role in outdoor recreation. Community gardens in parks help to reduce the impact of food deserts in low-income areas, encourage physical activity and social interaction, and give residents who do not have yards access to nutritious foods that contribute to a healthy lifestyle. Access to opportunities for vigorous physical activity is especially important to improve health outcomes and quality of life for people of color, who suffer higher rates of diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity.

Artistic and cultural programming in our public spaces – with a calendar of events varying in scale, time, and location – will help improve the equitable distribution of resources to celebrate our cultural diversity. By focusing investments in public art, cultural spaces, and cultural hubs along corridors and in Complete Communities we can make these places welcoming and attractive to people from different backgrounds. Support for arts and culture can educate and provide creative tools to share untold stories, encourage empathy, give voice to diverse points of view, and foster civic dialogue and participation.

A Range of Housing for a Range of Incomes Supports Equity and Integration

Diversity in development is especially important to producing housing that matches the needs of our future. The integration of many different housing types, such as small apartment buildings, accessory dwelling units, duplexes, and larger multi-family buildings within the same community supports a broader range of households and incomes, reduces the concentration of poverty, and increases racial and economic equity. A mixture of housing types – coupled with strategies to use the built environment to encourage social interaction – can help create integrated communities where people across the ethnic, racial, social, and economic spectrum not only live and work together but develop a sense of shared purpose and community. These elements also create opportunities for housing suitable to every stage of life, allowing residents to stay in the same neighborhoods as they age.

Access to decent housing that meets one's needs and fits one's budget is a basic human right. The construction of a wider variety of sizes and types of housing and a focus on affordability and attainability will help diversify the mix of incomes in neighborhoods across the County, improving access to services, amenities, and infrastructure for low- and moderate-income residents, who are disproportionately people of color.

Specific recommendations about housing policy can be found in the chapter titled "Housing for All." Key strategies that will enhance equity include:

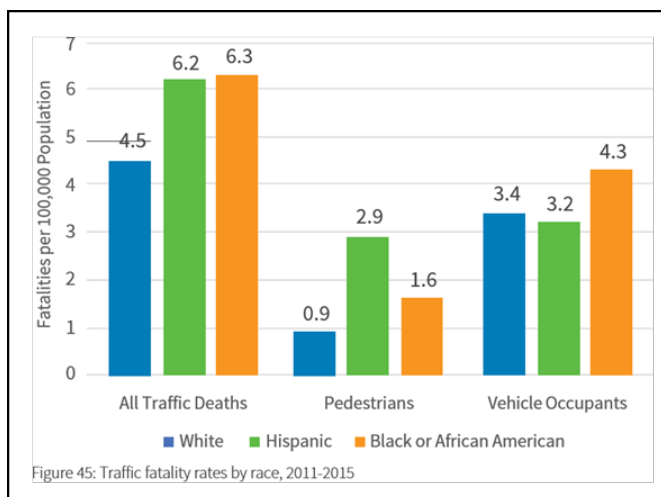
- Preservation of both naturally occurring and regulated existing affordable units will minimize displacement as neighborhoods benefit from see future investments in transit, schools, parks and other amenities.
- New affordable housing in existing amenity-rich neighborhoods will expand access to quality education for a wider range of students, leading to more integrated schools.
- Mixed-income housing – including new market-rate housing – in communities where investment has lagged will help mitigate the concentration of poverty and enhance access to amenities and recreational opportunities for current residents.
- More diverse housing types – ranging from low to medium densities such as accessory dwelling

units (ADU's); duplexes; triplexes; quadplexes; live-work units; and clustered housing such as townhouses, courtyard dwellings and smaller apartment buildings – will provide more choice, enhance intergenerational interaction, promote aging in place, and build social capital.

Expanding alternatives to driving helps build more equitable communities

Transportation strategies designed to facilitate walking, rolling, and bicycling as well as the use of public transit promise to serve our residents more equitably. Enhanced access to jobs via transit, walking, rolling and bicycling will help mitigate inequities for people of color and low wage earners who are more likely to live in areas without adequate infrastructure to meet their mobility needs without an automobile. People in these communities are less likely to own a car and lack access to high-quality transit service that operates frequently and reliably throughout the day and into the evening. Expanded transit service also serves as an affordable and attainable housing tool by connecting areas where housing is relatively inexpensive to jobs, schools, and amenities without subjecting residents to high transportation expenses or impractically long commutes.

The reordered transportation priorities in this plan will help meet the county's goal of eliminating all traffic-related fatalities and severe injuries by 2030, which is especially important in making transportation more equitable because people of color are more likely to be hurt or killed in crashes.



Streets that go beyond safety to make walking, rolling, and bicycling preferred ways of getting around will enhance human interaction and build social capital. Pedestrian-friendly rural, suburban, and urban centers will enjoy the benefits of a stronger sense of place where the conditions for high levels of civic participation and a feeling of community are far easier to create and maintain.

As part of the focus on equity for all communities in the county, it is also important to prioritize providing high-speed internet access to all parts of the county. Future communication infrastructure and technologies should be deployed equitably throughout the county.

Conclusion

Racial equity and social inclusion are essential to our economic success as well as to our ability to produce more equitable outcomes for all our residents. Thrive Montgomery 2050 provides a clear-eyed assessment of the challenges that stand in our way but also proposes ideas that can help remove these obstacles. As the demographics of our community change rapidly along dimensions of age, race and ethnicity, income and wealth, culture and language, the need to confront inequity is urgent.

MEMORANDUM

September 21, 2022

TO: County Council

FROM: Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst
Gene Smith, Legislative Analyst
Keith Levchenko, Senior Legislative Analyst
Selena Mendy Singleton, Racial Equity and Social Justice Manager

SUBJECT: Thrive Montgomery 2050

PURPOSE: Worksession on the PHED Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050

This addendum addresses comments provided by Greater Greater Washington (GGW) (see © 1-6) regarding the new consultant requested chapter on racial equity and social justice. Attached on © 13-26 of the September 22 staff packet, is the consultant proposed chapter. It provides context for the importance of this type of chapter in the general plan, addressing issues such as justice in planning, historical land use in Montgomery County, housing, environmental justice, and transportation.

Two types of comments were provided by GGW, a few that are global in nature, and several others specific to language in the draft chapter. The more specific comments are covered first.

On page 45 it reads:

“In 2022, across America, we are still seeing communities of color disproportionately dealing with eroding infrastructure, substandard living conditions, and environmental justice issues like unsafe drinking water. These neighborhoods do not exist by coincidence, they were 'carved out' on the map, years ago, by people who yielded the 'dark side' of planning's power. Too often, when these communities are finally paid attention, the original residents are displaced and unable to benefit. The cycle of disinvestment and real estate speculation in communities of color has been well documented over time, making 'Gentrification' one of the hottest issues impacting Urban America today.”

Comment: This paragraph needs to be revised to reflect the on-the-ground conditions in Montgomery County today.

Response: Council staff suggests only a minor edit to this text as these statements are about the broader, and often, deeply felt experience of communities of color in the face of development and growth. It may not be the typical experience in Montgomery County (and as the statement begins “across America” implies that it is not intended to be); however, based on the focus group interactions it highlights a real fear of what is meant by investment and growth to vulnerable communities in our County. It is about acknowledging this perception. The minor edit is to the following sentence:

“These neighborhoods do not exist by coincidence, they were 'carved out' on the map, years ago, by people who yielded ~~the 'dark side'~~ of planning's power.”

On page 46 it reads:

“Social justice is a process by which working class people begin to access the privileges only enjoyed by the historically privileged class[es], to afford healthy lifestyles and to experience education and built environments which inspire them to lead happier and more productive lives.”

Comment: This is an appropriate place to discuss how Montgomery County has already attempted to address social justice, such as through the MPDU (Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit) program, which has been documented to produce positive results for students from lower-income backgrounds who have access to well-resourced neighborhoods and schools. This program is briefly discussed on page (54).

Response: Council staff suggests adding text included in Planning's chapter on racial equity and social justice as follows:

“Social justice is a process by which working class people begin to access the privileges only enjoyed by the historically privileged class[es], to afford healthy lifestyles and to experience education and built environments which inspire them to lead happier and more productive lives. In modern times, this is becoming increasingly important as more and more people are finding it hard to thrive economically. Montgomery County has at times taken forward-thinking steps to address inequality, such as adoption of the nation's first – and to this day, most successful – inclusionary zoning law, the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) program, which guarantees that income-restricted housing will be built in every part of county as part of market-rate development projects. However, as the County plans for the future, special attention needs to be paid to the hidden costs of poverty and determine more ways to design communities to reduce problems associated with public health, crime, housing instability, food insecurity, and segregation.

On page 46 it reads:

“Property and Pacification. Quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy. The postmodernist penchant for encouraging the formation of market niches—in both consumer habits and

cultural forms—surrounds the contemporary urban experience with an aura of freedom of choice, provided you have the money. Shopping malls, multiplexes, and box stores proliferate, as do fast-food and artisanal marketplaces. We now have, as urban sociologist Sharon Zukin puts it, ‘pacification by cappuccino’ (Harvey 31). Source: David Harvey, Rebel Cities”

Comment: It is unclear how this quote reflects current conditions in Montgomery County or the concerns expressed by community members in public outreach, including for the Racial Equity and Social Justice chapter. A major complaint in BIPOC communities in the county, such as East County, is that there are not enough retail amenities. Places like Downtown Silver Spring are some of the most diverse gathering places in the region. Meanwhile, the county has two dead, or dying, shopping malls (Lakeforest and White Flint) and is seeking ways to redevelop them. Are the county’s efforts to redevelop these shopping malls, or to create more places like Downtown Silver Spring, “pacification by cappuccino” or providing the amenities that community members have asked for?

Response: The referenced text is about both the value in providing amenities and the authenticity of those amenities, and the freedom for each community to choose. A frequently voiced concern by BIPOC community members is the absence and/or loss of businesses, especially culturally distinctive, minority-owned businesses when redevelopment occurs and commercial rents increase. It is the fear of unique, small businesses being taken over by chains in the name of “progress”.

On page 50 it reads:

“Thrive’s housing prescriptions to address racial equity and social justice largely center in a strategy to integrate communities with high concentrations of minorities and/or poverty with new development that attracts multi-racial and higher income households into the area.”

Comment: This paragraph misrepresents recommendations in the PHED Committee draft of Thrive regarding “Complete Communities,” which “include housing suitable for different household types, income levels, and preferences, helping to support racial and socioeconomic integration.” It recommends a variety of locations where more diverse kinds of housing can be built but is not limited to majority-minority communities as described here. The plan describes Complete Communities as being located throughout Montgomery County, including in more affluent or majority-white areas like Bethesda and Potomac as well as less affluent or majority-minority communities.

Response: Council staff suggests the following edit to more appropriately reflect the Plan’s theme of more housing (of all types), in general and specifically along major corridors and in Complete Communities across the entire County:

Thrive’s housing prescriptions to address racial equity and social justice largely center on a strategy to significantly increase housing production, striving to increase housing density along major corridors and in Complete Communities across the County. This includes more housing for every income level, with particular attention to providing more income-restricted housing, housing for the very low-income, and permanent supportive housing. ~~*integrate communities with high concentrations of minorities and/or poverty*~~

~~with new development that attracts multi-racial and higher income households into the area.~~

On page 50 it reads:

“The strategies seek to integrate (gentrify) communities while simultaneously protecting existing residents from displacement. The idea of development without displacement is an exciting one, but these ideas, in practice are often acting in direct opposition of each other. Development without deliberate community and neighborhood conservation efforts will almost certainly result in (some) displacement.”

Comment: This paragraph conflates two processes—gentrification and integration—which can be related to one another but are usually described in opposition to one another. There is a growing body of research that shows that development does not automatically lead to gentrification or displacement (references to studies in correspondence).

Response: Council staff suggests the following edit to clarify proposed policies and practices in the Plan:

To promote racial equity and economic diversity of housing in every neighborhood, the Plan recommends targeted strategies be developed to minimize gentrification and displacement while promoting integration and avoiding concentrations of poverty. The strategies seek to integrate (gentrify) communities while simultaneously protecting existing residents from displacement. The idea of development without displacement is an exciting one, but these ideas, in practice are often acting in direct opposition of each other. Development without deliberate community and neighborhood conservation efforts will almost certainly result in (some) displacement. So, instead of ignoring this possibility, let’s determine where people can go.

On Page 52 it reads:

“Density brings economic opportunity, but it can also degrade the quality of natural resources, parks, schools, and neighborhoods.”

Comment:

This statement is unsupported. The EPA notes that “conventional housing development,” defined as suburban development on the region’s fringe, consumes significantly more rural land and generates more vehicle miles traveled, contributing to pollution, while higher-density development can protect water resources by conserving land and preventing development in ecologically sensitive areas. The UC Berkeley CoolClimate Map identifies more densely populated, urban parts of the Washington metropolitan area as having the lowest carbon footprint, including Silver Spring and Takoma Park in Montgomery County. It is unclear if there has been research on the connection between density and the quality of parks, schools, or neighborhoods in Montgomery County.

Response: Council staff suggests the following edit to the Plan:

“Encouraging growth in already developed areas, has ripple effects. Density brings economic opportunity, but it can also ~~degrade~~ strain existing infrastructure, impacting the quality of natural resources, parks, schools, and neighborhoods. If the majority of

new development will occur in urban areas where existing naturally occurring affordable housing exists, special attention needs to be paid to ensure that as the population density increases, residents maintain equitable access to parks, recreation, natural resources, and high-quality places which influence quality of life.”

On page 52 it reads:

“Analysis of environmental quality shows that residents of the Target Areas where the majority of BIPOC and Low-Income residents live are more likely to be exposed to poor environmental conditions and live next to polluting land uses.”

Comment: There is no description of what this analysis is or where it can be found.

Response: The text is referring to the map on page 53. Council staff suggests the following edit:

“Analysis The maps of environmental quality shows that residents of the Target Areas where the majority of BIPOC and Low-Income residents live are more likely to be exposed to poor environmental conditions and live next to polluting land uses experience lower quality environmental conditions based on air particulate matter and watershed quality.”

On page 52 it reads:

“The plight of the working class and many BIPOC people we talked to felt that the needs of working-class families were not considered in the planning themes of Thrive. They felt that many of the “progressive” policies did not consider their current status in life and expressed how proposed changes would adversely impact their quality of life. Some people showed great resistance to the idea of '15-minute living' because they relied on their work vehicles to take them to different parts of the county where they had access to jobs. Many expressed that they rely on vehicle miles and parking availability to make a living. For some, getting a vehicle represented the possibility of financial independence. To others, the idea of riding a bike for leisure or to commute was seen as a luxury that comes with a level of economic empowerment they did not have yet.”

Comment:

We must acknowledge the very real concerns of Montgomery County residents, particularly those who are working class or BIPOC. It’s also important to acknowledge the role that cars play in people’s lives, particularly in spread-out suburban areas or due to the perceived social status a car can bring. As research from the DC Policy Center found, walking and bicycling rates are lower among Black DC residents and in less-affluent parts of the District farther from jobs and amenities. Not surprisingly, some may perceive active transportation as something for higher-income people, or people who aren’t Black. At the same time, this section as written undermines the PHED Committee draft, which notes that the county’s current, auto-focused transportation system “limits access to jobs and opportunity, particularly for low-income residents who are more likely to depend on transit and makes our transportation system less adaptable and resilient.” We cannot ignore the role that public transit or active transportation already plays for working class or BIPOC individuals in Montgomery County. A 2020 Office of Legislative Oversight study found that 78% of Ride On patrons are people of color, 42% speak English as a second language, and 47% have an annual household income of less than \$30,000. Fifty-eight

percent of Ride On users walk to the service, meaning that many low-income or BIPOC residents walk for at least a portion of their trip. Meanwhile, 69% of Ride On riders have at least a Bachelors' degree. While that does not mean transit access causes higher educational outcomes, it does align with findings from a Harvard study that access to transportation is the key indicator of someone's ability to climb the economic ladder.

Response: Council staff does not support editing text that relays the thoughts and feeling expressed and learned through dialog with the focus groups; however, staff suggests a slight editing to frame the topic around Plan policies and not just focus group responses as follows:

~~“The plight of the working class and many BIPOC people we talked to felt that the needs of working class families were not considered in the planning themes of Thrive. They felt Thrive states that successful mixed-use communities require a transportation network that supports modes of travel appropriate for the trips users need to make. However, many working class and BIPOC people expressed concern that many of the Plan’s “progressive” policies (focused on biking, walking and transit) did not consider their current status in life and expressed how proposed changes would could potentially adversely impact their quality of life. Some people showed great resistance to the idea of ‘15-minute living’ because they relied on their work vehicles to take them to different parts of the county where they had access to jobs. Many expressed that they rely on vehicle miles and parking availability to make a living. For some, getting a vehicle represented the possibility of financial independence. To others, the idea of riding a bike for leisure or to commute was seen as a luxury that comes with a level of economic empowerment they did not have yet.”~~

On page 52 it reads:

“There is a concern that shifting to this new way of life will make it harder for them to survive and in some instances this is true.”

Comment: This comment ignores nearly 60 years of planning policy that supports urbanism in Montgomery County, in addition to the historically urban form of older communities such as Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Gaithersburg, and Rockville, which date to the late 19th and early 20th centuries and were primarily designed around walking and the Metropolitan Branch rail line (today's MARC Brunswick Line). Urbanism is not a new way of life for many Montgomery County residents, including low-income or BIPOC residents. In addition, Thrive does not dictate that everywhere in Montgomery County should be urban, or that should be the only choice for residents.

Response: In context with the preceding sentence, Council staff suggests the following edit:

“Ideas such as congestion pricing and reduced parking requirements that promote “good urbanism” are sometimes outside of the reality for working class people. There is a concern that shifting to this new way of life will make it harder for them to survive ~~and in some instances this is true.~~”

On page 52 it reads:

"I can't take my ladder on the Purple Line" - Montgomery County Resident

Comment: This comment, while reflecting the sentiment of one Montgomery County resident with a specific business need, undermines a project that has been the County's main transportation priority for decades, and should be removed from this document.

Response: Council staff does not support revising text that relays the thoughts and feeling expressed and learned through dialog with the focus groups.

On page 55 it reads:

"If housing conditions continue on their trajectory, it is quite feasible that Montgomery County will cease to be a bedroom community, but a community that requires commuters from outside the region to staff its businesses."

Comment: This statement is incorrect. Montgomery County is not a bedroom community. It has the largest number of jobs of any county in Maryland, with 450,600 people employed here in March 2022. 20 In 2015, 49% of Montgomery County residents worked in the county, while 20% worked in Washington, DC and 9% in Northern Virginia. Meanwhile, just over half of the people employed in Montgomery County commute from somewhere else, with the largest shares coming from Prince George's County, Frederick County, and Washington, DC in that order.

Response: Council staff suggests the following edit:

"More work needs to be put into understanding how to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing and establishing new affordable housing to ensure that Montgomery County doesn't lose the rich diversity, both racial and economic, to make it a complete community. If housing conditions continue on their trajectory, it is quite feasible that Montgomery County ~~will cease to be a bedroom community, but a community that~~ could requires even more commuters from outside the region to staff its businesses. This dynamic would be in opposition to both the Equity and Sustainability goals of Thrive."

The comments more global in nature suggest the chapter could be expanded to include more historical content including Asian and Latin American immigration experiences, a further discussion of the history and current relevance of the Wedges and Corridor plan, and text from the public hearing draft that noted the racial equity and social justice impact of community participation in the planning process aimed at blocking the development of new housing.

Response: Given the time available for further drafting and revision, Council staff suggests future master plans include text on the history of community development for the plan area as it relates to all people of color and the Wedges and Corridor concept.



Montgomery County Council
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

September 19, 2022

Dear Council President Albornoz and members of the Montgomery County Council:

My name is Dan Reed and I serve as the Regional Policy Director for [Greater Greater Washington](https://www.ggwash.org/), a nonprofit that works to advance racial, economic, and environmental justice in land use, transportation, and housing throughout Greater Washington.

Please find below our comments regarding the Racial Equity and Social Justice chapter of Thrive Montgomery 2050, which were presented at the County Council last week. This chapter represents several months of outreach regarding Thrive and includes important insights about residents' concerns, as well as meaningful recommendations to advance racial justice and social equity in the county's general plan. However, we have concerns about portions of this chapter, which mischaracterize recommendations within Thrive, do not accurately reflect the history or current conditions in Montgomery County, or are not sufficiently supported by research. In the subsequent pages you will find footnotes with additional information to support our comments, including references to the current PHED Committee draft.

This chapter will be part of a plan that decisionmakers will use for the next 30 years, and will be referenced by residents for years to come. We support the Council voting on and approving Thrive in October 2022 as currently scheduled, and recognize that there is limited time to make revisions. Our comments are intended to assist the Council in amending this chapter to make it a stronger addition to Thrive and support the county's stated goals to promote racial equity and social justice.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. I am happy to discuss any questions or concerns you have, and we look forward to working with you to make Thrive the best plan it can be for our county's future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Reed', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dan Reed
Regional Policy Director

The Washington, DC region is great >> and it can be greater.



Greater Greater Washington's comments on the Thrive Racial Equity and Social Justice chapter:

Global comments:

- This chapter discusses the experiences of African-American residents who have lived in the county for generations, and is an opportunity to expand to conversations about other components of Montgomery County's history—such as Black flight to the county in the late 20th century, the African diaspora, and Asian or Latin American immigration—and how those experiences have also shaped the county's built form.
- This chapter needs to further discuss the history of Wedges and Corridors, the reasons why such a philosophy created a racially and socioeconomically segregated county—including Harland Bartholomew's resistance to apartments in communities like Bethesda¹—and the reasons why Thrive seeks to build on that plan.
- This chapter could include language in the Planning Department Public Hearing draft regarding how “communities have become highly adept at using public process to block new housing.”² This is directly related to racial equity and social justice, as well-resourced communities have used the County's planning process to restrict access to them. This language was removed from later drafts due to opposition from many of those communities and County Executive Marc Elrich.³

Specific comments:

Page (45): *“In 2022, across America, we are still seeing communities of color disproportionately [sp] dealing with eroding infrastructure, substandard living conditions, and environmental justice issues like unsafe drinking water. These neighborhoods do not exist by coincidence, they were 'carved out' on the map, years ago, by people who wielded the 'dark side' of planning's power.*

Too often, when these communities are finally paid attention, the original residents are displaced and unable to benefit. The cycle of disinvestment and real estate speculation in communities of color has been well documented over time, making 'Gentrification' one of the hottest issues impacting Urban America today.”

This paragraph needs to be revised to reflect the on-the-ground conditions in Montgomery County today. Montgomery County is one of the wealthiest communities in the nation and home to some of the few majority Black and majority Latinx Census tracts that are also *affluent* Census tracts in the United States.⁴ Simultaneously, Montgomery Planning's own research shows that gentrification and displacement are happening primarily in a handful of places in the county, and that a more salient phenomenon is the

¹ <https://ggwash.org/view/70408/harland-bartholomew-the-man-who-zoned-washington-dc>

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<https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Public-Hearing-Draft-Plan-Thrive-Montgomery-2050-final-10-5.pdf#page=87>

³

https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Item10_Attachment-3-Comments-Received-Since-June-11-2020.pdf#page=86

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<https://ggwash.org/view/79489/prince-georges-countys-belt-of-high-income-majority-black-census-tracts-really-is-unique> (see map)



concentration of poverty and disinvestment⁵. Conditions such as “real estate speculation in communities of color” are not present in the county at the scale in which they’re described in this paragraph.

Page (46): *“Social justice is a process by which working class people begin to access the privileges only enjoyed by the historically privileged class[es], to afford healthy lifestyles and to experience education and built environments which inspire them to lead happier and more productive lives.”*

This is an appropriate place to discuss how Montgomery County has already attempted to address social justice, such as through the MPDU (Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit) program, which has been documented to produce positive results for students from lower-income backgrounds who have access to well-resourced neighborhoods and schools.⁶ This program is briefly discussed on page (54).

Page (46): *“Property and Pacification. Quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy. The postmodernist penchant for encouraging the formation of market niches—in both consumer habits and cultural forms—surrounds the contemporary urban experience with an aura of freedom of choice, provided you have the money. Shopping malls, multiplexes and box stores proliferate, as do fast-food and artisanal market-places. We now have, as urban sociologist Sharon Zukin puts it, ‘pacification by cappuccino’ (Harvey 31).”*

It is unclear how this quote reflects current conditions in Montgomery County or the concerns expressed by community members in public outreach, including for the Racial Equity and Social Justice chapter. A major complaint in BIPOC communities in the county, such as East County, is that there are not enough retail amenities. Places like Downtown Silver Spring are some of the most diverse gathering places in the region. Meanwhile, the county has two dead, or dying, shopping malls (Lakeforest and White Flint) and is seeking ways to redevelop them. Are the county’s efforts to redevelop these shopping malls, or to create more places like Downtown Silver Spring, “pacification by cappuccino” or providing the amenities that community members have asked for?

Page (50): *“Thrive’s housing prescriptions to address racial equity and social justice largely center on a strategy to integrate communities with high concentrations of minorities and/or poverty with new development that attracts multi-racial and higher income households into the area.”*

This paragraph misrepresents recommendations in the PHED Committee draft of Thrive recommendations regarding “Complete Communities,”⁷ which “include housing suitable for different household types, income levels, and preferences, helping to support racial and socioeconomic integration.” It recommends a variety of locations where more diverse kinds of housing can be built, but is not limited to majority-minority communities as described here. The plan describes Complete Communities as being located throughout

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<https://montgomeryplanning.org/montgomery-planning-briefs-planning-board-on-neighborhood-change-analysis/>

⁶ <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/housing-policy-is-school-policy/>

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<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2021/PHED-CommitteeDraftThrive2050.pdf#page=30>



Montgomery County, including in more affluent or majority-white areas like Bethesda and Potomac as well as less affluent or majority-minority communities. The following paragraph in the Racial Equity chapter alludes to this.

Page (50): *“The strategies seek to integrate (gentrify) communities while simultaneously protecting existing residents from displacement. The idea of development without displacement is an exciting one, but these ideas, in practice are often acting in direct opposition of each other. Development without deliberate community and neighborhood conservation efforts will almost certainly result in (some) displacement.”*

This paragraph conflates two processes—gentrification and integration—which can be related to one another, but are usually described in opposition to one another. There is a growing body of research that shows that development does not automatically lead to gentrification or displacement. A study from NYU and Fannie Mae shows that new development does not increase rents for existing homes⁸. Additionally, research from both George Washington University⁹ and Montgomery Planning has identified downtown Silver Spring¹⁰ as a community where new housing has also occurred alongside increased racial and socioeconomic diversity. Similar to the study of MPDUs in Montgomery County, a paper from the Philadelphia Fed finds that incumbent residents in a community often stay while it experiences an influx of new investment, and can benefit from access to higher-quality amenities.¹¹ However, a piece from Vox notes that a much more common experience for lower-income or BIPOC communities is not gentrification, but concentrated poverty and disinvestment due to a lack of development.¹²

Page (53): *“Density brings economic opportunity, but it can also degrade the quality of natural resources, parks, schools, and neighborhoods.”*

This statement is unsupported. The EPA notes that “conventional housing development,” defined as suburban development on the region’s fringe, consumes significantly more rural land and generates more vehicle miles traveled, contributing to pollution,¹³ while higher-density development can protect water resources by conserving land and preventing development in ecologically sensitive areas¹⁴. The UC Berkeley CoolClimate Map identifies more densely populated, urban parts of the Washington metropolitan area as having the lowest carbon footprint, including Silver Spring and Takoma Park in Montgomery County.¹⁵ It is unclear if there has been research on the connection between density and the quality of parks, schools, or neighborhoods in Montgomery County.

⁸ <https://www.fanniemae.com/research-and-insights/do-new-housing-units-next-door-raise-your-rents>

⁹ <https://scholarspace.library.gwu.edu/work/ww72bc095>

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<https://montgomeryplanning.org/montgomery-planning-briefs-planning-board-on-neighborhood-change-analysis/>

¹¹ <https://www.philadelphiafed.org/-/media/frbp/assets/working-papers/2019/wp19-30.pdf?la=en>

¹² <https://www.vox.com/22629826/gentrification-definition-housing-racism-segregation-cities>

¹³ <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-growth-and-affordable-housing>

¹⁴ https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2014-03/documents/protect_water_higher_density1.pdf

¹⁵ <https://coolclimate.berkeley.edu/maps>



Page (53): *“Analysis of environmental quality shows that residents of the Target Areas where the majority of BIPOC and Low-Income residents live are more likely to be exposed to poor environmental conditions and live next to polluting land uses.”*

There is no description of what this analysis is or where it can be found.

Page (53): *“The plight of the working class and many BIPOC people we talked to felt that the needs of working class families were not considered in the planning themes of Thrive. They felt that many of the “progressive” policies did not consider their current status in life and expressed how proposed changes would adversely impact their quality of life. Some people showed great resistance to the idea of ‘15-minute living’ because they relied on their work vehicles to take them to different parts of the county where they had access to jobs. Many expressed that they rely on vehicle miles and parking availability to make a living. For some, getting a vehicle represented the possibility of financial independence. To others, the idea of riding a bike for leisure or to commute was seen as a luxury that comes with a level of economic empowerment they did not have yet.”*

We must acknowledge the very real concerns of Montgomery County residents, particularly those who are working class or BIPOC. It’s also important to acknowledge the role that cars play in people’s lives, particularly in spread-out suburban areas or due to the perceived social status a car can bring. As research from the DC Policy Center found, walking and bicycling rates are lower among Black DC residents and in less-affluent parts of the District farther from jobs and amenities.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, some may perceive active transportation as something for higher-income people, or people who aren’t Black.

At the same time, this section as written undermines the PHED Committee draft, which notes that the county’s current, auto-focused transportation system “limits access to jobs and opportunity, particularly for low-income residents who are more likely to depend on transit and makes our transportation system less adaptable and resilient.”¹⁷ We cannot ignore the role that public transit or active transportation already plays for working class or BIPOC individuals in Montgomery County. A 2020 Office of Legislative Oversight study found that 78% of Ride On patrons are people of color, 42% speak English as a second language, and 47% have an annual household income of less than \$30,000.¹⁸ Fifty-eight percent of Ride On users walk to the service, meaning that many low-income or BIPOC residents walk for at least a portion of their trip.

Meanwhile, 69% of Ride On riders have at least a Bachelor’s degree. While that does not mean transit access causes higher educational outcomes, it does align with findings from a Harvard study that access to transportation is the key indicator of someone’s ability to climb the economic ladder.¹⁹

Page (53): *“There is a concern that shifting to this new way of life will make it harder for them to survive and in some instances this is true.”*

¹⁶ <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/the-demographics-of-walking-and-biking-to-work/>

¹⁷

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2021/PHED-CommitteeDraftThrive2050.pdf#page=47>

¹⁸ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2020%20Reports/OLOReport2020-10.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html>



This comment ignores nearly 60 years of planning policy that supports urbanism in Montgomery County, in addition to the historically urban form of older communities such as Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Gaithersburg, and Rockville, which date to the late 19th and early 20th centuries and were primarily designed around walking and the Metropolitan Branch rail line (today's MARC Brunswick Line). Urbanism is not a new way of life for many Montgomery County residents, including low-income or BIPOC residents. In addition, Thrive does not dictate that everywhere in Montgomery County should be urban, or that should be the only choice for residents.

Page (53): *"I can't take my ladder on the Purple Line" - Montgomery County Resident*

This comment, while reflecting the sentiment of one Montgomery County resident with a specific business need, undermines a project that has been the County's main transportation priority for decades, and should be removed from this document.

Page (55): *"If housing conditions continue on their trajectory, it is quite feasible that Montgomery County will cease to be a bedroom community, but a community that requires commuters from outside the region to staff its businesses."*

This statement is incorrect. Montgomery County is not a bedroom community. It has the largest number of jobs of any county in Maryland, with 450,600 people employed here in March 2022.²⁰ In 2015, 49% of Montgomery County residents worked in the county, while 20% worked in Washington, DC and 9% in Northern Virginia. Meanwhile, just over half of the people employed in Montgomery County commute from somewhere else, with the largest shares coming from Prince George's County, Frederick County, and Washington, DC in that order.²¹

²⁰ https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/countyemploymentandwages_maryland.htm

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https://mwejobs.maryland.gov/admin/gsipub/htmlarea/uploads/Montgomery_WorkforceRegion_Commuting_Patterns.pdf