



**Committee:** PHED

**Committee Review:** Completed

**Staff:** Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst

Glenn Orlin, Senior Analyst

**Purpose:** Worksession – no vote expected

**Keywords:** #Thrive, Montgomery 2050, M-NCPPC

AGENDA ITEM #9

October 4, 2022

**Worksession**

## SUBJECT

Council worksession to discuss the last three chapters of the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050. This includes the chapters on Housing, and Parks and Recreation, as well as the Conclusion to the Plan.

## EXPECTED ATTENDEES

Casey Anderson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board  
Gwen Wright, Director, Montgomery Planning Department  
Tanya Stern, Deputy Director, Planning Department  
Khalid Afzal, Special Projects Manager, Planning Department  
Caroline McCarthy, Chief, Research and Strategic Projects, Planning Department

## COUNCIL DECISION POINTS & COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

- The recommendations (too lengthy to list here) are covered in the attached staff report by chapter.

## 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 an unanimously supported PHED Committee Draft.

The Council conducted additional public engagement to solicit feedback on the PHED Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050. At the same time the Council requested the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) conduct an equity analysis of the plan. The result of this review was a recommendation to seek consultant assistance with targeted outreach on Plan recommendations. On June 16, the consultant team made up of staff from Nspiregreen and Public Engagement Associates, met with the Council and began their work on additional outreach.

On September 13 and 20, the consultant team briefed the Council on the results of their outreach efforts, their summary recommendations, and their draft chapter on racial equity and social justice. On September 22, the Council held a worksession on three new chapters for the Plan: the chapter on racial equity and social justice drafted by Nspiregreen, a chapter on the economy and a chapter on the environment.

## SUMMARY OF KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

- The PHED Committee Draft can be viewed at:  
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2021/PHED-CommitteeDraftThrive2050.pdf>
- The PHED Committee Draft does not indicate specific changes to the text of the Planning Board Draft, highlights of the PHED Committee changes can be found on pages 2 and 3 of the PHED Committee Draft.
- The Racial Equity and Social Justice Report on the PHED Committee Draft can be viewed at:  
[https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2022/Thrive\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2022/Thrive_Final_Report.pdf)

### **This report contains:**

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Staff Report	1-10
Memorandum from Councilmember Friedson	© 1-2
Revised Growth Map	© 3
Comments including specific recommendations to proposed changes in the Plan	© 4-41
Recommended changes based on Racial Equity and Social Justice Report	© 42-60
Council Staff suggested edits to the PHED Committee Draft	© 61-147
Executive Branch Comments on the PHED Committee Draft	© 148-165

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## MEMORANDUM

September 29, 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

Last week the Council held a worksession on three new chapters to be included in the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan. Each new chapter addresses one of the three overarching objectives of the Plan: the economy, the environment, and racial equity and social justice. As such, these chapters are seen a “setting the stage” for the policies and practices recommended in the policy chapters that follow.

This staff report (and the second worksession today) will cover the remaining chapters of the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050, which includes the chapters on Housing, and Parks and Recreation, as well as the Conclusion.

### **Background**

Over the course of the summer and fall of 2021, the PHED Committee held nine worksessions on the Planning Board’s Thrive Montgomery 2050 Draft Plan. The Committee completed its review on October 25 incorporating its recommended changes into an unanimously supported PHED Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050.

For a more detailed summary of the Planning Board and PHED Committee Drafts, see the staff report for the morning worksession today. Following the format of the morning worksession staff report, this review includes a summary of chapter content, highlights of prominent issues raised during the PHED Committee review, and a consideration of comments received on the PHED Committee Draft.

## **Review of the PHED Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050**

The review of each chapter will include a summary of chapter content, highlights of prominent issues raised during the PHED Committee review, and a consideration of comments received on the PHED Committee Draft from the public and other interested parties. However, not every comment received is listed and a response provided; focusing instead on the most commonly received comments.

On ©61-147 is a Council Staff suggested draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050 based on the PHED Committee Draft. It includes minor corrections, edits for clarity, or additional language suggested to reinforce the goals and objectives of the Plan. It also includes the more substantive edits proposed by Council staff in response to stakeholder feedback as suggested below.

### **HOUSING FOR ALL: MORE OF EVERYTHING**

Perhaps the most prominent change in the PHED Committee Draft for this chapter is the revised title. The original title was, Affordable and Attainable Housing – More of Everything. As noted in the staff report for the Committee worksession on October 11, 2021, the General Plan is about **all** housing and the confusion that Thrive 2050 implements changes related to the Attainable Housing Strategy Initiative – which it does not, motivated the title change. The new title Housing for All – More of Everything conveys the goals of providing more housing, diversifying housing types to meet different household needs, and increasing the availability of housing that is affordable to people of all incomes.

The revisions collaborated by Council staff and Planning staff (on which the PHED Committee Draft is based) include edits to clarify that policies in Thrive 2050 are for all housing and that housing should be available and affordable to all residents, and edits to strengthen the language regarding the environmental advantages of both new construction and the preservation and renovation of currently affordable housing.

### **Prominent issues raised during the PHED Committee review**

During the Committee worksession the topic of “housing as a right” was raised. The Committee unanimously supported restoring language similar to what was included in the public hearing draft. In the section titled *What policies will solve the problem?* The following statement was added: “Montgomery County must view access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing as a basic human right.”

The Committee also discussed whether the Plan places enough emphasis on affordable and deeply affordable housing, ultimately deciding that the policies, practices, and narrative sufficiently reflect the importance of affordable housing, referencing housing types like personal living quarters, co-operative housing, and micro units, and housing policies such as Housing First, the MPDU program and the Housing Initiative Fund.

### **Comments received on the PHED Committee Draft Housing for All: More of Everything**

1. 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. Add language that supports and promotes tenants' rights. And, add back language from the Staff Draft regarding fair housing.

**Response:** Council staff suggests two practices could be added under the policy **“Promote racial and economic diversity and equity in housing in every neighborhood”** as follows:

- Support and strengthen housing code regulations and tenant protections to ensure healthy and fair housing.
  - Examine options to expand housing access through the elimination of fair housing barriers and enforcement of fair housing laws to protect residents from discrimination.
2. All references to residents being “over-housed” (and its ties to an aging population) should be deleted and the concept dropped from the Plan. The implication is that the “over-housed,” especially the older and “empty-nester”, should “downsize” to something smaller, presumably so the homes can be sold to larger households or divided into duplexes, triplexes, or apartments.

**Response:** Council staff found two references to “over-housed” in the PHED Committee Draft. One reference summarizes a graphic showing the number of households by housing unit type and household size. The other is copied below:

Options to buy a starter home or downsize are limited, and by some estimates, as many as one in three owner households are “over-housed”- that is, they have at least two more bedrooms than residents. Because more than one-third of the county’s land area is zoned for single family housing, more than ten times the area zoned for mixed use development, our ability to provide a greater variety of housing units in desirable locations is constrained. This limits the ability of long-time residents to relocate to a different type of home in their neighborhoods.

The above text is intended to provide a reason why starter homes are limited - which is that options for downsizing are limited as well. The primary reason for this limitation is the significantly greater proportion of land zoned for single-family homes versus land zoned for mixed use development (and the lack of unit types to downsize to within an existing neighborhood). The text suggests that if there was enough land allowing mixed use development, a greater number of housing units of all sizes and tenancy would be available – which would permit homeowners wanting to “downsize” an appropriate option (and one that could be in their neighborhood). Below is a suggested edit for clarity and tone:

Options to buy a starter home [or downsize] are limited. So are options to downsize. [and] By some estimates, as many as one in three owner households are “over-housed”- that is, they have at least two more bedrooms than residents. [Because] With more than one-third of the county’s land area [is] zoned for single family housing, more than ten times the area zoned for mixed use development, our ability to provide a greater variety of housing units in desirable locations is constrained. This limits the

ability of long-time residents who want to relocate to a different type of home and stay in their neighborhood, and limits the availability of starter homes for new homeowners.

3. Adequate and accurate data is missing from the discussion of housing needs. The data presented must include, among other things, the number of residential units (single-family and multi-family) now being built or that in the future could be built under current zoning, to accurately present the unmet needs. Without this information, the assertion that substantial increased density is required to accommodate the new residents is not supported by the facts presented.

**Response:** This comment focuses on zoned capacity as a measure of density. The Plan uses the term density 16 times. Below are copied text of these occurrences. In most cases, if not all, the reference to density seems to mean the actual or existing number of residents in an area or the actual or existing square feet of commercial or residential development – not the zoned density or zoning capacity. Using the term density does not equate, de facto, to a change in zoning. As the Plan states, much of the County’s future development will occur in places already developed. Redevelopment is not predicated on a need for increased zoning, it may require an increase, but it may not. And references, like those listed below, are about the actual or resulting number of households, or workers, or number of square feet in an area- not necessarily zoning capacity or the lack thereof.

- identified as an area for “maintaining a low-density residential character”...
- – for example – only a few Metrorail station areas developed with high density.
- part of the county with highest-density population...
- significant residential and/or commercial density either existing or planned
- existing or planned residential density, as well as clusters of commercial density
- characterized by low- to medium-density residential neighborhoods
- located in rural areas and low-density residential neighborhoods
- Traditional, low-density office parks are no longer in favor
- Increased density, great transit options and a regulatory environment
- accommodating additional density in a context-sensitive manner
- higher density economic and housing cooperatives
- Population density in centers of activity along corridors
- focus on form and adaptability rather than use and density
- Expand opportunities to increase residential density
- Our highest density areas are far from most parkland

4. The Racial Equity and Social Justice Report included several recommendations related to the PHED Committee Draft chapter of Thrive. The Council was provided a table for the September 20 worksession that indicates for each recommendation: either a proposed edit to the text; a copy of existing language in the Plan that addresses the issue; and/or an action for implementation that could be included in the Action Appendix, see © 42-60.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION FOR AN INCREASINGLY URBAN AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY: ACTIVE AND SOCIAL**

The promotion of parks as essential for providing natural areas for recreation, enjoyment, and resource conservation is not new to the County's general plan. Thrive 2050 reaffirms these important roles and adds new ones that recognize the challenges of providing park facilities in a mature County.

As with the earlier chapters, Council staff and Planning staff collaborated on a revised version of this chapter which was subsequently review by the PHED Committee. Many of the changes made by staff simply a reordering of some of the text for clarity and readability, and the addition of information/explanations regarding the three overarching objectives. However, there were a few substantive changes which included adding an expanded section to the Parks timeline description to include discussion the systemic racism that shaped land development during this time<sup>1</sup>.

Following this background material, the Plan notes that, while the Parks Department has built a well-deserved reputation for environmental stewardship and has made progress in providing a more culturally diverse range of recreational opportunities (i.e., cricket), there is room for improvement. The Plan specifically notes the following in need of improvement:

- Our highest density areas are far from places where the most acreage of parkland exists in the county, with lack of alternatives to accessing such parks other than driving.
- Conservation-oriented parks can include carefully designed trails and other low impact recreation areas; however, many of these parks lack appropriate access for hikers and bikers, limiting their availability to the greater public.
- Parks conceived as buffers often act as separators rather than gathering places for people.
- Park facility standards and acquisition strategies conceived during a period of greenfield expansion are incompatible with infill development and adaptive reuse of sites.”

In addition to addressing these challenges and maintaining its leadership role in environmental management, new roles for the Parks Department<sup>2</sup> are also suggested to advance and support the County's park system in the years ahead.

### **Prominent issues raised during the PHED Committee review**

During its review of the Parks and Recreation chapter the Committee discussed a letter received by the Council, signed by several environmental organizations following promotion through the Action Network.

The letter requested that the Council prioritize equitable green infrastructure and require a comprehensive plan to restore and increase green infrastructure in the County. Green infrastructure refers to interconnected forested greenways, re-greened urban areas, conservation landscaping, constructed wetlands, native biodiverse habitat, and other nature-based areas.

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<sup>1</sup> See page 72 of the PHED Committee Draft.

<sup>2</sup> See page 74 of the PHED Committee Draft.

In response, under the policy “**Maintain high standards of environmental stewardship in park management and operations.**”, the Committee added the following practice:

- Prioritize the equitable distribution of green infrastructure.

The Committee also recommends that a comprehensive plan to restore and increase green infrastructure within the County be added to the Action Appendix.

#### **Comments Received on the PHED Committee Draft Parks and Recreation for an Increasingly Urban and Diverse Community**

1. This is the best written and most organized chapter of the document.
2. We would like to state our strong support for language in the section on parks and recreation, where Thrive recognizes the vital contribution made by urban parks to the success of Complete Communities.

**Response:** Council staff sees no additional edits necessary for this chapter.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Thrive’s Conclusion starts with a synopsis of the Plan. It outlines the strengths of our County as well as the challenges ahead. And ends by noting that while economic, social, and environmental changes will not be easy to navigate, Montgomery County is well-positioned to make the decisions and investments necessary for success.

The rest of the Conclusion focuses on guidance for implementation. There is a section on the cooperation and role of the public and private sectors. In it, the Plan notes that implementation of Thrive will occur over several decades and will require changes in master plans, zoning and building codes, subdivision regulations, the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance and many other County rules and processes, as these changes are not made in the adoption of the Plan. And while the Planning and Parks Departments will lead much of the work, full implementation of Thrive’s recommendations will require collaboration or approval of other government bodies, including the County Council, who will be asked to review and **approve** many of these efforts.

The last section focuses on measuring progress. It suggests several indicators, in addition to the more detailed measures listed in previous chapters. The indicators are intended to be used for periodic assessments of progress and to inform priorities and decisions, as well as to guide shorter term goals. The Plan groups the indicators according to the three overarching objectives, noting that they are broader than the measures included in each chapter. The Plan also notes that the list of indicators should not be considered exhaustive and may be modified or expanded to suit future needs.

#### **Prominent issues raised during the PHED Committee review**

The Committee did not suggest any changes to the text of the Conclusion.

#### **Comments Received on the PHED Committee Draft Conclusion**

1. The conclusion would benefit from more detail about implementation and indicators for measuring progress.

**Response:** This comment was common during the Committee’s review of the Planning Board Draft and was briefly mentioned to the Council at early worksessions on the Plan. Council Staff suggests adding the following sections based on text provided by Planning Staff.

#### **How Thrive Montgomery 2050 will be Implemented**

Thrive Montgomery 2050, as the County’s General Plan, is a guidebook, not a roadmap. It lays out an overarching vision for the future of the county. Its policies and practices are not self-implementing. Instead, the General Plan’s role in land use is to guide future decision-making and actions so that its policies become a reality on the ground. Some of these actions we know are needed now, others will become clear as conditions, opportunities, challenges, and technologies change over time. Thrive Montgomery’s vision of compact growth, complete communities, and integrated design arts and culture serve as an umbrella under which tactical tools such as master plans, regulations, codes, and future development will be the building blocks for a more equitable, sustainable, compact, and walkable Montgomery County where all residents can thrive.

#### **Compliance with Maryland State Requirements for Planning**

Maryland law requires local jurisdictions and agencies to meet specific standards and requirements for the exercise of planning authority delegated by the state. Thrive Montgomery 2050 complies with multiple state laws that govern requirements for comprehensive/general plans by local jurisdictions. For further details, please refer to Appendix A: Compliance with state law requirements.

#### **Tools to Implement the General Plan**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 sets a high-level policy framework to guide the future land use. While non-government entities will play a role in its implementation, the public sector—Montgomery Planning, Montgomery Parks, the Montgomery County government, and other government agencies—will all play critical roles in implementing the Plan. The following section describes the tools the public sector can use to implement the Plan’s policies over the coming decades.

#### **Master Plans**

Master plans (or area master plans or sector plans) are long-term planning documents for a specific place or geographic area of the county. All master plans are amendments to the General Plan. They provide detailed land use and zoning recommendations for specific areas of the county. They also address transportation, the natural environment, urban design, historic resources, affordable housing, economic development, public facilities, and implementation techniques. Many of Thrive Montgomery 2050’s policies and practices cannot be implemented with a one-size-fits-all approach. Area master plans will help refine and implement them at a scale tailored to specific neighborhoods.

### **Functional Plans**

Functional plans are master plans addressing a system, such as traffic circulation or green infrastructure, or a policy, such as agricultural preservation or housing. A functional master plan amends the General Plan and may include recommendations on land use and zoning. The Master Plan of Highways and Transitways, the Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan, and the Master Plan for Historic Preservation are functional plans that do not include land use or zoning recommendations; however, the Preservation of Agriculture & Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan does. New and revised functional master plans can help refine and implement Thrive Montgomery 2050 recommendations that affect county-wide systems and/or policies.

### **Montgomery County Code Chapter 59 – Zoning Ordinance**

The division of a locality into zones is done for the purpose of regulating the use of private land. All land in Montgomery County is zoned. Within each zone, the Zoning Ordinance allows certain uses by right and allows others conditionally with approval by the Hearing Examiner. The Ordinance also excludes or limits certain uses from each zone. For each zone, the text of the Ordinance specifies the uses allowed, the density of development, the bulk of buildings, the required open space, the necessary off-street parking, and other prerequisites to obtaining permission to develop. The County Council, acting as the District Council (which has the legal oversight authority over land use), makes the final decision on changes to the Ordinance and changes to a property's zone.

The Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance is maintained as Chapter 59 of the Montgomery County Code. Updates to the Ordinance are proposed as zoning text amendments and must be adopted by the County Council. Implementing Thrive Montgomery 2050 policies will likely require changes to the zoning code.

### **Other Regulations**

In addition to Chapter 59, other chapters in the Montgomery County Code include regulations governing land use and development in the county. Chapter 50 of the County Code contains the subdivision regulations, which govern the legal division and subsequent transfer of land to ensure new developments are coordinated with other existing and planned developments. Chapter 50 also includes the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance which ensures transportation and public school facilities are planned and in place to serve new development.

### **Capital Improvements Program (CIP)**

The implementation of Thrive Montgomery 2050 will require major public investments in infrastructure over many years. The Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is the mechanism by which the County plans for and funds major infrastructure projects, including new and renovated schools, streets, and parks. The County adopts a new six-year CIP on even numbered years. The General Plan, master plans, functional plans, and the Growth and Infrastructure Policy are important planning tools for informing which projects are prioritized in the CIP. These plans provide a link between the needs for specific projects and county-wide or neighborhood development needs.

### **Facilities Plans**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 includes guidance that applies specifically to the design, placement, and funding of public facilities. Future planning for public facilities, including County government facilities, park facilities, public schools, and Montgomery College, should reflect this guidance and direction in order to ensure they are compatible with and help implement the goals of Thrive Montgomery 2050.

### **Other Funding Sources**

Given constraints on the amount of money the county can borrow, Thrive Montgomery 2050 recommends consideration of new sources that could fund the provision of more community amenities. The Plan recommends, for example, exploring the creation of alternative funding tools to support the acquisition and development of parks in urban areas.

### **Other Resources**

Other county plans with tactical guidance such as the Climate Action Plan (CAP) and Economic Development Strategic Plan are key resources beyond master plans to implement the vision of Thrive Montgomery 2050.

Council staff also suggests editing the following section so as not to be redundant or confusing with the prior added text on Tools for Implementation:

#### **Modifications to other plans, policies, and rules**

As stated many times already, Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a broad policy document and does not, in and of itself, change land uses, zoning or transportation. Key to implementing Thrive Montgomery 2050, Montgomery County will need to undertake a variety of future actions. These actions will guide the priorities for future work programs of the Planning Department, the Parks Department, and other government agencies over the next several years. An appendix that includes a list of actions will be developed and reviewed after adoption of the Plan. [are not specified in detail in this document but will be fleshed out in future work programs for the Planning Department and other agencies. Some future actions may include, but are not limited to:

- Reviews of existing policies, regulations, and programs;
- Studies and new master, functional, or facility plans to delve more deeply into the topics addressed in the policies, collect and analyze data, and identify detailed strategies for decision making and implementation;
- Development of tools and templates to support master planning, regulatory review and other planning processes; and
- Changes to agency governance and practices that shape how decisions are made.]

2. Commit to evaluating the plan's progress regularly. Each chapter has identified metrics to measure progress, and those should be used to provide a regular report to 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.

**Response:** The last section in the Plan is dedicated to the topic of measuring plan progress. It provides a list of indicators and references the measures to track plan implementation provided at the end of each policy chapter. As currently included in the Plan, the list of indicators and measures are informative. As the text suggests, it is expected that the list of indicators and the measures provided in the policy chapters will be further refined over time.

The Committee and Council have discussed creating a list of actions that would help implement the plan, and the importance of establishing guidelines to evaluate plan progress. An Action Appendix<sup>3</sup> is the right document to address these objectives. As an appendix it can be written, evaluated, and revised at any time without requiring an amendment to Thrive.

To clarify this Council staff suggests the following edits to the last few sentences under the section *Measuring Progress – Indicators*, which includes calling for an overall assessment of the Plan in five years.

The indicators, along with the [metrics] measures provided in the preceding chapters, will be further refined over time. An appendix that includes a list of actions [that] will be developed and reviewed after Thrive is adopted. This appendix [should]will also include a section on indicators and metrics, using the measures of progress included at the end of each chapter to develop specific metrics. The section on indicators and metrics should include [providing] detailed information on how the metric or indicator [will be] is measured, the agency responsible for collecting the associated data, [and how frequently] the frequency the metric or indicator will be publicly reviewed and reported, and the frequency indicators and metrics will be evaluated to monitor their relevancy and use. An overall assessment of Plan progress should be conducted every five years.

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<sup>3</sup> The Action List of Resources appendix drafted by the Planning Board should be revised accordingly following adoption of Thrive.





MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

ANDREW FRIEDSON  
COUNCILMEMBER  
DISTRICT 1

MEMORANDUM

February 9, 2022

TO: Colleagues

FROM: Andrew Friedson

SUBJECT: Thrive 2050

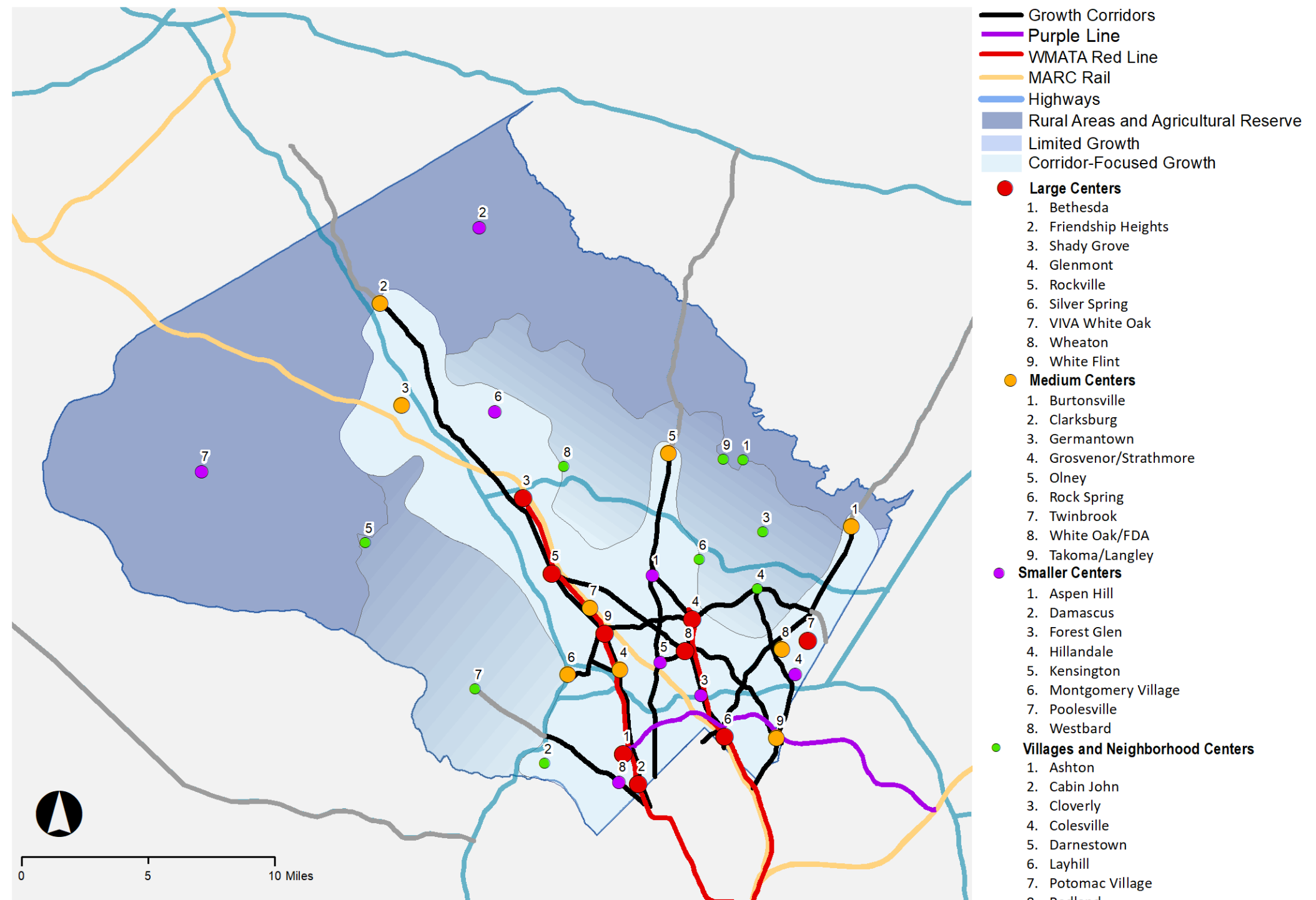
It has been three months since the PHED Committee finished its review of Thrive 2050. During this time, like you, we have continued to take in the additional community input received at our listening sessions and meetings hosted by the citizen advisory boards, via email correspondence, and phone calls to my office. Despite the PHED Committee's extensive deliberations over the course of nine work sessions, some further opportunities for refinement and greater clarification remain as we prepare for our full Council work sessions which will begin next week. After further deliberation, and in preparation for those work sessions, I am recommending five specific changes to the document for your consideration.

- 1) River Road Growth Corridor: Early on, I questioned the wisdom of including River Road as a designated growth corridor. The rationale shared by staff to the PHED Committee was that in the current General Plan, everything inside the beltway is designated as a growth area. Planning staff also indicated that River Road could become a growth corridor because there may be major transit infrastructure along the corridor in the future. After careful consideration, I continue to feel strongly that we should be more targeted in our approach to growth than in the '63 Plan and that "inside the beltway" paints too broad a brush, especially as we are intentionally now focusing transit-oriented growth on the corridors. In order to lay the foundation for a sustainable future, it is imperative that we plan for the majority of future growth in close proximity to high quality transit and avoid further sprawl development. There is no transit project currently planned for the River Road corridor. In fact, it is almost entirely auto-centric and for that reason I recommend removing its designation as a designated growth corridor.

- 2) Growth Map Activity Centers: My office has received an enormous amount of feedback from the Darnestown community who from the start, were concerned about being included in the Limited Growth Area rather than the Rural Area which they feel better reflects the character of their community. Residents in this area are also concerned about being identified as an activity center and what that might mean for future growth initiatives in Darnestown. While I actually believe that existing conditions on the ground there meet the definition of a rural village center, we have also been told that not all activity centers are identified on the growth map. From a practical standpoint, it seems rather inconsequential whether Darnestown is illustrated on the map or not, so I am therefore asking that it be removed. I think this action would go a long way to assuage some of the concerns of this community.
- 3) Growth Map Limited Growth Area: To better capture existing variations in density throughout the Limited Growth Area, I requested that Planning add color gradation to the growth map. You can find their recommended approach attached. I believe it reflects the reality on the ground and the expected natural change in densities from the corridor-focused growth areas to suburban areas and then to our rural communities throughout this Limited Growth Area. This more nuanced map better reflects how the policy goals in the document will meet both the actual and desired reality of the growth pattern. I ask that it be included in the Thrive document.
- 4) Economic Development: The Council has received a large volume of correspondence asking for a more robust discussion of economic development in Thrive 2050. I think we all agree that economic development is critically important to our county's future, but reasonable minds can disagree on what should or should not be included in our general plan. In the end, I have concluded that Thrive is a land use document and cannot be all things to all people. The Council will soon review our county's 2022-2026 Economic Development Strategic Plan drafted by MCEDC and sent over to the Council in late December. This document, which will guide our economic development work over the next four years, should be referenced in Thrive 2050 and language should be added to illustrate how this strategic plan works synergistically with our general plan.
- 5) Environment: We have also received a large volume of correspondence urging additional language addressing environmental planning and challenges presented by climate change. In the same vein as my comments about economic development, I believe Thrive 2050 is primarily a land use document. There is a strong and compelling nexus between development patterns and sustainability. It is my opinion that the greatest impact on climate we can have at the local level is by creating more sustainable land use and transportation patterns and policy, and I believe that the document does chart a far more environmentally sustainable road map for both. With that said, there have been some specific language enhancements proposed which I do believe warrant discussion for inclusion in the final document we ultimately approve, and I look forward to those discussions at full Council. The environmental imperatives before us as a community surpass land use planning alone. The Climate Action Plan (CAP) recently completed by the Executive Branch includes an extensive list of recommended actions that is intended to guide our work combatting climate change in the years ahead. We should explicitly reference this document in Thrive 2050, making it clear that significant attention is being paid to actions beyond the land use arena.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to continuing our discussion of Thrive 2050 at full Council.

cc: Marlene Michaelson, Executive Director, Montgomery County Council  
Pam Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst, County Council



The Growth Map should be considered in the context of the Compact Growth and Complete Communities chapters. The centers of activity shown are not exhaustive of all existing or potential centers. Some of the centers listed on the growth map are not subject to Montgomery County zoning authority.

Dear Council President Alborno, Council Vice President Glass, Councilmember Friedson, Councilmember Hucker, Councilmember Jawando, Councilmember Katz, Councilmember Navarro, Councilmember Rice, Councilmember Riemer, Ms. Michaelson, Ms. Dunn, and Ms. McMillan:

Thrive Montgomery 2050's path to the full council has been rocky and irregular. Some councilmembers have invited members of the public to submit language to improve Thrive and address concerns. With revisions, Thrive could be a better foundation for the next thirty years. This letter and attached document, an annotated Word version prepared by five citizens (Amanda Farber, Cheryl Gannon, Joyce Gwadz, Dedun Ingram, and Naomi Spinrad), is therefore submitted for your consideration. Our letter discusses general issues and provides recommendations for the document, followed by more specific comments about each section. The Word document includes specific language changes and comments for your consideration. Extraneous formatting markup has been removed for readability.

### **Thrive Montgomery 2050: General Comments**

#### **1. Environmental and economic development chapters should be restored.**

Economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability are two of the three overarching objectives of Thrive and deserve focused chapters. The county's current economic state is not good and Thrive should focus more on how its policies will work to improve the county's economy, including small businesses. Without a stronger economy many of Thrive's goals will be unaffordable. The county is already feeling the impacts of climate change and a chapter focused on policies aimed at dealing with climate change seems critical. Identifying elements of the other chapters that relate to the economy and the environment is helpful, but not sufficient.

#### **2. Thrive must place primary importance on Master and Local Area Planning Processes and other mechanisms of robust citizen input such as charrettes and citizen advisory panels to implement changes in zoning and uses, particularly among residentially zoned properties.**

Countywide changes cannot take into account differences that Thrive already recognizes, such as rural/suburban/urban, as well as ways to increase income as well as racial and social diversity in particular geographical areas in the context of existing development.

#### **3. The possibility that county residents' preferences in housing and other aspects of their lives will change, and the likelihood that technologies will also alter how we live, require that Thrive acknowledge the vital role of the master planning process to implement policies to achieve the three overarching goals.**

Thrive is premised on many assumptions, including that a substantial number of residents now want to live in dense urban areas, and that this number will grow. Recent studies – for example, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/26/more-americans-now-say-they-prefer-a-community-with-big-houses-even-if-local-amenities-are-farther-away/> - suggest changes in housing preferences and patterns. Technological changes can have similar wide effects not just on housing preferences, but also on transportation, shopping, and working choices and preferences. The master planning process allows public input that reflects how people actually live and hope to live. This democratic, bottom-up process is key to keeping Thrive flexible and relevant as it aims to achieve its goals.

#### **4. The language throughout Thrive is often vague.**

Vague language, without definitions of terms and concepts within the text or as footnotes, has undoubtedly contributed to the many different interpretations of what Thrive actually says. Some definitions are even missing from the glossary appendix. For example:

- "Neighborhood" and "community" are used frequently, "district" occasionally, but none of these are defined.
- In the Complete Communities chapter, "within one of the state's four growth tiers" is never identified as a reference to Maryland's Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012 (Senate Bill 236). Other cases are noted within each chapter.

**5. When definitions are provided, they are often incomplete.**

For citizens around the county, this leads to greater uncertainty about what Thrive is proposing and allows individual interpretations. For example, on page 21 (Compact Growth), although there are descriptions of activity centers of different sizes, there is no guidance as to what public and private facilities might be associated with a particular size activity center. A school? DMV office? Full service grocery store?

**6. Thrive sees only one path to achieve the overarching goals of economic health, racial equity and social justice, and environmental resilience.**

There is only fleeting mention, in the conclusion, that there may be other ways to achieve the three goals. Thrive focuses on planning concepts that are in vogue today but often unproved, and has a limited view of technology, its potential for change, and how quickly it can change. Yet Thrive's proposed policies are often mandates instead of recommendations, and it states repeatedly that they "will" lead to the desired goals. We believe that Thrive should include policy recommendations, not mandates, and that it should include recognition of technology's potential changes. For example, simply replacing polluting gas vehicles with electric vehicles will on its own do little to reduce congestion and the need for roads.

**7. Comments about the 1964 plan and 1993 update are overly simplistic, loaded with value judgments, and sometimes contradictory.**

Plans are shaped by their times and the people who write them. Fifty years from now Thrive – like earlier plans – is likely to be viewed critically as well. Thrive should be straightforward about what needs to change without impugning the motives or capabilities of those who wrote the 1964 plan and 1993 update.

**8. Thrive does not pay adequate attention to land use policy as it relates to seniors, the disabled, families, those with low incomes, and both the general and specific needs and situation of people of color, including Blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans, and others.**

Thrive displays limited concern about displacement with no suggested policies to prevent it. It fails to recognize that the county has communities that are not high income and White but where home ownership is highly valued and meant to last years and to build wealth. Displacement is mentioned only four times in the entire document, gentrification only three times – and none of these mentions involve a proposed policy to prevent them. As a result, some members of the public have inferred that Thrive is meant primarily to meet the demands of a small portion of the population who will not require many County services.

**9. It is young people who will live longest and most intensely with unintended consequences.**

Accurate data, specific metrics at regular intervals, and openness to new information and technologies are the best way to ensure against unintended negative consequences, or at least reduce their impact. Our proposed changes and comments identify places where more information of these sorts would be useful.

**10. Figures and tables need to be made ADA compliant with readable, informative, accurate titles and readable legends.**

As well, in some cases figure and table sizes should be increased to improve readability.

**11. The "metrics" listed at the end of each chapter to evaluate progress toward goals are no more than categories.**

These are not metrics but broad categories, with no indication of the sorts of changes needed. Specific goals tied to specific timelines and checkpoints should be included in each chapter.

**Comments on Specific Sections**

**1. Introduction**

- It's vital that there be more explanation and discussion of the important role of master planning, that the map showing all the area master plans be included, and that Thrive explicitly acknowledge that any major

changes be done through the master plan process rather than through countywide changes. We have added language from the staff draft of Thrive to this section.

- Although the introduction talks about constraints on new development including lack of vacant land, it does not mention the already zoned capacity discussed on page 33. This presents an incomplete view of development capacity. It also ignores planned projects.
- We have serious concerns about the portrayal of community engagement, as indicated in our comments in the document.

## **2. Compact Growth: Corridor-Focused Development**

- Include a map showing the growth areas from the 1993 plan to contrast with what is being proposed in Thrive, and add more information about the differences.
- Exactly what “centers of activity” comprise should be defined in the narrative and in the glossary in more detail: for example, what public facilities are necessary.
- Ensure that the definition of “centers of activity” is consistent across chapters. For example, in the Complete Communities chapter, centers of activity in suburban and rural areas “range from large retail shopping centers such as Aspen Hill, to clusters of commercial and neighborhood serving retail uses like the shopping areas in Potomac Village or Four Corners.”
- Further, based on a sentence in the first paragraph of the Compact Growth chapter, and others in the Complete Communities chapter, it appears that downtowns, town centers and rural villages, are not “centers of activity”, but are places where compact growth is desired (“Thrive Montgomery 2050 proposes redoubling and refining efforts to concentrate growth in downtowns, town centers, rural villages, and intensively developed centers of activity...” and “through infill and redevelopment within centers of activity along corridors as well as within existing downtowns, town centers and rural villages.”). Yet other text in the Compact Growth chapter also seems to indicate that villages and neighborhood centers are not considered to be centers of activity: “The Growth Map identifies several existing and potential centers of activity at a variety of scales, including Large, Medium, and Small as well as Villages and Neighborhood Centers.”
  - What is the distinction between centers of activity and downtowns, town centers, rural villages, neighborhood centers?
  - The sections that describe large, medium, and small centers of activity are too vague and do not convey to the reader what geographic entities are included in each category. At the least, the category descriptions should name the types of areas considered to fit in each category and give population size indications – naming some examples for each category would be helpful.
  - The confusion continues when “node” is used as a synonym. The document should use one term consistently.
- In the description of the Corridor-Focused Growth areas on the growth map, there is no mention of Complete Communities or centers of activity. Yet in the description of the Limited Growth areas, creation of Complete Communities is mentioned. There needs to be integration of the concepts of centers of activity and Complete Communities with these three different types of growth areas.
- There is a lot of focus in the Compact Growth chapter on the Agricultural Reserve. Nowhere is the size of the area (as a percentage of the total county area) mentioned. This should be added. Further, some discussion about rural areas not in the Agricultural Reserve should be added.

## **3. Complete Communities: Mix of Uses and Forms**

- No definition of complete communities is provided. At the least, there should be a discussion about the minimum requirements for an area to be considered a complete community. Does it include a center of activity? Must it contain a supermarket, pharmacy, schools, library, fire station, police station, medical offices, housing, parks and public open spaces? What other public amenities would be required - sidewalks, bike lanes, access to transit? What are the characteristics of Complete Communities in the three different growth areas – Large, Medium, and Small?
- In the Different Ingredients for Different Communities section, as well as other sections such as the Retrofit section, the lists of things that would need to be added to the different community types in order

to make them “complete” generally seem incomplete and routinely leave out mention of parks and public spaces. These sections need to be more carefully and consistently written.

- Language needs to be added throughout this chapter that calls for use of the master and sector plan process to implement the various changes called for in uses and housing types allowed in different areas. This section repeatedly calls for expanding the uses allowed in residential neighborhoods. The statements need to be tempered with references to use of the master and sector plan processes to implement any such changes and also to requiring that any expanded uses must be reasonable given the context of each neighborhood.
- The assumption in this chapter is that infill development and redevelopment will necessarily be environmentally beneficial. When this development involves removing large surface parking lots this no doubt is true. But when it involves removing detached houses from single-family neighborhoods and replacing them with larger multi-family housing or other structures, the environmental consequences may not be beneficial but may actually result in increased heat islands, stormwater run-off, and decreased tree canopy. This needs to be acknowledged in the appropriate places in this chapter and language added requiring that infill development/redevelopment be done so it does not have these negative impacts.
- This chapter denigrates single-family neighborhoods to some extent. Instead, it should recognize that single-family neighborhoods continue to be what many county residents prefer and acknowledge that they have a place in the county’s diverse housing options.

#### **4. Design, Arts, and Culture: Investing and Building Community**

- This chapter is disorganized and confusing. This is a land use/natural resources plan and there is no need for language about Arts and Culture beyond noting that the built environment should include space, distributed equitably, for art and cultural activities and those who engage in them.
- If there is a determination that arts and culture should be included, the chapter should be divided into two separate subsections.
- Ensuring that space for Arts and Culture is included in development is very different than fostering different arts engaged in by diverse people in multiple communities. Will quotas be set? Who decides who gets support? The establishment of grant programs for the arts should not be a concern of a general plan.
- If special accommodations (housing, dedicated space) are acceptable for those in the arts and cultural fields, why not others? Why not housing for police and teachers?
- Regarding the appropriate concern with design of the natural and especially built environment, there is no differentiation in *Thrive* between areas like the downtowns and activity centers and residential areas. For example, there is support for wide sidewalks but imposing this in many existing residential areas is challenging and roads are already narrow here. Yet there is also support for narrowing roads, without distinguishing where.
- There is no recognition that views about what is good design are subjective and change over time.
- As with other chapters, there is little acknowledgement that the vast majority of people rely on cars for essential activities, and that we all rely on vehicles for the delivery of goods and services.
- More information is needed about how buildings can be constructed to be more adaptable – not detailed techniques but, for example, the characteristics that will allow an office building to be converted into residential units of various types and sizes.
- If this chapter is to contain statements that public art and design help to create economically successful communities, supporting evidence should be included.

#### **5. Transportation and Communication Networks: Connecting People, Places, Ideas**

- This section makes broad assertions which may not hold up over time, or even reflect current realities.
- *Thrive* does not contemplate changing transportation needs. The plan does not include a comprehensive call for extensions of red line metro or increases in MARC availability (as proposed in Corridor Forward) or preparations for newer forms of transportation. The plan ignores the high financial cost of public transportation and its inequitable burden on some communities.

- Another broad assumption is that residents favor walking, biking and public transportation over car travel, which will be true for many, but not all, residents. Not all residents who are employed live and work on a metro line, and not all residents are able to travel everywhere by walking and biking, and not all services are accessible using those modes. Thrive should acknowledge that cars will continue to be a major source of transportation within the county for many years to come.
- The document has internal inconsistencies, asserting on one hand a need to reduce car traffic to increase safety and environmental resilience, which includes removing traffic lanes for sidewalks and adding bike lanes, and on the other hand advocating for building more streets in residential neighborhoods for interconnected street traffic grids, which will bring more car traffic through neighborhoods.
- Thrive must allow for periodic review and adjustment through the master plan processes as evolving transportation needs become clear, taking into account existing amenities in specific neighborhoods.
- Public transit, road and sidewalk changes, and adding bike lines are all expensive. Thrive does not address transportation funding priorities directly or considering the best return on investment.
- We are on the cusp of major changes in the transportation realm, including significant technological changes which will change mobility dramatically. *Thrive* makes passing reference to these changes without any discussion of how to prepare for and adapt to them. Instead, Thrive discusses current metro and bus systems as the only transportation modes that will exist other than walking and biking. For example, charging stations for EVs are a major challenge everywhere to increasing use of EVs and the plan makes no mention of that challenge or how it will be met. There are other jurisdictions, like Baltimore for example, that have put measures in place on public property, but Thrive is silent about this.
- The communication part of the section is incomplete and redundant, repeating sentences about building high speed communication networks without detail about how and where and with what zoning and regulatory changes. The plan fails to recognize that simply building a telecom network does not in itself create equity with underserved communities if the residents can't afford to subscribe to the services. The plan should call for requiring reduced or free cost access to residents with economic challenges as part of the zoning and regulatory changes that will allow deployment.
- The Council should consider consulting a panel of transportation and telecom experts to help predict the future landscape of transportation, financing, implementation, and equity and likewise the future of information technology, zoning changes needed for a roll-out and equity and financial issues with regard to these.

## 6. Housing for All: More of Everything

- The assertion that more housing will bring more jobs and boost the economy runs throughout this section, without support. The study of White Flint for Planning found that the limited job growth in the county is holding back residential construction, in which case the jobs must come before the residential construction will happen. The relationship between housing and jobs is at best unclear.
- Assertions of the benefits of adding different types of housing ("missing middle," duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, small apartment buildings, and the like) are made without support, and without consideration of the experiences in other areas of the country (for example Austin, Minneapolis, Chicago, New York) where results have been mixed at best, and in some areas more negative than positive. Additional research regarding the actual experiences in other parts of the country, not what those advocating change hoped would happen, should be reviewed before changes such as those described in this section should be considered.
- Although there are likely to be places in the county appropriate for increased density, including in the older, more fully developed neighborhoods, one-size-fits-all (or many) would be the wrong approach. Thrive needs to make clear that any changes to zoning to permit increased density are to be made through the master / sector plan process. This process provides for community involvement (working toward community buy-in and support) with attention to local factors. It also helps ensure essential and accurate analyses of attainable and affordable housing prospects, and careful consideration of infrastructure needs, street capacity, stormwater management, tree canopy, and other issues.
- This section includes data points and charts, but many of these need better explanation, titles, and sourcing.



- Where percentages are used, absolute numbers should also be presented to give a complete picture.
- Where averages are shown (for example, for sales prices and rent), the median should be included as well, as the average can be distorted by outliers.
- Some of the charts are misleading. Please see the comments to this section in the markup.
- All references to residents being “over-housed” (and its ties to an aging population) should be deleted and the concept dropped from Thrive. The implication is that the “over-housed,” especially the older and “empty-nester”, need to get out of those homes and move to something smaller, presumably so the homes can be sold to larger households or divided into duplexes, triplexes, or apartments. There is no place in Thrive for the judgmental implications of the “over-housed” concept.
  - Individuals and families make personal decisions regarding the size of a home, where to live, when to stay and when to move.
  - Older residents whose children are grown often want to stay in the family home as long as circumstances and health permit, providing a place where grown children and their families can gather and stay for a longer visit.
  - The “over-housed” in the workforce, regardless of age, and especially parents with children at home, may need space for working at home – one or more separate home offices - as has become abundantly clear during the pandemic.
- Adequate and accurate data is missing from the discussion of housing needs. The data presented must include, among other things, the number of residential units (single-family and multi-family) now being built or that in the future could be built under current zoning, to accurately present the unmet needs. Without this information, the assertion that substantial increased density is required to accommodate the new residents is not supported by the facts presented.
- Statements and data presented contradict the many statements made about Thrive that one of its goals is to increase home ownership, especially among low- and middle-income residents. Figure 60 shows almost 60% of new housing being rental housing. Adding primarily rental properties increases the percentage of renters, not owners. This apparent inconsistency in goals needs to be resolved.
- There is much in this section about providing a diversity of housing to improve access of low- and moderate-income residents to services, amenities, and infrastructure, which access most would get only by moving to a new area. Equal attention must be given in Thrive to providing our low- and moderate-income residents the same level of services, amenities and infrastructure in the communities in which they now live.

## **7. Parks and Recreation for an Increasingly Urban and Diverse Community: Active and Social**

This is the best written and most organized chapter of the document.

## **8. Conclusion**

The conclusion would benefit from more detail about implementation and indicators for measuring progress.

## **9. Appendices**

Some words used in the main document need definitions in the glossary, and others need more detail and/or changes.

We know you are getting many comments from many individuals and organizations. Our experience is that if people feel they have been heard and their concerns considered, they are more open to collaboration and compromise. You have an opportunity to create that environment, and we hope our thoughts will be useful. We can discuss these thoughts with you if that would be helpful. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,  
 Amanda Farber  
 Cheryl Gannon  
 Joyce Gwadz  
 Dedun Ingram

Naomi Spinrad

# *The River Road Coalition*

April 1, 2022

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

Dear Council President Albornoz, Vice-President Glass and Members Friedson, Hucker, Jawando, Katz, Navarro, Rice, and Riemer:

As community organizations that represent nearly 3,000 households along River Road, we are petitioning you to remove River Road from Western Avenue to the Beltway as a Growth Corridor in Thrive Montgomery 2050.

Making River Road a Growth Corridor will affect more than 850 residential properties in nearly a dozen communities. Individual property owners who will be affected by this designation were not specifically notified nor were they asked for their opinions on this designation, which could result in a dramatic change in the density of our neighborhoods and destroy the sense of community we currently have.

Unlike other designated Growth Corridors in Thrive, **River Road lacks sufficient public transit to support increased growth. It is dangerous to walk along, even where there are sidewalks. It is dangerous to bike or roll on despite bicycle lanes. It does not include any major employers or connect multiple “activity centers.” River Road does not meet any of the criteria Thrive Montgomery 2050 has for Growth Corridors.**

## **Why is River Road included as a Growth Corridor in Thrive 2050?**

There is no explanation in Thrive Montgomery 2050 as to why River Road is included as a Growth Corridor. In the PHED Committee review of Thrive, River Road from the Beltway to Falls Road was eliminated as part of the Growth Corridor. The entire road should be removed.

## **River Road does not provide multi-modal transit, which Thrive promotes:**

### **1. River Road does not have robust public transit**

The other Growth Corridors have or are scheduled to have robust public transit such as: Metrorail Red Line, the Purple Line, the MARC train, or bus rapid transit (BRT). Planning Director Gwen Wright in response to questions Councilmember Friedson asked her said, “Although there are no current plans to add bus rapid transit or other forms of transit to River Road, there may be opportunities to supplement the current bus service.”

Supplementing current bus service will not promote one of Thrive's goals for car-less or car-free residential areas. There is one WMATA bus line along River Road that runs every 30 minutes weekdays and every 50 minutes on weekends as a Ride-On bus.

## **2. River Road is dangerous to walk along or cross**

From Western Avenue to Ridgefield Road, a distance of a mile, there is a narrow sidewalk. For the first half-mile from Western Avenue to Little Falls Parkway, the narrow sidewalk is bordered by River Road on one side and driveways from private homes on the other. From Little Falls Parkway to Ridgefield Road, there are numerous driveways for commercial establishments. There is no grass buffer between the road and either the private homes or commercial establishments.

From Ridgefield Road to the Beltway, a distance of 3.2 miles, **THERE IS NO SIDEWALK** on either side of River Road.

It is dangerous to cross River Road at many of the bus stops because there are no traffic signals or crosswalks to alert drivers that there are pedestrians who want to cross the road.

## **3. River Road is dangerous to bike on**

Bicycle lanes were painted on River Road a few years ago, but due to traffic volume and speed, the turning lanes, and the hills and valleys along the road, even the most experienced bicyclists avoid this road.

Making River Road a Growth Corridor and allowing more intense development will only add more single-use vehicles to River Road. In addition, because River Road is a state highway, any improvements, such as sidewalks, safer bikeways, and better stormwater management will require state expenditures and state approval. If one considers it took an accident with multiple fatalities and years of community pressure to get traffic safety measures by Braeburn Parkway, how long would it take the state to provide the kinds of traffic and pedestrian safety measures to comply with Vision Zero if there's increased development along River Road?

## **River Road has only one activity center**

Westbard, which is currently under redevelopment is the only activity center along River Road from Western Avenue to Potomac. Planning Department Director Gwen Wright claims that "Additional housing is needed along major corridors to meet future housing needs." Development approved so far for Westbard Square includes a mixed-use multi-family structure with 200 units, about 70 townhouses and a senior residential care facility with up to 155 beds.

The Westbard Sector Plan, approved in 2016, allows for a total of 1300 residential units to be built along Westbard Avenue. When the Westbard sector plan was being discussed with the Planning Department the objective was to provide for future housing needs in the county. But we have no idea how the additional population expected at Westbard will be absorbed into the greater community and how it will affect our infrastructure – transit, schools, emergency services, stormwater management or recreational space. Since the sector plan provides density guidance for the next 10-15 years, the possibility of an additional 1000 residential units above what is already planned, could add a substantial number of new

housing units and residents. The Council should allow for the Westbard sector plan to be developed and new population growth absorbed before increasing density on River Road.

### **River Road has no major employers**

There are no significantly large employers along River Road. There are some employers – schools, senior citizen facilities, and the commercial area of Westbard -- but there are no major employers such as NIH or Suburban Hospital found along Old Georgetown Road or biomedical facilities such as those on Route 28.

### **River Road is just a link**

Gwen Wright wrote Councilmember Friedson that River Road “is proposed as a growth corridor, [as] an acknowledgement that River Road is a State Highway that links major centers, such as Friendship Heights, Downtown Washington, D.C. with the Beltway, very near the American Legion Bridge to Virginia. Simply because of its geography, it will always be an important transportation link.”

**Link** is the key word. **River Road – the 4.2 miles from Western Avenue to the Beltway -- serves only as a link, a connector road, a pass-through for most traffic**, much of it between Virginia and D.C. Except for nearby residents, River Road is not a destination road like Route 355 or Route 97. During morning rush hour, most of the traffic travels along River Road from the Beltway to Goldsboro Road, Westbard Avenue and Little Falls Parkway to connect to Massachusetts Avenue to go to downtown D.C. To a lesser extent, drivers take River Road to Western Avenue and turn left to Friendship Heights or continue on Military Road to points further east in D.C. There is also some traffic – mainly from Virginia -- that turns left onto Goldsboro Road to downtown Bethesda.

River Road is not traveled to get from one activity center to another. It has neither the physical nor social structure to support compact development. In fact, the growth corridor designation for River Road will only add to congestion. West of the Beltway, River Road is a two-lane road and east of Western Avenue, in Washington, D.C., it again becomes a two-lane road ending abruptly at Wisconsin Avenue in Tenleytown. If a Beltway exit had not been built at River Road, it would still probably be a two-lane road for its entire length.

### **The unaddressed costs:**

Finally, when asked by Councilmember Friedson about benefits versus costs or disruptions for a community with a Growth Corridor designation, Ms. Wright said, “. . . other housing types along the corridor could serve as a buffer to single family homes located away from the corridor and reduce some impacts of the busy State Highway on these single-family homes.” That’s not a very helpful message for the hundreds of single-family homeowners along River Road whose properties are currently serving as Ms. Wright’s “buffer.” Homeowners closer to River Road bear the brunt of noise and air pollution from road traffic.

Ms. Wright also added, “In terms of cost and disruptions, additional growth would have short-term disruptions during the construction process.” This is a disingenuous response.

### **1. Lack of infrastructure**

Although Ms. Wright acknowledges that “All new development would need to account for and address impacts to traffic, transit, schools and stormwater management,” the question is: What comes first: The residential development or the infrastructure? Adding people before transit is a poor planning practice that accelerates congestion, the emission of greenhouse gases, and is inconsistent with modern planning theory, which adds density around robust transportation hubs. History teaches us that allowing development before the infrastructure issues are addressed would result in the failure of the objectives of a Growth Corridor designation – to promote more housing choices and racial equity.

### **2. Environmental damage**

As mentioned above, adding more growth along River Road will increase greenhouse gas emissions. It will also destroy more green space and old growth trees that border the road, either in the right-of-way or in the yards of current homeowners. Also of concern is the impact on the numerous creeks that run under River Road including, the Willett Branch, the Little Falls Branch, the Minnehaha Branch and Booze Creek. These creeks flow directly into the Potomac River through the C&O National Park. This could require the development of environmental impact statements before any increased construction on lots bordering River Road.

We already know that if construction of a new American Legion Bridge and expansion plans for 495 go forward this will create substantial environmental damage to the Potomac River. It is anticipated this will result in the C&O National Park losing 17 to 20 acres at the same time Thrive wants to increase the population of River Road, resulting in a greater need for parks and recreational areas.

### **3. The value of one’s private property:**

#### **a. Financial costs**

The costs that weren’t addressed were the value of a person’s home. Financially, if a single-family home is surrounded by quadplexes or faces a small apartment building next door or across the street, how does that affect its value? Since putting denser housing in single-family home neighborhoods is a new concept, Ms. Wright really doesn’t know what the economic impact will be either on individual property owners or on a neighborhood.

#### **b. Sense of security**

And how do you put a value on the sense of security your home and neighborhood provide? You move to a house in a neighborhood to fulfill not just the basic need of shelter, but also to provide your family with a safe, secure and comfortable respite from the outside world. Especially now, while we’re still in the midst of the waning Covid pandemic, the growth corridor designation would thrust more than 850 homeowners into an insecure position – wondering if one of their largest investments would continue to provide the safety, security, and comfort they expected when they bought their property, which we need now more than ever.

#### **4. Solutions to non-existent problems**

In her response to Councilmember Friedson, Ms. Wright also suggested “If some non-residential uses were built along the corridor and/or mixed with new residential uses, this would give the residents . . . more access to neighborhood services and amenities.” This is quite simply implying a solution to a problem that does not exist, especially since shops and services are already just a few minutes away for most residents.

Similarly, requiring infill along River Road by designating it a growth corridor ignores that Westbard will be providing the compact growth that Thrive 2050 is promoting.

The conclusion is inescapable: the Council should remove River Road as a Growth Corridor as it does not meet the criteria established for the other Growth Corridors.

Sincerely,

***The River Road Coalition***

Mike Zangwill, President  
Bannockburn Civic Association  
(representing 600 households)

Christopher Danley, President  
Kenwood Citizens Association  
(representing 240+ households)

Foroud Arsanjani, President  
Kenwood Park Citizen’s Association  
(representing 639 households)

Jan Lilja, President  
Springfield Civic Association  
(representing 658 households)

Eric F. Fedowitz, Vice-President – Issues  
Management  
Wood Acres Citizen’s Association  
(representing 427 households)

Jeffrey Z. Slavin, Mayor  
Town of Somerset  
(representing 416 households)



## COMMISSION ON AGING

February 11, 2022

The Honorable Gabe Albornoz  
President, Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Council President Albornoz,

As a follow-up to your request at the County Council's Health and Human Services Committee Budget Hearing on November 17<sup>th</sup>, the Montgomery County Commission on Aging (CoA) is pleased to provide our perspective on the THRIVE 2050 Plan. The CoA is authorized by the Older Americans Act and was established by Montgomery County in 1974 to advise County government on the needs, interests, and issues of older adult residents, and to advocate on their behalf at the local, state, and national levels.

The CoA fully supports the concept of social equity as an overall guiding principle for all that we do. In general, we feel that the THRIVE 2050 Plan presents a strong vision to move forward on these priorities and principles (e.g., racial equity and age diversity), particularly as it impacts older adults in the County.

The CoA's overall view of the THRIVE 2050 draft plan is favorable. Given the audience for the Plan, we suggest that the technical jargon in the report be eliminated in favor of more consumer-friendly terms that make the Plan easier to understand by the public. For example, the Plan talks about an update to the zoning code using something called "Form-based elements." Unless someone is familiar with "Form-based elements," this terminology is unknown to the public, bureaucratic, and masks what is to be done. We urge that jargon and technical terminology be explained or eliminated.

To further strengthen the Plan, we offer the following thoughts on four key sections in the Plan: Housing; Complete Communities; Design, Arts, and Culture; and Transportation and Communications Networks.

**Housing:** The CoA supports the THRIVE 2050 Plan recommendation for more housing options and opportunities because of the anticipated increase in the older adult population and in the changes of the racial and economic make-up of the County. We offer the following comments for this section of the Plan:

- We support continued efforts to expand the availability of affordable rental housing.
- Affordable "missing middle" housing can benefit many different kinds of residents from middle income residents seeking a "starter home" to older adults wishing to downsize in or near their neighborhood, but are priced out of the market. As the plan notes, missing middle housing also can facilitate intergenerational interaction and aging in place, both of which are goals of the CoA.



- The CoA supports design for life policies, and we strongly suggest that the THRIVE 2050 Plan consider adding a recommendation that building codes require design for life /universal design (or, at a minimum, safety features such as grab bars, wheel chair access, no-step entrances, wider doors, elevators, etc.) in new multifamily senior housing and for modifications when upgrading existing housing for older adults who may choose to age-in-place. Such options and opportunities can have a great impact on the livability of housing and communities for older adults.
- We also recommend that the first four metrics for measuring success or failure, presented near the end of the Housing section, disaggregate the data by age and gender in addition to race.
- The CoA is pleased to see the Plan's support for additional funding for the Housing Initiative Funds (HIF).

**Complete Communities:** The CoA believes the concepts presented in this section encourage integration and diversity of communities. By supporting a broader range of types of households and incomes levels, the concepts presented have the potential to reduce the concentration of poverty and increase racial and economic equity for all older adults in Montgomery County. The complete community concepts can encourage intergenerational housing and may enable older adults to have an active lifestyle in the communities where they may have lived for many years. We realize some older adults have resisted this concept as they worry about removing single-family home zoning restrictions because of the potential for more congestion and purportedly reduced housing values. Although this concept can potentially pit high-income and low-income older adults against one another, we believe that in the longer term, the overall benefit to older adults will outweigh the concerns. In addition, the concept contributes to stable communities and reduces the possibility that some older adults might have to move out of Montgomery County because of the high cost of housing. Notwithstanding our overall support for the concepts outlined in this section, we are concerned that the plan lacks sufficient changes to policies, regulations, or procedures to understand how the concepts can be actualized.

**Design, Arts, and Culture:** Overall, the CoA supports the concepts presented in this section. In particular, we believe the following quote on Page 41 is an important guiding principle to the Plan; “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.” In addition, we believe the THRIVE 2050 Plan would benefit from a high-level description of the anticipated changes to codes, design guidelines, regulatory tools and zoning modifications needed to facilitate shared use, encourage walkable communities, and create social interaction. Clear standards governing acceptable community-based forms will encourage the introduction of different housing types and neighborhood-serving retail centers, where essential services are within walking distance of most residences. As noted above, we are concerned about the lack of specifics with respect to the required policy, legislative, or regulatory changes needed to make the vision of the Plan a reality. The Plan should present how the goals and policies will be actualized.

**Transportation and Communication Networks:** We appreciate the goal of the THRIVE 2050 Plan to “create a world-class transportation system.” However, it appears that a world-class transportation system simply translates into just more buses, be they electric or hybrid. It does not create an environment for a broad range of innovative services that will serve not only older adults, but a range of demographic, racial, and spatial portions of the County. The Plan should create a vision where demand-responsive service in both urban and rural settings can function. For example, this might include transportation services like Uber and Lyft, especially in rural areas where public transportation is less accessible. The Plan also needs to account for the growth in privately-owned electric and autonomous vehicles that will inevitably be a part of our future transportation system, servicing all age groups in the County.

As the County begins to expand its broadband and wireless 5G network, we strongly believe that the THRIVE 2050 Plan needs to better incorporate ways to expand the use of that network. For example, the

Plan needs to create a vision for the use of technology that will support, strengthen, and enable innovation in health care services, especially for home and community-based services for older adults.

The Plan also should create a pathway to use the expanded broadband and wireless network that can enhance on-demand transportation services, emergency response, and future vehicle-to-vehicle communications. The THRIVE 2050 Plan must demonstrate that the County is ready to embrace the technological innovations that will be coming over the next 25-plus years and use it to enable improved services for County residents, young and old.

We hope these recommendations will help enhance the THRIVE 2050 Plan. We would appreciate the opportunity to continue to be a part of the Plan review process as specific components are further developed and articulated. Thank you again for your support and interest in the CoA and the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

*Barbara Selter*

Barbara Selter, Chair

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



February 16, 2022

**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

**RE: Thrive Montgomery 2050 (PHED Committee Draft)**

Dear President Alborno and Members of the Montgomery County Council:

Our municipality is continuing to participate with our neighboring communities to review the council's Planning, Housing, Economic Development Committee's draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050. We echo the sentiments of those who have expressed support of the plan's focus on inclusive, socially connected, and walkable communities and for environmental sustainability and resiliency; however, we remain concerned that certain aspects of the plan require further focus and amendments.

Specifically, we echo and, by this letter, amplify the points outlined in the attached letter dated December 14, 2021, from our neighboring municipality, The Town of Chevy Chase (the Town). We urge members of the council to review the comments and recommendations included in the Town's letter.

It is important that Thive Montgomery 2050 reflects the broad spectrum of input and feedback from across the county as this document will serve as the basis for all zoning, development, and public investment to occur across the county over the next 30 years. We appreciate the opportunity to provide this feedback for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert Goodwin, Jr.  
Vice Chair  
Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers

cc: Mr. Marc Elrich, County Executive, Montgomery County  
Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers  
Mr. Barney Rush, Mayor, Town of Chevy Chase

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December 14, 2021

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

Dear President Alborno and Members of the County Council,

We support many of the principles of Thrive, including its call for inclusive, socially connected, and walkable communities and for environmental sustainability and resiliency. We also support its general objective of encouraging higher density development along transit corridors and activity centers around the County. Achieving this objective will offer significant benefits to County residents.

However, before the County Council approves Thrive, which will form the policy and legal foundation for long-term and large-scale community development and redevelopment, we submit for your consideration the following comments and recommendations along with our endorsement for one particular principle of urbanism concerning parks.

## **1. Reinstate Chapter on Economic Competitiveness**

Our County faces an enduring and increasingly severe financial strain. We must find ways of attracting new and better paying jobs to the County, to afford both the growing level of services our residents need, and the infrastructure projects called for in Thrive. Thrive recognizes the magnitude of this problem by including economic competitiveness as one of only three overarching objectives in the plan. The introduction presents a highly concerning set of facts, demonstrating how Montgomery County has fallen behind other counties in our region in job creation and has suffered a decline in household income over the past 15 years. We are not on a sustainable path.

Instead of confronting this crisis, the authors of Thrive deleted a chapter on economic competitiveness that had been in an initial draft. We now read statements about the County's potential to attract employers, the County's need to strengthen its "economic competitiveness by creating the kinds of places where people with diverse choices want to live and work." (p. 7), and "Major employers are looking for amenity rich walkable areas near transit." (p. 24). While such statements have merit, they neither comprise the comprehensive strategy our County requires nor

appear particularly compelling. Notably, rapid job growth is evident in many areas of Northern Virginia that are not in or adjacent to complete communities.

We encourage the County Council to hold a hearing on how best to integrate economic competitiveness back into Thrive and to invite the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation to testify and submit comments on the document. Montgomery County residents deserve a more comprehensive discussion of the interrelationship between economic development and planning for our future growth. For example, as the December 2020 Planning Department Report on White Flint determined, developers will not build housing there unless there are jobs in the area.

Also, a 2019 Brookings Institute [paper](#) points out the additional elements required to attract new jobs: Innovative companies favor mixed-use downtowns and *innovation districts where research institutions, advanced industry firms, and entrepreneurs cluster and connect*. (Emphasis added). Thrive should include a specific vision for how the county can build on existing economic strengths (e.g., biotech, hospitality, federal government), create an environment for innovation and entrepreneurship, promote more job training programs, and compete given increased telecommuting opportunities and increased office and retail space vacancy rates. Taxes, regulations, the ability to deliver needed infrastructure, and other factors should be considered as well.

Other jurisdictions, including Prince George's County, Frederick County, Anne Arundel County, and Fairfax County, have seen the wisdom of integrating planning and economic development in their general plans. Indeed, even Montgomery County's 1993 General Plan Refinement had an employment/economic activity chapter. Therefore, we ask the County Council to reinstate and update the chapter on economic competitiveness.

## **2. Use Master & Sector Planning Processes**

The current draft of Thrive does not discuss how recommended policies will be implemented, and several Councilmembers have expressed the view that the ways and means of undertaking any land use changes should be considered only as a subsequent matter. We are concerned with this position. We agree that Thrive will serve as a policy guide, but the document should state, as the original version of Thrive did, "Many of Thrive Montgomery 2050's recommendations cannot be implemented with a one-size-fits-all approach. Area master plans will help refine Thrive Montgomery 2050 recommendations and implement them at a scale tailored to specific neighborhoods." Previous substantive changes to zoning have occurred through this established process.

The master and sector planning processes help ensure that essential and accurate analyses of attainable and affordable housing prospects, concentrated infrastructure capacity studies and investments, improved stormwater regulations to manage increased residential density, targeted economic development strategies, and tax changes are integrated and comprehensive. This raises confidence in the success of the proposed changes, permits more localized flexibility and appropriate development, and provides the means to secure local support for the proposed changes. Thrive should state the importance of continuing to use this vital process that has

served the County well and earned the confidence of residents as the fair and reasoned way to make zoning changes.

### **3. Promote Market-Rate Affordable Housing In More Locations**

The original draft of Thrive extolled urbanism as the means to move the County away from car-centric to people-centric living. The current draft purports that applying the principles of urbanism also will address issues of racial disparities in home ownership, neighborhood equity, and affordable housing. We are concerned that too much is being expected from the promotion of this one vision. In particular, Thrive fails to account for the high cost of land and construction for in-fill development in urban areas. How will the County achieve the increase in market-rate housing that can be afforded by “a broad swath of County residents” (p. 62)? Thrive asks in every chapter, *what problem are we trying to solve?* In our view, increasing the supply of market rate affordable housing requires building more housing in many parts of the County. This will include building in areas of existing high density but also in areas where land is less expensive and construction costs more moderate - such as less urban areas.

In making this statement, we are not opposed to identifying a Corridor-Focused Growth Area, since even that area includes considerable property that is not particularly urban. But we do not foresee that “complete communities,” as Thrive defines that concept, will be the location for much of the market-rate, broadly affordable housing needed. We suggest that Thrive consider the development of affordable housing in both the Focused and Limited Growth Areas, with the view that the County should also encourage CR development in non-urban areas -- development that will bring some services closer to where this housing is and will be located. This concept is hinted at on p. 32 but should be explored more fully.

### **4. “Housing for All: More of Everything.” But Let us Not Denigrate Suburbia**

Thrive offers recurring praise for compact development that supports “dense, vibrant and energized” communities. Thrive states that if we build more housing near “high quality transit corridors” we can provide housing that will keep the most productive workers in the County.” (p. 66). Other goals include increasing the number of County residents that bike and walk and reducing reliance on cars. Meanwhile, suburban living is implicitly criticized: “The desire of property owners to maximize the value of their land led to more development in outlying areas... with a proliferation of garden apartments and townhouses... The absence of tighter limits allowed development to disperse...” (p. 17).

However, suburban homes - both multi-family and single family - are a material component of the County’s stock of attainable middle-income housing and offer a lifestyle desired by many families. These communities can also offer social connectivity, inclusiveness, and walkability but at a different scale than downtown, high-density areas. Thrive can state that there is an unmet need for more housing in urban areas; but there is no need to imply that suburban living is a mistake, undesirable – or where *less* productive workers live!

Thrive also builds a case that the County has too much single-family housing and that a material shortage exists in the provision of smaller units. Thrive states on p. 58, that “the percentage of

households consisting of one person has risen from 7% in 1960 to 25% in 2019, and that this has led to a housing “gap.” But is this so? When one looks closely at the table of family composition, shown on p. 59, it is apparent that the percentages in the different categories have not shifted materially in the 30 years since 1990. Over this period, the percentage of people living alone has grown only from 21% to 25%, and the percentage of families with children has shrunk by only a few percentage points. As a result, the purported mismatch of housing types to demand does not appear to be as serious an issue as the text suggests.

In addition, Thrive shows no awareness of how the work/home life paradigm is rapidly shifting. Looking ahead, we should expect that a family with children, with working (productive) parents based at home and therefore, in need of home office space, might choose a more suburban housing option where they can afford more space. And the environmental consequence of this choice may not be so detrimental if they only need to commute intermittently to an office in an electric vehicle or ride share.

Given these considerations, we suggest a reset of the tone of the document: The County should strive to meet the needs of its residents and of residents it wishes to attract, whatever choice in housing they decide to make. We should support additional housing in urban areas without denigrating suburban developments where families may find the right mixture of amenities that they want at a price they can afford.

## **5. Improve Infrastructure When Increasing Housing Density**

Thrive should state that infrastructure improvements need to be undertaken commensurate with any zoning changes (i.e., through a master or sector plan) to increase housing density. Thrive should include calls for infrastructure improvements to meet added demands placed by infill development on water/sewer lines, electrical lines, high-speed communications, stormwater capacity, and other critical infrastructure needs for communities. Currently, such improvements are required for large developments but not for infill development that typically impacts one lot at a time. Thrive advocates for substantial additional density in the High Growth Area. While individual projects that might fulfill Thrive’s vision may or may not be large, there must be an understanding of the cumulative impact of such developments, and the corresponding demands made on infrastructure. The plan needs to address this. In addition, Thrive should be integrated with the Climate Action Plan (CAP) so that infrastructure improvements meet climate change challenges.

## **6. Develop a More Imaginative Transportation Approach**

Thrive should include a broader, more realistic, and more imaginative transportation approach beyond wider sidewalks, more bike lanes, and BRT. Some important questions should be addressed: How will mass transit-centric transportation be staged both in terms of development timelines and service coverage areas (i.e., given the high cost of constructing and maintaining transit and limited funds)? To what extent will ride sharing provide home to office transportation that will be faster than mass transit? In addressing these questions, Thrive should set out strategies for how the County will flexibly plan for traffic and technology advancements, account for transportation needs that support all the land uses in the County, and accommodate

the needs of different population groups that cannot use public transit, including the elderly, disabled, and young families. Also, as indicated in the County MDOT's response letter about Thrive, coordination with MDOT will be essential to implementing Thrive along with the recognition that most county residents and visitors will continue to use their cars.

## **7. Reinstate Chapter on Environmental Resiliency**

Given the vital importance of improving environmental resiliency, we believe that there should be a stand-alone chapter in Thrive on this topic. This would provide the means to treat all key environmental topics holistically and set out how they may relate to and reinforce each other, instead of leaving the reader with the task of piecing together disparate comments through the text. And it would encourage consistent treatment of such issues as increasing the use of clean energy, promoting green buildings, the need for climate adaptation, and improving climate governance. A separate chapter also could set out energy efficiency recommendations for all new commercial and residential buildings. We also encourage providing current watershed and water quality maps, instead of referencing a Water Resources Functional Plan that was written 10 years ago before we began to experience the increasing severity and frequency of storms.

## **8. Require Five-Year Reviews of Thrive**

Thrive would benefit from acknowledging the inherent uncertainty of making plans: facts and circumstances change, sometimes abruptly. Would anyone have imagined that the trend to remote work would accelerate as it has due to the pandemic? Therefore, Thrive should be reviewed and updated every five years. Such revisions would permit the systemic analysis of data that Thrive asks to be collected at the end of each chapter and would allow consideration of other factors, such as the state of the County's finances and the pace of economic development and job creation.

This periodic review should be countywide and comprehensive, including input from a broad number of agencies as well as documentation on the changes through a number of critical success factors: economic growth, development and competitiveness; multi-family versus single-family housing demand and supply; public revenue; transit, and ride-sharing use; vehicle miles traveled; housing affordability metrics; adequate public facility impacts; and environmental factors such as stormwater management efficacy. Such a review should lead to recommendations for adjustments to Thrive to achieve critical County goals.

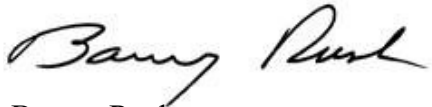
## **We Applaud Thrive's Support for Urban Parks**

Before closing, we would like to state our strong support for language in the section on parks and recreation, where Thrive recognizes the vital contribution made by urban parks to the success of complete communities. We support this principle with our wallet as well as voice. The Town of Chevy Chase has authorized contributing up to \$4 million to the creation of two new parks in Bethesda, connected to the redevelopment of the Farm Women's Market. This is an example of an innovative public-private partnership, involving the County, the Town, and the developers (The Bernstein Management Corporation and EYA). It is also an example of the partnership value that municipalities such as ours could bring to Thrive. We look forward to collaborating

with our partners to realize this development and turn into reality a vital component of the vision set out in Thrive and in the Bethesda Downtown Plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns and recommendations regarding the Thrive general plan and our hopes for the success of our County. We are always available should you like to speak further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barney Rush". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Barney" and the last name "Rush" clearly distinguishable.

Barney Rush  
Mayor





## SECTION 5 OF THE VILLAGE OF CHEVY CHASE

March 1, 2022

Council President Gabe Albornoz  
Montgomery County Council

Council President Albornoz:

We write regarding Thrive Montgomery 2050. Although we have written in the past as part of a larger community coalition, today we would like to detail Chevy Chase Section 5's specific concerns with the plan.

We remain concerned with the process surrounding Thrive. Because much of the proposal was written during the Covid-19 pandemic, widespread community involvement to discuss the plan was difficult at best. As you are aware, Covid-19 has presented unprecedented changes for most people's day-to-day lives. Many struggled with disruptions to their health, work, family, school, and livelihood. Understandably, digesting and studying a dense 93-page planning document was not a priority. We also are concerned that the lack of in-person hearings or work sessions intrinsically makes the process appear less open and transparent. Many of the proposed zoning changes have far-reaching and significant consequences. It is important that the different communities be able to review, weigh-in, and provide feedback. The listening sessions you had were an important first step, but many communities—including ours—continue to believe their concerns were not heard or addressed in a meaningful way.

In addition, the plan does not adequately address the infrastructure needs that will be required for change on such a massive scale. The two issues we hear about most often from our residents are traffic and stormwater, and the proposed zoning changes would significantly affect both. On the former, the main road arteries in our area are Connecticut Avenue, East West Highway, and Brookville Road. These roads are already insufficient for the number of cars on the road. We see regular cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets at a high volume and fast speed. Increased development along these roadways—development which is already occurring—without meeting the proper infrastructure needs is not prudent. Additionally, while we support the idea of a more pedestrian and public transit-centric community, it is not realistic to assume that all residents will walk, bike, or bus everywhere. There will continue to be a large number of people that require the use of cars for a variety of reasons. The plan needs to reflect this.

Along these same lines, our stormwater infrastructure is outdated. Section 5 (and most of the other Chevy Chase municipalities) have already enacted stricter standards than what the County and State require because many homes in our neighborhood have issues with water. Over the last ten years, the County has continued to build up and out with no regard to how this affects stormwater. So far, the County and State have been unwilling to make large-scale improvements and changes to the stormwater drain systems. The systems we have are simply overwhelmed. The types of changes Thrive suggests do not take this into account or provide for any methods to counteract this. These are key factors that the County Council should not ignore.

We urge the County Council to pause and take the time needed to address the issues we have outlined before passing Thrive Montgomery 2050. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you or your staff. Thank you for the important work that you do on behalf of Section 5 and Montgomery County.

Sincerely,  
Gregory S. Chernack  
Chairman, Town Council  
Section 5 of the Village of Chevy Chase

## **THRIVE: THE SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE PLAN**

**Donald L. Horowitz**

**February 7, 2022**

*Thrive* is a detailed, carefully thought-out plan containing a number of good ideas. It also contains a number of serious defects that, over the course of time, are likely to create serious problems that will not be easy to remedy. Long-term planning is always hazardous. As conditions change or unanticipated consequences appear, plans may need to be revised. Unfortunately, some of the most ambitious elements of *Thrive* will not be amenable to course correction over time. They should be rethought and revised. The remainder of this memorandum deals with these problems.

**Uniformity:** The draft plan contains a strong preference for uniform development. Every “growth corridor,” for example, should receive similar treatment: “intensively developed centers of activity” (p. 18), “compact growth,” with “mixed uses and forms” (p. 22). Outside of growth corridors, development will be limited to “infill development to prevent sprawl” (p. 33). Note that these injunctions come out of thin air, and note, too, what they omit: citizen preferences that may (and surely do) vary from community to community. The assumption of homogeneity neglects the fact that the county contains a large number of jurisdictions and local areas. The uniformity of these prescriptions seems to assume that all localities should and will simply fall into line. But citizens of different localities have varying needs and preferences. One size will not fit all.

**Hostility to Single-Family Housing:** *Thrive’s* ambitious goals are to create much more rental housing in the county. The draft plan is quite hostile to single-family housing and to zoning for single-family

housing. The draft neglects some crucially important facts. **Most important of these is that a single-family home has historically been the way in which Americans build wealth and financial security.**

For all Americans, home equity comprises fully 49% of their net worth. Once wealthier Americans, who tend to own financial assets such as stocks or mutual funds, are excluded from this calculation, the percentage of Americans who derive their financial security overwhelmingly from home ownership is very much higher than 49%. And for the bottom half of the wealth distribution in the United States, the vast majority of wealth derives from ownership of the family home (especially the single-family home). This is a very important fact in view of growing income and wealth inequality in the United States.

**Limitations on single-family housing may actually reduce wealth for those who have less of it.**

Of course, many lower-income and minority Americans do not own a home, but many aspire to do so, and historically home ownership has been the route to social mobility and economic prosperity.

Rentals, even subsidized rentals, build no equity. Kimblynn Persaud of Wheaton has noted that 43% of Black Americans in Montgomery County are homeowners, and 49% of Hispanics in the county are.

These numbers are in the same range as national averages. Americans across ethnic and racial lines aspire to own their own homes, and the percentage of families in the bottom half of the income distribution in the United States who own their own home rose from 2016 to 2019 to just short of 50%, according to the Federal Reserve. The Montgomery County numbers testify to the widespread desire of county residents to participate in single-family housing. The elimination of single-family zoning and the very heavy emphasis in the plan on multi-family housing, if it were to be approved by the council, would ignore the economic functions performed by home ownership.

It is quite true that, historically, single-family zoning was used in some places to enforce residential racial segregation. That is not its current function in the county. The problem faced by people of modest

means in some of the most affluent close-in Maryland suburbs is the price of entry-level single-family housing. But significant numbers of entry-level buyers and second- or third-time buyers, including minority buyers, have already been migrating to somewhat lower-cost suburbs, some adjacent to higher-priced areas. If there were incentives for economic development in those lower-cost areas, more people of all backgrounds would find their way into affordable single-family housing, a large step up in economic welfare and the ability to afford the next house in any area of their choice, including the most affluent.

The elimination of single-family zoning and the heavy emphasis on multi-family housing would also ignore the preferences of many residents. This is another aspect of single-family housing that deserves emphasis. Single-family housing in a suburban-exurban area like Montgomery County is part of a long-term development that accelerated after World War II. City people chose increasingly to live in quiet neighborhoods, where they could obtain more space and a garden of their own. This aspiration is enduring. Others prefer living in more thoroughly urban settings, with a variety of housing styles, shopping facilities, restaurants, and other amenities within easier reach. **Both choices are lawful, legitimate, and deserving of respect.** Yet *Thrive* decrees that many neighborhoods of the former variety must become more like the latter. In fact, it claims that “urbanism” is “equally relevant to rural, suburban, and urban areas” (p. 12). It would be easy to find very large numbers of Montgomery County residents who would disagree with this odd claim.

It is not hard to see what the consequences of a policy to produce “a mix of diverse housing types in existing residential neighborhoods” (p. 49) would be if it were enforced. Montgomery County would become a less attractive place to reside for those who choose suburban living. Maryland is already losing population among residents who are affected by high rates of state taxation. A great many of

them live in single-family neighborhoods. They have other options, some just across the river, and they can move. Serious restrictions on single-family housing may lead to the departure of county residents who prefer a quiet suburban neighborhood. There is in the plan an expectation of population growth; the two trends (migration into the county and migration from it) are not mutually exclusive.

***Indifference to Traffic Congestion:*** *Thrive* states that it aims at “a pleasant urban pattern,” with “economies of scale” in growth corridors (p. 33), and to some extent these may be achieved, at least for those who prefer an urban pattern. But in one respect, there will be no economies of scale, only very costly diseconomies of scale. The main arteries that flow through the proposed growth corridors are already clogged with traffic. *Thrive* complains of congestion created by automobile traffic (p. 78), and for this problem it proposes “efficient provision of transit service” (p. 32), by which it apparently means mass transit, as well as walking, bicycling, and “rolling.” These would be admirable goals if they could be fulfilled, but nearly a half century of Metro service suggests that mass transit will not be able to tackle this problem adequately anytime soon.

New apartment buildings in suburban areas, even if they are near Metro stops, and roads narrowed to facilitate bicycle lanes (which most bicyclists cannot really use for commuting) can only make congestion problems and pollution worse. Traffic lanes are to be reduced; so is parking (pp. 79-85), even as the plan anticipates population growth of some 200,000 new residents. The explicit intention is to make driving less convenient, although there is hardly a way to make public transit significantly more convenient for a great many commuters in the short or medium term (p. 83). **The consequences of this transportation policy will be further gridlock along major arteries and spillover of traffic onto adjacent streets and parallel roads by motorists seeking shortcuts.** (That spillover is already occurring.) This is

not anyone's idea of a "pleasant urbanism." The transport component of *Thrive* is filled with wishful thinking.

The plan explicitly pledges to build no new roads and to widen none. I have no idea whether any new roads might be needed or which roads, if any, should be widened. What I do know is that such a blanket pledge suggests an indifference to the welfare of the citizens of the county whose benefit the plan is supposed to maximize.

**General Observations:** In concluding, I would like to make a few general observations about *Thrive* and about planning. The most general of these observations is that the tone and the substance of the draft are heavily authoritarian. The barely concealed subtext is that we the planners know what is best and know how to achieve it. This is a dangerous attitude in a democracy. The many objections that have arisen to the draft plan make clear that quite a number of citizens do not agree with significant parts of it. But there are additional failings that I have not mentioned.

*Thrive* reveals little real knowledge of economics or even of general social trends that are relevant to its task. For example, there is little or no consideration of what might be required to attract businesses that could increase the income of county residents, so that their improved financial condition might allow them to improve their housing situation. There is, likewise, no acknowledgment of the current trend, fostered by the pandemic, for large numbers of people to move from more crowded urban or close-in suburban areas to the exurbs, where more space is affordable, especially for the growing numbers who work at home. Needless to say, this trend undercuts the plan's emphasis on a uniform urbanism. It might also indicate a different path of development for communities, rather than merely "infill," in areas such as Clarksburg or Damascus, to make them attractive to new exurbanities.

The draft plan is hostile to the plurality of tastes among people. That bias seems to underlie its single-minded preference for multifamily housing. But planning in a democracy should not be a zero-sum exercise, in which your preferences are illegitimate and mine are legitimate. Democracy is a matter of mutual accommodation.

Finally, *Thrive* is itself a dense plan, meaning that it aims to fill in many blanks at once, and its commitments look very firm. There is little humility about the capacity of people, including planners, to do forecasting. That means much of the plan will be hard to revise or reverse if circumstances change or unanticipated consequences arise. In a long academic career, with frequent spells of policy consulting, I have never encountered a policy that did not produce unanticipated consequences. Because many conditions change over time, a plan for 30 years' duration should have a light touch. It should sketch in many desirable developments, acknowledge the plurality of preferences among citizens, and make provision for changes if the plans do not seem to produce expected results along the way. It should not seek to impose uniform solutions everywhere in the county. It should also have more "If this occurs, then that will change" clauses, because the future is exceptionally difficult to forecast. *Thrive* has none of these attributes. It is written in stone. As I said at the outset, it needs to have a good deal of revision and perhaps a thorough rethinking.

# Better neighborhoods, same neighbors

The pursuit for justice is also a pursuit for prosperity. The decades-long rise in demand for living and working in walkable places—especially with good access to transit—is good news, for our health, our economy, and the fight against climate change. However, too often current residents of these neighborhoods are left behind or pushed out

When new development comes to an established neighborhood, how do we ensure that the impacts of growth—both benefits and challenges—are distributed equitably? We have to confront the very real concern that “new investment” in neglected areas doesn’t necessarily bring new opportunity, new income, or new wealth to existing residents and workers of those areas. For future growth and development decisions, how can these mistakes be avoided and instead support economic mobility, wealth-building, and shared prosperity? How can we ensure that they are beneficiaries of change?

## Key discussion points



**There must be a deliberate implementation strategy to develop places without displacing faces.** To achieve this, equitable community engagement must be embedded in each component of the process. In many cases, it involves bringing the room to them. As Marla Bilonick said during the panel, you must “meet them where they are and when they are there.” When there is rapid change of any kind, community members are often unaware or under-informed about development—including the direct impacts on them. In order to ensure that long-time community members are able to benefit from investments in their neighborhood, they must be empowered to provide input in every step of the decision-making process. When development projects are community-driven, neighborhood revitalization has the potential to strengthen the authenticity of places by reflecting the history and values of the community, the cultural elements that are important to preserve, and the gaps that need to be filled to support their housing and economic stability.

## Discussion guides



Day One: Equity Summit keynote



Day One: Land use and development



Day Two: Transportation and thriving communities



Day Three: Economic development



**“It is important that we not only grow as a community, but that we become a community. That the benefits of this growth are inclusive.”**

- Mayor Keith James,  
West Palm Beach, Florida

## What to do next



### Policymakers

As communities pursue development, they should place a high priority on retaining existing residents and make a long-term commitment to protect the socioeconomic security of current and future generations. Focus on updating or eliminating policies that may have been created with fair intentions but resulted in skewed, inequitable outcomes over time.





2

**Intentionally prevent economic and cultural displacement of those who have been historically excluded from the benefits of growth.** A large portion of the increased value should be directed to targeted interventions that ensure that existing residents and businesses—particularly those most at risk—can afford to remain in their neighborhood, benefit from improvements, and provide input on how these benefits are distributed.

3

**Centering equity in development can help counteract the harmful impacts of gentrification and socioeconomic segregation.** There is a lingering misconception about urban growth suggesting that all development results in displacement. At Smart Growth America, we believe that development can be enormously beneficial for long-time residents of any community as long as it is accompanied by supportive policies that not only help prevent displacement, but also facilitate the flow of new capital to build wealth for existing community members. That is the difference between gentrification and equitable development.

## Questions to ask

1

How can we create the kind of places that have “15-minute neighborhoods” and Complete Streets without displacing existing communities (with households of generally lower income and wealth)?

2

Some people feel like “this neighborhood isn’t for us anymore.” How do we make sure that when we invest in neighborhoods, that the cultural value of a place stays intact?

3

Capitalism has created a lot of the tension that exists today, primarily around income and racial inequality. Can you use free enterprise and capitalism and some of the unique attributes of the American economy to create social change?

## What to do next



### Developers

Stay bold, stand, and deliver. Encourage practitioners, planners, investors to simply be bold. Coming out of what we thought was the peak of COVID-19, we all have that heaviness of dealing with yet another mountain to climb. There is general skepticism around the private sector’s ability to generate social impact at the same time as collecting high returns on investment. Developers can support equity by walking the walk and pushing their capital into the community in scalable ways and move the community forward.

### Community coalitions

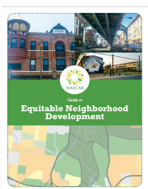
Preventing displacement takes a lot of time and effort. There’s often a mismatch between the challenge and the solution—planners have to constantly play catch up to help folks keep their homes and businesses.



**“Our model is doing well by doing good, not doing well and doing good.”**

- Martin Muoto, principal and co-founder of SoLa Impact

## Recommended reading



**Promising Practices for Equitable Neighborhood Development by the NALCAB**

The National Association of Latino Community Asset Builders developed a methodology for analyzing neighborhood change to anticipate gentrification in established communities.



**Gowanus Neighborhood Plan: Racial Equity Report on Housing and Opportunity**

This report by Lance Freeman at Columbia University outlines the potential impacts on the Gowanus neighborhood’s racial diversity and the availability of below-market housing units.



**Zoned In: Economic Benefits & Shared Prosperity with Form-Based Codes by Smart Growth America**

This report compares conventional zoning codes versus form-based codes to assess whether form-based codes have a significant, positive impact on their communities’ economic performance.



## Council Staff Response to Recommendations in the Racial Equity and Social Justice Review Report

General		
Recommendation	Potential Edit to the Draft	Action through Implementation
For all plan chapters, the “How will we evaluate progress?” sections need to include establishing specific targets for equity outcomes - for example: Establish criteria to support black owned businesses recruitment and retention	The PHED Committee Draft includes a list of metrics that may be used to monitor and evaluate progress on the Plan. These lists, at the end of each chapter, are intended as informational and not an exhaustive list of the metrics that will be developed and evaluated on a regular basis.	The Action Appendix currently addresses implementation actions proposed to implement the Plan policies and practices. This Appendix should be updated based on the adopted Plan and include detailed information on metrics and evaluation procedures, including metrics to measure equity outcomes moving forward.
After revising Thrive: Revisit with low-income and BIPOC communities to make sure communities can support the policies before passing the document		Reconnect with low-income and BIPOC communities as well as the focus group members to help revise Implementation/Action Appendix.
Conduct a housing study that will seek to address displacement fears by community, determine how to achieve growth targets, and identify barriers to successful implementation		As part of the Action Appendix review assess the extent to which recent and ongoing work/studies undertaken by the Planning Department include evaluation of displacement, growth targets, and barriers to policy implementation.

Establish working relationships with Communities that prioritize participatory planning and delegate power to vulnerable communities	<p>Edit text in the Introduction on page 9 as follows:</p> <p>“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. <u>To this end, planning must establish working, on-going relationships with communities that prioritize participatory planning and must delegate more power to vulnerable communities to bring their voices forward.</u>”</p>	
<b>Compact Growth</b>		
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Potential Edit to the Draft</b>	<b>Action through implementation</b>
Focus density near transit stations	<p>No edit necessary, the Plan includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed growth map on page 20 and the explanation of different tiers (on page 21) is all about concentrating density near transit stations.</li> <li>• Page 19: The intensity of development along these corridors should be aligned with the urban, suburban, and rural context and calibrated to account for existing or planned transit and other transportation infrastructure.</li> <li>• Page 22: Under the <b>“Concentrate growth in centers of activity and along corridors through compact, infill development and redevelopment to maximize the efficient use of land”</b> policy is the following practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Amend land use, design, and zoning regulations, including the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, to support corridor-focused compact development. Appropriate densities will vary but should be sufficient to support, at a minimum, the efficient provision of transit service along these corridors.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

When new development comes, efforts need to be made to ensure that the existing community benefits in a significant and meaningful way. Community Benefit Agreements need to have accountability mechanisms and follow up to measure outcomes	Edit text on page 32 as follows: “Specific strategies will be needed to recognize and minimize the negative impacts of gentrification on communities and businesses at risk of displacement, including the recommendations described in the chapter on housing together with policies outside the scope of this plan, such as direct assistance to small and minority-owned businesses <u>and Community Benefit Agreements</u> . <u>It is important to note that these strategies should include accountability mechanisms and metrics to track outcomes.</u> ”	(CC chapter - move)
Partner compact growth with social work that helps residents access housing affordability resources		Add to the Action Appendix: Partner with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs and other not-for-profit housing entities to ensure that residents are informed and provided assistance in accessing housing affordability resources.
Create policy framework to ensure that BIPOC businesses are accessing opportunities in new development(s)	Add a practice under the following policy: <b>“Promote and prioritize public investment in infrastructure along growth corridors and leverage it to attract future private investment in a compact form.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Develop a policy framework to ensure that businesses owned or operated by Black, Indigenous or People of Color are accessing opportunities in new development(s).</u>”</li> </ul>	Also add to Action Appendix: Create policy framework to ensure that BIPOC businesses are accessing opportunities in new development(s).
In existing low-income areas, prioritize development of parks, open-space and institutional uses to support improved property values	No edit necessary, the Plan includes the following: <b>Ensure that parks and recreation opportunities are equitably distributed along racial, socioeconomic, and geographic lines.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amend the EPS Plan study area to incorporate a more refined analysis of equity in its methodology.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand and improve the use of racial and socioeconomic equity measures in developing capital budgets for park and recreation facilities.</li> <li>• Gather data on – and address – barriers to participation in park and recreation programs.</li> <li>• Improve accessibility of park and recreation facilities via walking, biking and transit.</li> <li>• Ensure that urban, suburban, and rural areas all have access to great parks.</li> </ul>	
If market rate housing is going to be built in areas with naturally occurring affordable housing, strong tools to prevent displacement are needed	Edit practices on page 32 as follows: Prioritize neighborhood-level land use planning as a tool to enhance overall quality of community life and avoid reinforcing outdated land use patterns, <u>with particular attention to preventing displacement.</u>	(CC chapter – move)
Design a clear growth management strategy to protect communities of color from displacement and overcrowding	No edit necessary, under the policy “ <b>Promote racial and economic diversity and equity in housing in every neighborhood</b> ” on page 66, is the practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop targeted strategies to minimize gentrification and displacement while promoting integration and avoiding a concentration of poverty.</li> </ul>	
Neighborhood stabilization and conservation strategies for communities of color	While the Plan has text to this effect and a practice in the Transportation and Communication Networks chapter, a practice under the “ <b>Identify and integrate elements needed to complete centers of housing, retail, and office development and plan to make 15-minute living a reality for as many people as possible</b> ” policy on page 32 could be added as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Support the creation of neighborhood stabilization and conservation strategies for communities of color.</u></li> </ul>	(CC chapter – move)
<b>Complete Communities</b>		

Recommendation	Potential Edit to the Draft	Action through implementation
Planning must seek to strengthen existing communities to make them complete. Social networks should be leveraged, and institutions strengthened.	Edit a practice under the <b>“Identify and integrate elements needed to complete centers of housing, retail, and office development and plan to make 15-minute living a reality for as many people as possible”</b> policy on page 32 as follows: Adopt planning approaches that prioritize providing more Complete Communities in service to improving the quality of community life throughout the county <u>that also strengthen existing communities through support of social networks and local institutions.</u>	
Work with County to set up incentives for workforce development youth + adult		Add to Action Appendix: Work with County to create incentives for workforce development for youth and adults.
Leverage partnerships to increase education access		Add to Action Appendix: Leverage public and private partnerships to increase education access.
<b>Design, Arts, and Culture</b>		
Recommendation	Potential Edit to the Draft	Action through implementation
Leverage rich diversity in the County, especially in places like Silver Spring, Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Germantown.	Edit a practice under the <b>“Support arts and cultural institutions and programming to educate, connect and build communities that celebrate our diversity and strengthen pride of place”</b> policy on page 40 as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote public art, cultural spaces, and cultural hubs along corridors and in Complete Communities, <u>leveraging the County’s rich cultural and socio-economic diversity.</u></li> </ul>	

Explore ways to celebrate “Diversity Hubs” in Montgomery County as places to reinforce inclusion.	<p>Add a practice under the <b>“Support arts and cultural institutions and programming to educate, connect and build communities that celebrate our diversity and strengthen pride of place”</b> policy on page 40 as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Explore ways to celebrate “Diversity Hubs” in Montgomery County as places to reinforce inclusion.</u></li> </ul>	
Invest in urban design and architecture that promotes safe communities and civic pride	<p>Add a sub-practice under <b>“Use design-based tools to create attractive places with lasting value that encourage social interaction and reinforce a sense of place and inclusion.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider changes to codes, design guidelines, and regulatory tools as well as broader use of form-based zoning that focuses on the physical forms of buildings, streets, and spaces to ensure development across the county satisfies the following:” on page 38 as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Encourage investment in urban design and architecture that promotes safe communities and civic pride.</u></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
Consider CPTED or other standards to encourage safe/welcoming public spaces	<p>Add a sub-practice under <b>“Use design-based tools to create attractive places with lasting value that encourage social interaction and reinforce a sense of place and inclusion.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider changes to codes, design guidelines, and regulatory tools as well as broader use of form-based zoning that focuses on the physical forms of buildings, streets, and spaces to ensure development across the county satisfies the following:” on page 38 as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Evaluate the use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) or other standards in the development of Design Guidelines to encourage safe/welcoming public spaces.</u></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

Discourage walls and buffers which keep communities disconnected	<p>Edit a sub-practice under <b>“Use design-based tools to create attractive places with lasting value that encourage social interaction and reinforce a sense of place and inclusion.”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider changes to codes, design guidelines, and regulatory tools as well as broader use of form-based zoning that focuses on the physical forms of buildings, streets, and spaces to ensure development across the county satisfies the following:” on page 39 as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Link individual architectural projects seamlessly to their surroundings irrespective of style, <u>discouraging walls and buffers that can separate or disconnect communities</u>. Civic buildings and public gathering places must be treated as important sites whose design reinforces community identity and a culture of inclusion and democracy.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
Create official channels for BIPOC artists, neighbors, and businesses owners to come together to provide input on arts and culture		Add to Action Appendix: Create official channels for BIPOC artists, neighbors, and businesses owners to come together to provide input on arts and culture.
Create training, internship, and jobs programs for local artists, specifically local BIPOC artists, to get jobs in advancing public arts and culture		Add to Action Appendix: Create training, internship, and jobs programs for local artists, specifically local BIPOC artists, to get jobs in advancing public arts and culture.
Prioritize inclusion of racial minorities and immigrants in public placemaking to help nurture a sense of culture which celebrates all residents	<p>Add a practice under the <b>“Support arts and cultural institutions and programming to educate, connect and build communities that celebrate our diversity and strengthen pride of place.”</b> policy as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Prioritize inclusion of racial minorities and immigrants in public placemaking to help nurture a sense of culture which celebrates all residents.</u></li> </ul>	



Invest in urban design that allows communities to adapt to climate change and extreme weather patterns. Pair these plans with long-term maintenance plans to detail plans for maintenance, key players involved, and populations impacted by these plans	<p>No edit necessary, under the policy “<b>Promote design strategies and retrofits to make new and existing buildings more sustainable and resilient to disruption and change.</b>” on pages 39-40 are the following practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage state-of-the-practice sustainability features such as net-zero/carbon-positive buildings, biophilic design and on-site energy generation for new public buildings and large private developments on sites across the county.</li> <li>• Implement policies to ensure that new buildings and parking structures are adaptable to changing technologies and market preferences and are able to mitigate effects of climate change over time.</li> </ul>	In the Action Appendix is the follow suggested action: “Develop guidelines and standards for climate-sensitive design principles and materials for new public and private development projects. Ensure these standards include strategies to maximize greenhouse gas reductions in the built environment, including generating clean renewable energy and reducing heat island effect.”
Sustainable Urban Design needs to be accompanied by formal guidance that ensures equitable use of design technique, sustainable materials, and investment in sustainable infrastructure in all neighborhoods, regardless of the demographic composition of a neighborhood	(See above)	(See above)
Create plans to specifically reuse existing viable buildings to support BIPOC entrepreneurs access affordable spaces for small local businesses	<p>No edit necessary, under the policy “<b>Promote design strategies and retrofits to make new and existing buildings more sustainable and resilient to disruption and change.</b>” on page 39 is the following practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote cost-effective infill and adaptive reuse design strategies to retrofit single-use commercial sites such as retail strips, malls, and office parks into mixed use developments.</li> <li>• Incentivize the reuse of historic buildings and existing structures to accommodate the evolution of communities, maintain building diversity, preserve naturally occurring</li> </ul>	Add to Action Appendix: Create plans to specifically reuse existing viable buildings to support BIPOC entrepreneurs access affordable spaces for small local businesses.

	affordable space, and retain embodied energy of structures.	
<b>Transportation and Communication Networks</b>		
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Potential Edit to the Draft</b>	<b>Action through implementation</b>
Improve access to the Ag reserve and urban centers, from neighborhoods through Multi-Modal Transit	<p>Edit a practice under the <b>“Preserve and enhance the Agricultural Reserve and manage it to maintain a rural pattern of development for the benefit of the entire county.”</b> policy on page 23 as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Improve awareness of and <u>multi-modal</u> access to the Agricultural Reserve for the public to experience and directly benefit from this valuable resource for locally grown food, outdoor recreation, and tourism.”</li> </ul>	
Subsidize the cost of shared mobility options for residents with limited access to train stations or bus stops		Add to the Action Appendix: Develop a program to subsidize the cost of shared mobility options for residents with limited access to train stations or bus stops
Encourage mixed-use zoning to integrate a balance of parking options to accommodate car-dependent residents	<p>Edit the following policy and practices on page 50 of the PHED Draft as follows: <b>“Adapt policies to reflect the economic and environmental costs of driving alone, <u>recognizing car-dependent residents and industries remain.</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employ pricing mechanisms, such as congestion pricing or the collection and allocation of tolls, <u>equitably</u> to support walking, rolling, bicycling, and transit.</li> <li>• Manage parking efficiently <u>and equitably</u> by charging market rates and reducing the supply of public and private parking.</li> </ul>	
Encourage Antiracism, accessibility, and implicit bias training for		Add to the Action Appendix: Encourage Antiracism, accessibility, and implicit

transportation officials, including decision makers, planners, agency leaders, and bus and train conductors.		bias training for transportation officials, including decision makers, planners, agency leaders, and bus and train conductors.
Address issues faced by commuters travelling to/from outside of the County for work through regional collaboration	<p>Edit the following policy, adding a practice related to regional collaboration, <b>“Develop a safe, comfortable and appealing <u>transportation network for walking, biking, and rolling.</u>”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support regional collaboration to address challenges faced by commuters travelling to/from outside of the County.</li> </ul>	
Consider exemptions for policies such as congestion pricing and reduced parking for low-income and BIPOC communities	<p>Further edit the following policy and practices on page 50 of the PHED Draft as follows: <b>“Adapt policies to reflect the economic and environmental costs of driving alone, <u>recognizing car-dependent residents and industries will remain.</u>”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employ pricing mechanisms, such as congestion pricing or the collection and allocation of tolls, <u>equitably</u> to support walking, rolling, bicycling, and transit.</li> <li>• Manage parking efficiently <u>and equitably</u> by charging market rates and reducing the supply of public and private parking.</li> <li>• <u>Consider exemptions for policies such as congestion pricing and reduced parking for low-income individuals.</u></li> </ul>	
Look at ways to address the costs of transit		Add to the Action Appendix: Investigate mechanism to reduce the cost of transit.
Consider creating land uses such as lots for essential vehicles		Add to the Action Appendix: Consider creating land uses such as lots for private essential vehicles, such as service trucks and shared use vehicles.

Improve communication to address anxiety over changes		Add to Action Appendix: Develop a communication plan to inform and educate changes in policies and regulations in land use.
Identify strategies and partnerships to help address the “digital divide” bringing free networked resources to vulnerable communities	<p>Add a practice under the following policy on page 51 as follows:</p> <p><b>“Develop and extend advanced communications networks.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support strategies and partnerships to address the “digital divide” and bring network resources to vulnerable communities.</li> </ul>	Add to the Action Appendix: Identify strategies and partnerships to help address the “digital divide”.
<b>Housing for All</b>		
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Potential Edit to the Draft</b>	<b>Action through implementation</b>
Encourage establishment of rent to own programs and create systems to educate homeowners on how to protect and enhance their investments.	<p>No edit necessary, under the policy, <b>“Promote racial and economic diversity and equity in housing in every neighborhood”</b> is the following practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand existing programs designed to increase access to homeownership, especially among low-income residents, people of color, and young adults; create new programs and entities such as community land trusts to maintain long term affordable homeownership opportunities.</li> </ul>	Add to Action Appendix: Increase outreach and education to renters on rent to own programs and create or expand educational programs for homeowners on how to protect and enhance their investments.
Make home improvement and maintenance incentives available to low income property owners who spend a certain proportion of their income on housing costs.		Add to the Action Appendix: Expand home improvement and maintenance incentives available to low income property owners who spend a certain proportion of their income on housing costs, including potential modifications to the single-family rehabilitation loan program administered by the Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

Weatherization programs will help with County’s sustainability goals and improve health outcomes for residents. Prioritize making grant dollars and incentives available to low income families to improve their indoor environmental quality and overall resource management.		Add to the Action Appendix: Prioritize incentives available to low income families to improve their indoor environmental quality and overall resource management, including grants and educational resources.
Integrate high-income neighborhoods by identifying a threshold of low-income housing which supports the local economy – enough housing should be provided to ensure that people who work in retail, service and other low wage earning employment sectors have the option not to commute.	<p>Edit a practice under the <b>“Encourage the production of more housing to better match supply with demand”</b> policy as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of income-restricted affordable housing units, especially for low-income households <u>with particular attention to high-income areas to ensure that people who work in retail, service and other low wage earning employment sectors have the option not to commute.</u></li> </ul>	
Develop a zoning and design strategy which allows different housing types to be built and high income (primarily single family) areas that will preserve existing property values through careful design and allow for low income residents to live with dignity.	<p>Edit a practice under the <b>“Plan for a wide range of housing types and sizes to meet diverse needs”</b> policy as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support creative housing options including personal living quarters and/or micro units; “missing middle” housing types such as tiny houses, cottages, duplexes, multiplexes, and small apartment buildings; shared housing, cooperative housing, co- housing, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs), to help meet housing needs and diversify housing options <u>throughout the County.”</u></li> </ul>	
Missing Middle: Based on the observed trend over time of the widening wealth gap between economic elites and the working		Add to Action Appendix: Study the potential for expansion and/changes to the County’s Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit and Workforce Housing Programs.

class, it is doubly important to ensure that future development makes room for the growing low to moderate income class. New development should preserve at least 15 to 20% of units for the lowest income earners, but also set aside at least 20% for low to moderate income households i.e. Workforce housing that people earning standard wage jobs can afford.		
Promote and expand inclusionary zoning with tools such as density bonuses and reduced parking requirements for developers that build affordable housing		Add to Action Appendix: Evaluate the success and/or possible modifications to the current inclusionary zoning tools such a density bonuses and reduced parking requirements.
Develop system for measuring outcomes to ensure that initiatives put in place to help communities of color are having intended outcomes.		Add to Action Appendix: Develop system for measuring outcomes to ensure that initiatives put in place to help communities of color are having intended outcomes.
Increase checks and balances to offset the personal bias that impacts programs meant to help people of color but end up causing problems due to inadequate safeguards.		Add to Action Appendix: As part of the continued implementation of the Racial Equity and Social Justice Act, increase checks and balances to offset the personal bias that impacts programs meant to help people of color but can end up causing harm due to inadequate safeguards.
Reestablish the River Road Growth Corridor to provide opportunities	River Road from the Beltway to Potomac Village was removed in the PHED Committee Draft as a corridor since this portion of River Road does not meet the definition of a corridor. This	

for low-moderate income housing development.	<p>recommendation is focused on housing opportunities. The following policy and revised practice further the goal of more housing in higher-income areas: <b>“Encourage the production of more housing to better match supply with demand”</b> policy as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of income-restricted affordable housing units, especially for low-income households <u>with particular attention to high-income areas to ensure that people who work in retail, service and other low wage earning employment sectors have the option not to commute.</u></li> </ul>	
Identify new mechanisms to provide supportive housing for vulnerable residents, with a special focus on those who may be aging out of youth programs (18-24)	<p>Edit a practice under the <b>“Encourage the production of more housing to better match supply with demand.”</b> policy as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the commitment to the Housing First approach, develop strategies to build deeply affordable housing and provide permanent supportive housing, <u>with a special focus on those who may be aging out of youth programs.</u></li> </ul>	
Advocate on the state and federal level of funding to support development of low-income housing		Add to Action Appendix: Advocate on the state and federal level for funding to support development of low-income housing.
Identify and inventory existing areas that have private restrictive covenants and work with state to address		Montgomery Planning is already working on the <i>Mapping Segregation</i> project to identify racial restrictive covenants. Could add to the Action Appendix an item to address restrictive covenants by homeowners’ associations at the state level.

<p>Work with lenders to make capital available to BIPOC and low-income first-time home buyers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify subsidies to support down payment and weatherization and</li> <li>- integrate green systems opportunities (solar, water, etc.)</li> </ul>		<p>Add to Action Appendix: Work with lenders to make capital available to BIPOC and low-income first-time home buyers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify subsidies to support down payment and weatherization and</li> <li>- integrate green systems opportunities (solar, water, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p>Identify Affordable housing targets and create realistic measures to reach them</p>		<p>N/A: The County supports the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments' regional housing targets, including targets for Montgomery County. And the Action Appendix currently includes an action to "Create a Housing Functional Master Plan to provide measurable housing goals and strategies for different market segments in Montgomery County as well as an analysis of affordability gaps and impediments to the housing supply."</p>
<p>Preserve naturally occurring affordable housing</p>	<p>No edit necessary, under the <b>"Promote racial and economic diversity and equity in housing in every neighborhood"</b> policy on page 65 is the following practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refine regulatory tools and financial and other incentives with the goal of avoiding a net loss of market-rate and income-restricted affordable housing stock without erecting disincentives for the construction of additional units.</li> </ul>	
<p>Develop social and cooperative housing</p>	<p>No edit necessary, under the <b>"Plan for a wide range of housing types and sizes to meet diverse needs"</b> policy is the following practice:</p>	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider features of other housing models such as social housing that, in addition to providing long-term affordability for low and moderate-income households, emphasizes architectural quality, environmental performance, and social stability.</li> </ul>	
Strengthen strategies to deal with unsheltered populations	<p>Edit the following practice under the <b>“Encourage the production of more housing to better match supply with demand”</b> policy as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of the commitment to the Housing First approach, develop strategies to build deeply affordable housing and provide permanent supportive housing in support of <u>unsheltered populations and those who may be aging out of youth programs.</u></li> </ul>	
Strengthen strategies aimed at foreclosure prevention		Add to Action Appendix: Evaluate and strengthen strategies aimed at foreclosure prevention.
Increase developer impact fees if the economic case can be made		Council is required to review the Growth and Infrastructure Policy on a quadrennial basis which often includes an evaluation of development impact fees. It is not needed in the Action Appendix for the General Plan.
<b>Parks, Recreation, and Natural Resources</b>		
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Potential Edit to the Draft</b>	<b>Action through implementation</b>
Establish clear environmental thresholds and targets with a focus on improving access to parks and enhancing environmental quality and resource management in communities of color	<p>No edit necessary, under the <b>“Ensure that parks and recreation opportunities are equitably distributed along racial, socioeconomic, and geographic lines.”</b> are the following two practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amend the Energized Public Spaces Plan study area to incorporate a more refined analysis of equity in its methodology.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand and improve the use of racial and socioeconomic equity measures in developing capital budgets for park and recreation facilities.</li> </ul>	
Inventory and establish plan to address environmental justice issues		<p>Two actions already included in the Action Appendix:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Develop guidance to conduct a racial equity and social justice impact analysis when planning, designing and budgeting for new community facilities such as libraries, recreation centers, schools, parks, and public infrastructure to determine whether the new amenity will be accessible to nearby residents of all backgrounds and will reduce any existing inequities in access.”</li> <li>“Ensure environmental and sustainability services improve public health, allow for opportunities for nature interpretation and education, and corrects environmental justices within equity and/or densely populated areas.”</li> </ul>
<b>Racial Equity and Social Justice</b>		
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Potential Edit to the Draft</b>	<b>Action through implementation</b>
Conduct analysis to determine social and economic costs of past discriminatory practices to develop an implementation plan to address the legacies of racism. This should		Add to Action Appendix: however, should be noted that a thorough analysis should include multiple county departments and agencies.

serve as a baseline for determining what reparations might look like.		
Capital Improvement Program should be aligned with Thrive		There is language in the economy chapter recommending the Capital Improvements Program be aligned with Thrive; however, an item could be added to the Action Appendix requiring a systematic review.
Ensure that priority is given to projects that show benefit to vulnerable communities. Address the most serious 'wounds' first.		If there is to be a systematic review of the alignment of the CIP with Thrive, use of the Equity Focus Areas (already developed by Planning), and the Community Equity Index (currently being developed) could help with prioritization of project with the most benefit to vulnerable communities.
Protect and preserve historic African American and Indigenous sites	<p>Add a practice under the <b>"Use design-based tools to create attractive places with lasting value that encourage social interaction and reinforce a sense of place and inclusion."</b> policy as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Support the preservation of historic African American and Indigenous cultural sites and resources.</u></li> </ul>	In the current Action Appendix is the following action item: "Partner with local, statewide, and federal cultural heritage organizations to seek grants that promote and preserve historical and cultural sites county wide."
Encourage distribution of assets and resources that reflects a prioritization of historically disadvantaged residents, giving them a chance to "catch-up" and level the proverbial playing field.		This would be supported by the earlier recommendation to add a systematic review of the alignment of CIP with Thrive using the Equity Focus Areas and a soon to be complete, Community Equity Index, as tools in the evaluation.
Establish programs and policies which create opportunities for vulnerable groups to participate more fully in business opportunities		Add to Action Appendix for the Executive Branch or MCEDC: Establish programs and policies which create opportunities for vulnerable groups to

		participate more fully in business opportunities.
Look for opportunities to improve outcomes for vulnerable communities through regional partnerships and collaboration		Add to the Action Appendix: Explore opportunities to improve outcomes for vulnerable communities through regional partnerships and collaboration.
Hospitality and Life Sciences cluster - Work to achieve a way in for low-income and minority residents through partnerships and workforce development opportunities		Add to the Action Appendix for the Executive Branch, MCEDC or WorkSource Montgomery: Explore avenues of entry into the Hospitality and Life Science sector for low-income and minority residents; consider partnerships and workforce development opportunities.
Identify opportunities for Capacity Building to increase the capacity for target communities to have meaningful participation - Create pathways into the planning profession for local people of color from diverse communities		Add to Action Appendix: Identify opportunities for Capacity Building to increase the capacity for target communities to have meaningful participation. Currently in the Action Appendix is the following proposed action: "Partner with Montgomery County Public Schools to introduce students to Thrive Montgomery 2050 and local land use planning as a part of the standard educational curriculum."

## **Council Staff suggested edits to the PHED Committee Draft Thrive Montgomery 2050**

### **INTRODUCTION**

When Montgomery County adopted its first general plan, known as the “Wedges and Corridors Plan”, in 1964, much of our land was undeveloped. The 1964 plan – as modified by “refinements” adopted in 1969 and 1993 - embraced many of the principles and ideas that are still of value today, such as an emphasis on the preservation of the Agricultural Reserve, development of physically concentrated centers of all sizes, and encouragement of land use patterns that could be effectively served by a multi-modal transportation system. These plans helped to make the County one of the most desirable places to live and work in the United States. Our success has been built on an award-winning park system, high-quality schools, preserving our agricultural and natural resources, fostering the emergence of urban centers and mass transit, and shaping the design of attractive suburban subdivisions.

The Wedges and Corridors Plan was visionary, and its refinements were largely effective in adapting its principles and ideas to the needs of a growing population; however, today we find ourselves facing new challenges and changing circumstances. We have evolved from a bedroom community to a complex jurisdiction with major employment centers and mature residential neighborhoods. As a group, our residents are older, more diverse, and less likely to live in traditional family arrangements. We have a highly educated workforce, proximity to the nation’s capital, and a culture of openness to newcomers, but we also are struggling to attract businesses and house our residents, grappling with a legacy of racial and economic inequality, and facing the effects of climate change.

In addition, we now see that not all of the changes in our approach to planning were beneficial. The 1993 refinement established the residential wedge, identified as an area for “maintaining a low-density residential character” and directed most growth to the “urban ring” and I-270 corridor. However, the removal of the eastern portion of the County as a location suitable for corridor-focused development discouraged public and private investment in this area. The establishment of the residential wedge consigned more than one-third of the County to zoning exclusively for single family homes, leaving many of our neighborhoods reliant on automobiles and disconnected from many amenities and services. These decisions, in conjunction with discriminatory land use and planning-related practices such as redlining and restrictive covenants (both created by the real estate and financial industries and then adopted by government agencies), established inequitable patterns of development that must be recognized and addressed in ways that do not compound the issues caused by displacement and gentrification.

Today the combination of rapid social, environmental, technological, demographic, and economic shifts at the national and global levels along with our new context requires us to take a clear-eyed look at our strengths and weaknesses. We have tremendous assets, but if we hope to continue to thrive, we must be prepared to make difficult decisions and take bold steps to prepare for the future. Thrive Montgomery 2050 is the vehicle for assessing the implications of

these shifts for land use, transportation and public infrastructure and adapting our approach to planning and growth for the next 30 years.

## WHAT IS A GENERAL PLAN?

A general plan is a long-range guide for the development of a community. Every jurisdiction must adopt some form of general or “comprehensive” plan as a legal predicate for the exercise of the government’s land use and zoning powers. The purpose of a 30-year plan is not to predict and respond to a single future, but to provide broad guidance for land use decisions as we face multiple, unpredictable future opportunities and challenges that influence growth and development such as disruptions brought about by climate change, pandemics, or terrorist attacks as well as the consequences of innovations such as autonomous vehicles and micro transit.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is the county’s update to our general plan. It is a framework for future plans and development that defines the basic land use policies and context for all public and private development in the county. It provides direction for decisions about land use, transportation, and related issues under local government influence, but it does not by itself change zoning or other detailed land use regulations (although implementation of its recommendations would require such changes). Its recommendations also touch on the objectives and actions of other public and private entities that are responsible for implementing and providing land use related services and amenities. However, while the general plan provides guidance to the entire county, that guidance is not binding upon those municipalities that have independent planning, zoning, and subdivision authority<sup>1</sup>.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 does not abandon or reject the Wedges and Corridors concept but instead modernizes it to remain relevant. Area master plans, sector plans, and countywide functional plans will remain valid until modified pursuant to the guidance provided by this plan. Like the previous general plan its broad policy recommendations pave the way for future actions, such as amendments to other plans, policies, and development rules.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 has a 30-year time horizon, but it is designed to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. It is designed to provide long-term guiding principles and objectives that can deal with a constantly changing economic, social, and environmental landscape.

To that end, Thrive Montgomery 2050 will inform future master and functional plans. Master plans (or area master plans or sector plans) are long-term planning documents for a specific place or geographic area of the county. All master plans are amendments to the General Plan. They provide detailed land use and zoning recommendations for specific areas of the county. They also address transportation, the natural environment, urban design, historic resources, affordable housing, economic development, public facilities, and implementation techniques. Many of Thrive Montgomery 2050’s recommendations cannot be implemented with a one-size- fits-all

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<sup>1</sup> This includes the Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg, and the municipalities of Barnesville, Brookeville, Laytonsville, Poolesville, and Washington Grove.

approach. Area master plans will help refine Thrive Montgomery 2050 recommendations and implement them at a scale tailored to specific neighborhoods.

Functional plans are master plans addressing a system, such as traffic circulation or green infrastructure, or a policy, such as agricultural preservation or housing. A functional master plan amends the General Plan and may include recommendations on land use and zoning. The Master Plan of Highways and Transitways, the Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan, and the Master Plan for Historic Preservation are functional plans that do not include land use or zoning recommendations; however, the Preservation of Agriculture & Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan does. New and revised functional master plans can help refine and implement Thrive Montgomery 2050 recommendations that affect county-wide systems and/or policies.

## **A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is about addressing historic inequities, embracing new realities, and shifting the way we think about how the county should grow. Montgomery County has many assets and advantages. Our strengths will enable us to continue to thrive, but we must also take a hard look at where we have been, where we are going, and how we want to get there.

Montgomery County is growing more slowly than in past decades, but our population is still projected by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to increase by about 200,000 people over the next 30 years. We have little undeveloped land left to accommodate this growth, even if new construction is compact. With 85 percent of our land already developed or otherwise constrained, accommodating even the modest growth expected over the life of this plan is an ambitious undertaking. The way we think about growth needs to change. We need to reconsider sites previously considered unsuitable for development, such as parking lots or the air rights over existing buildings, and find ways to use land more efficiently.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 offers a blueprint for new approaches that are needed immediately and will extend over a period of decades. These strategies [will] aim to accommodate growth in ways that make room for new residents and also improve the quality of life for the people who already live here. The plan anticipates a county that will become more urban, more diverse, and more interconnected. It guides us to leverage growth and redevelopment to create places that are more economically competitive, foster a stronger sense of trust and inclusiveness among people from different backgrounds, and improve environmental quality and public health in the process.

## **Plan Framework and Overarching Objectives**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 aims to create communities that offer equitable access to jobs, more housing, transportation, parks, and public spaces. Just as importantly, it can help guide the design of the built environment to strengthen the social and physical health of our residents, supporting active lifestyles and encouraging interaction and engagement. This framework embraces and builds on the Wedges and Corridors plan, with a greater emphasis on the development of compact, complete communities and the role of major corridors as places to grow. It also

supports greater conservation and expanded protection of our natural resources, and recognizes the importance of integrating arts and culture in our communities. [The plan is designed to integrate arts and culture into the fabric of our community and open opportunities for creative expression.]

The ideas and recommendations in this plan are organized to achieve three overarching objectives: economic competitiveness, racial and social equity, and environmental sustainability.

## **Economic Performance and Competitiveness**

### **Opportunities and Challenges**

The county has significant concentrations in two private industry sectors: hospitality and life sciences, in addition to a strong Federal presence of offices and laboratories. These elements form a strong foundation to produce higher wage jobs and spur economic growth. Montgomery County is home to companies representing half of the market capitalization of the entire hospitality sector, and the Washington area is consistently ranked as one of the nation's top life science clusters, with I-270 as its epicenter. Local institutions such as the University of Maryland are leading ground-breaking research in emerging fields such as quantum computing.

We are also 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. We need to think about Montgomery County as a part of the larger region and find ways to work more effectively with other area governments on policies and projects that will help make us all stronger.

As we work to fortify the county's economic performance, we must simultaneously bolster our dominance in existing sectors, diversify our job base, improve connections to centers of employment and innovation throughout the region, and provide the kinds of infrastructure, services, and amenities that [will] can strengthen our ability to compete effectively in the future. Our quality of life depends on the ability to attract and retain employers and the employees they need.

We continue to benefit from our proximity to the nation's capital, which draws highly skilled, educated, and motivated people from all over the world, but we must also recognize that some key measures of Montgomery County's economic performance have been stagnant since the Great Recession of 2008. The total number of jobs in the county grew by five percent from 2004 to 2019, while 20 similarly sized counties across the country grew by an average of 21 percent. In addition, household income growth in the county has lagged the national average (-2 percent vs. 10 percent) and was the slowest in the region during this period. Montgomery County added jobs, albeit slowly, but growth came largely in lower-wage sectors of the economy.

How Thrive Montgomery 2050 addresses economic health



Thrive Montgomery 2050 can play[s] an important role in strengthening our economic competitiveness by fostering the creation [ng the kind] of places where people with diverse choices want to live and work. Its recommendations for land use, transportation, parks, and other public and private infrastructure 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 strategy for attracting workers to well-designed and planned complete communities, which in turn will entice businesses and employers to locate here.

Thrive Montgomery emphasizes that the county should support a diverse array of work environments. Re-energizing the county's commercial centers is a major goal of the plan, but so is the recognition that small offices or storefronts in Complete Communities and even home offices [will] are likely to be common workplaces in the 21st century. Different skill and education levels and linguistic, racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds infuse the local economy with the varied pool of skills, experiences, and perspectives necessary to solve problems and innovate. The Plan's compact land use pattern and walkable communities supported by an efficient transit network will connect the county's diverse population to economic opportunities.

### **Racial Equity and Social Justice**

#### **Opportunities and challenges**

Diversity and inclusion are essential to our economic success as well as to our ability to produce more equitable outcomes for all our residents, who deserve high quality housing, education, jobs, transportation, and recreational opportunities. The county's population has grown more diverse as a result of a steady influx of foreign-born immigrants. Montgomery County is home to some of the most culturally diverse places in the United States, including Silver Spring, Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Germantown.

But past patterns of discrimination – some intentional, some unintentional – have left 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. More recently, disinvestment from and abandonment of neighborhoods previously considered highly desirable, combined with the suburbanization of poverty, have created new geographic divisions and barriers to equity and inclusion. The 1993 Refinement of 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, focusing public and private investment to the west.

### **Impacts of Past Practices**

Today communities with high concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities also show lagging median household incomes, not because of their race or ethnicity but because financial precarity due to low wage jobs, high rates of being uninsured, declining business starts and lack of housing are experienced to a greater degree as a result of past and institutionalized discriminatory practices. Not surprising is the resulting gaps in quality-of-life indicators seen among too many Black, Hispanic, and Asian residents.

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. To this end, planning must establish working, on-going relationships with communities that prioritize participatory planning and must delegate more power to vulnerable communities to bring their voices forward.

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 inclusion**

In this regard, 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, the planning process, 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 can greatly influence levels of community cohesion and social interaction. Creating social capital requires the built environment

to encourage and make it easier for people to meet others and engage in activities. For this reason, Thrive Montgomery 2050 emphasizes the roles streets, parks, and public spaces play in creating a physical environment where a sense of community can flourish.

Advancing racial equity through just planning policies and public investments in underserved communities, promoting the racial and economic integration of neighborhoods, and focusing on the potential for the design of communities to help build social trust and inclusion while encouraging civic participation and participation in the planning process are among the most significant elements of Thrive Montgomery 2050. Thrive Montgomery 2050 strives to create racially integrated and just communities. Like economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability, policies designed to advance racial and social equity are integrated into every part of this Plan.

## Environmental Resilience

### Opportunities and challenges

The Wedges and Corridors Plan laid the groundwork for the adoption of forward-thinking policies that emphasized land preservation for resource conservation and agriculture, protection of our streams, forests, and trees and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. One-third of the county's land is now protected within the Agricultural Reserve and another 13.8 percent is under the stewardship of the Parks Department. Along with [aggressive] improved stormwater and forest conservation regulations, these efforts have established a strong framework for the protection of natural resources.

Despite these policies, however, additional work is still needed in these areas, including increased attention to localized flooding and loss of mature tree canopy. The county cannot avoid the impact of global climate change. Precipitation in northeastern United States increased by 55 percent between 1958 and 2016. This trend has meant more frequent violent weather events like the flash flooding that occurred in July 2019, when the D.C. region received a month's worth of rain in a single day, causing streams to rise 10 feet in less than an hour, inundating vehicles, businesses, roads and closing the Metrorail system. The past decade has also been the hottest 10-year period in the region's recorded history, with rising hospitalizations due to extreme heat impacts. Public health issues are exacerbated by climate change and intertwined with the quality of the built and natural environment. Where possible, these and other effects of climate change must be addressed in our land use policies. The adverse effects of a changing climate will be felt most acutely by low-income residents and people of color, who are likely to suffer a disproportionate share of the damage to real property and personal health due to past and current patterns of discrimination.

Montgomery County has made progress in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, a key contributor to climate change, but has much farther to go to meet its goal of eliminating these emissions by 2035. It will require significant changes in both the transportation and building sectors of the County. For transportation, the County should contemplate policies to facilitate a transition to zero-emissions vehicles (or other zero-emissions technologies). For buildings (both existing and new construction), the County should consider a combination of energy conservation measures and clean energy generation (such as rooftop solar PhotoVoltaic).

Together, buildings and transportation are responsible for more than 90 percent of our county's greenhouse gas emissions, making reduced reliance on driving and more energy-efficient buildings and compact development patterns essential to meeting our climate objectives.

#### How Thrive Montgomery 2050 addresses environmental resilience

Thrive Montgomery's focus on a compact form of development with a mix of uses supported by transportation systems that make alternatives to driving practical and attractive are essential pieces of any comprehensive strategy to fight climate change. A stronger focus on walking, biking, and transit infrastructure will be crucial, but the significance of mixed uses and compact development in reducing driving is equally important. The environmental benefits of dense, walkable neighborhoods dovetail with the increasing preference across age groups to live in walkable places served by a mix of uses and amenities.

Of course, not even the most sustainable 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. It prioritizes the equitable distribution and expansion of green infrastructure throughout the County. It supports alternative clean energy generation, distributed energy, grid modernization, improved composting and food waste recovery, and advances in other circular economy initiatives. And it proposes a series of strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change and minimize pollution. The plan also anticipates the need for public and private infrastructure to be made more resilient to withstand more severe weather and protect us from the effects of environmental degradation from sources that are beyond our ability to control.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 was drafted in coordination with the county's Climate Action Plan (CAP). While 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, the CAP recommends specific actions to be taken in the near-term to achieve the goal of eliminating 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. To effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow the effects of climate change will require "greening" of our electricity grid through a significant increase in clean energy generation in the County, likely employing both large-scale solar PV projects where feasible and smaller distributed solar PV installations. The Planning and Parks Departments also will implement recommendations in the CAP that are within the scope of the M-NCPPC's responsibilities. Together these plans [will] strive to create a comprehensive approach to climate change at the local level.

#### Other Important Objectives

The plan also addresses other important goals that complement the three overarching objectives discussed above.

## Improving Public Health and Encouraging Active Lifestyles

The length and quality of human life are strongly influenced by both the natural and built environment. In 2018, more than three-fifths of adults in Montgomery County were overweight or obese. Five of the seven zip codes in the county with household incomes in the lowest quartile are also among the zip codes with the lowest average life spans. And even though low-income residents and people of color are more likely to suffer from negative health outcomes for several reasons, all residents can benefit from a more active lifestyle supported by an emphasis on transit, walking, and biking, and easy access to parks, [and]recreational opportunities, and nature. The importance of healthy living for seniors and the disabled will also remain a significant area of focus as our ageing population continues to grow. Active lifestyles supported by improved housing choices in compact, complete communities can serve to improve public health for all, while simultaneously reducing the ecological footprint of human activity.

## Elevating Quality of Design and Highlighting Role of Arts and Culture

The Wedges and Corridors Plan envisioned a variety of living environments and encouraged “imaginative urban design” to avoid sterile suburban sprawl. Nonetheless, like every plan, that plan was a product of its time. It relied on design approaches that were typical of the 1960s, emphasizing the convenience of driving and rigid separation of land uses.

Good design is not a luxury but a critical economic development tool. Businesses and workers [now]today prefer walkable, accessible, amenity rich, mixed-use places that facilitate the interaction and exchange of ideas that feed innovation. A greater share of residents, across all ages, prefer walkable, transit-rich neighborhoods too. Combined with the lack of undeveloped land far from transit, these forces [dictate] indicate the need for a shift toward redevelopment and infill that converts “parking lots to places” near existing or planned transit lines and incorporating walkable form.

Our arts and culture sector, taken as a whole, would be the county’s sixth-largest employer. The sector taps into creative, social, and economic networks, and its practitioners have developed tools to share stories, encourage empathy, and empower creative exchange. Supporting a healthy and diverse arts and culture ecosystem will not only enrich the lives of our residents and bring us closer together but can also [will] help attract talent and spur innovation.

## URBANISM AS ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE

Thrive Montgomery 2050 applies the principles of urbanism – a term this plan uses as shorthand for a set of ideas about what makes human settlements successful – to guide their future growth. Urbanism draws on the lessons of thousands of years of experimentation and evolution in the design and development of villages, towns, and cities to apply the ideas that have proven to endure as the foundation for adaptable and resilient communities everywhere. An urbanism-focused approach to the development of land and related infrastructure (such as roadways, transit systems, and parks) emphasizes the value of: (1) a compact form of development; (2)

diverse uses and building types; and (3) transportation networks that take advantage of and complement these two land use strategies, at all densities and scales.

This approach calls for focusing growth in a limited number of locations rather than dispersing it, avoiding “sprawl.” It means encouraging in appropriate areas the agglomeration of different uses such as retail, housing, and office space as well as diversity within each type of use. For example, a variety of housing sizes and types near employment and retail can help[s] to ensure that people of diverse income levels can live and work in proximity to each other. This over time can produce[s] more racially and socioeconomically integrated neighborhoods and schools, [providing] and more equitable access to economic opportunities, public services, and amenities. It also emphasizes the importance of walking, biking and transit and reduces reliance on cars.

Of course, other factors – particularly quality and thoughtfulness in the design of buildings, streets, neighborhoods, [and] public spaces, and the incorporation of nature into urban areas – are also essential. Combined with the fundamentals of urbanism, design excellence and biophilic design<sup>2</sup> can help create a sense of place, facilitate social interaction, [and] encourage active lifestyles, and contribute to environmental resiliency. Compact development can also provide[s] other advantages including efficient use of scarce land, more natural areas for recreation and preservation, and reduced expense for building and maintaining infrastructure.

These principles of urbanism [are equally relevant to] benefit rural, suburban, and urban areas. In fact, the preservation of land for agriculture in a place like Montgomery County depends on concentrating development in urban centers instead of permitting sprawl, and even suburban and rural areas benefit from a mix of uses and housing types – at appropriately calibrated intensity and scale – to serve their needs.

With attention to both the functional and aesthetic aspects of design, urbanism is not only consistent with a commitment to maintaining the best of what has made Montgomery County attractive in the past but is necessary to preserve and build on these qualities while [correcting] addressing the challenges of auto-centric planning and its effects on the environment, racial equity, and social cohesion.

## HOW THRIVE MONTGOMEY 2050 WAS DEVELOPED

### Organization of the Plan

Related to the three primary objectives of economic competitiveness, racial and social equity, and environmental sustainability, the plan is organized into six chapters:

- Compact Growth: Corridor-Focused Development
- Complete Communities: Mix of Uses and Form
- Design, Arts, and Culture: Investing and Building Community
- Transportation and Communication Networks: Connecting People, Places, and Ideas
- Housing for All: More of Everything
- Parks and Recreation for an Increasingly Urban and Diverse Community: Active and Social

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<sup>2</sup> Biophilic Design is the practice of connecting people and nature within our built environments and communities.

The ideas in each chapter are intended to complement each other and outline approaches calibrated for varying scales of planning. The first three chapters move from the countywide scale (Compact Growth) to the district and neighborhood scale (Complete Communities) and finally to the details of individual blocks and buildings (Design, Arts, and Culture). The chapter on Compact Growth describes a countywide approach that aims to concentrate development along corridors to maximize the efficiency of infrastructure, preserve land, and focus investment. The Complete Communities chapter covers strategies for individual neighborhoods and districts that build on the foundation of a compact footprint for growth by incorporating a mix of uses, building types, and lot sizes to create livable places that are accessible and inviting to people with a variety of income levels, household sizes, and lifestyles. The Design, Arts and Culture chapter discusses the finer-grained analysis of design concepts applicable to blocks and individual development sites, the architecture of public and private buildings, the landscape of plazas and public spaces, and elements of street design.

These concepts are reinforced and supported by the remaining three chapters, which address specific topics related to development and public infrastructure. The Housing for All chapter recommendations are intended to diversify our housing stock across incomes, building types and geography. The Transportation and Communication Networks chapter outlines the multi-modal and digital infrastructure required to support compact growth and the creation of walkable, well-designed complete communities as well as the communication networks in the county. The Parks and Recreation chapter describes the role of public and privately-owned parks and gathering spaces in encouraging social interaction, promoting a healthy lifestyle through physical activity, and mitigating the effects of climate change through environmental stewardship. Each chapter explains how its recommendations serve the broader objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050 and provides suggested measures [metrics] to gauge progress in implementing the chapter's ideas. No plan that is designed to provide guidance over a period of decades can anticipate every difficult problem, attractive opportunity, or useful idea that may emerge, so these metrics should be used to assess new proposals as well as to measure the success or failure of the plan's recommendations over time.

### **A Plan Based on Community Input**

This Plan is the result of community feedback and collaboration over more than two years of extensive outreach by Montgomery Planning. Planners reached out to a wide spectrum of stakeholders including students; homeowners and civic associations; non-profit advocacy groups and community-based organizations; and representatives of large and small businesses. The outreach effort was designed to emphasize engagement with residents who will live longest with the recommendations made in this plan – Millennials and Gen Xers and high school and college students— as well as members of racial and ethnic groups who historically have been left out of land use and planning processes.

Thrive Montgomery 2050's community engagement activities were implemented through four phases beginning in summer 2019. Each of these phases—Excite, Educate, Engage, and Endorse—included specific objectives and communication and engagement strategies.



## Equitable Communications and Community Outreach

For historically underrepresented audiences – such as Latinos, African Americans, foreign born residents, renters, and small business owners-- outreach focused on connecting with community influencers who have established trust within their communities. This included co-hosting listening sessions and events, providing content for events and communications, and engaging their organizations with educational tools.

From June 2019 through April 2021, Montgomery Planning organized multiple in-person and virtual engagement activities to imagine what life in Montgomery County will be like in 2050 and what will be needed to ensure that we thrive in the decades to come. Planners participated in more than 180 meetings with community members and organizations; created and distributed a “Meeting-in-a-Box” for residents and organizations to host their own discussions about Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the county’s future; created an online quiz soliciting feedback on values and priorities for the plan; built a dedicated website (accessible both in English and in Spanish), [thrivemontgomery2050.com (and MontgomeryProspera.com in Spanish),] with a wealth of materials in multiple languages, and distributed tens of thousands of postcards and e-newsletters to reach community members across the county. [Montgomery Planning estimates that these efforts resulted in interactions with approximately 12,000 people.

*Thrive Montgomery 2050 looked at the largest minority languages where limited English proficiency was greater than 10% and created materials and advertising in multiple languages.*

### **Thrive Montgomery 2050 Engagement by the Numbers**

- Over 180 meetings with community
- 1,635 people completed online Thrive Montgomery 2050 Quiz
- 1,300 Meeting-in-a-Box postcards sent to HOAs + Community Associations
- 91,000 postcards to equity emphasis areas
- ThriveMontgomery.com – 102,641 web views
- E-letter signup – 1,384, with open rate of 40% (double industry average)
- Estimated participation – approximately **12,000**

### **Top five topics that received the most comments:**

1. Public transit
2. Affordable housing
3. Parks
4. Walkability
5. Education/Schools]

For a typical master or sector plan, one public hearing is held by the County Council. For plans that encompass a large area or contain recommendations for a large number of properties, the Council will hold two public hearings. For Thrive Montgomery 2050, the Council held two public hearings in June 2021.



Recognizing the interest in the Plan and hoping to receive input from as diverse a group of County residents and business-owners as possible, the Council created additional opportunities for community members to weigh in. A virtual Townhall was held in September 2021, where Thrive was one of the focus topics. In late 2021, following completion of the Committee Draft, the Council held two Community Listening Sessions, encouraging participation focused on the overarching goals of the Plan and the updates made by the Committee. In early 2022 at the request of the Council President, the Citizen Advisory Board of the County's five Regional Service Centers hosted a discussion of the Draft Plan, providing yet another opportunity to gather diverse thoughts on the updated Plan from residents across the County.

During this time of extended outreach, the Council also requested the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) conduct a racial equity and social justice review of the Plan. The primary finding from this review was that meaningful input on plan recommendations from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as well as other under-represented residents would require more targeted outreach best handled by a consultant with expertise in this area. In response, a consultant team with extensive experience engaging under-represented communities on a variety of topics, including land use planning, transportation, economic development, and housing were hired. In executing their work, the consultant team spent three months gathering input from communities of color and other under-represented groups within the County; specifically engaging these community members on the policies and practices recommended in the Committee Draft. As a result, the consultant team produced a report that includes recommended revisions based on input aimed at advancing racial equity and social justice, detailed information on targeted community engagement, a description of the community engagement process and the methodologies used to gather feedback, and recommendations applicable to any future outreach efforts.

# COMPACT GROWTH: Corridor-Focused Development

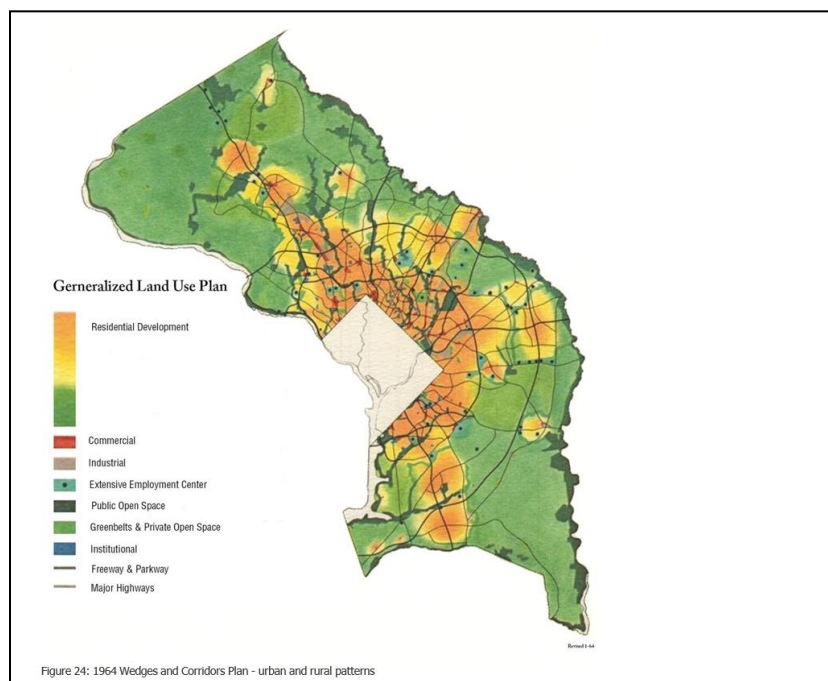
## Introduction: Compact Footprints along Multiple Corridors are Central to Future Growth

When the Wedges and Corridors Plan was adopted much of Montgomery County was undeveloped. The plan recognized, however, that what seemed to be abundant available land must be used wisely:

“Land should be treated as one of our most precious possessions, using efficiently what we need for accommodating expected urban growth, and conserving the rest for the unforeseeable future. Land is too valuable an asset to be heedlessly wasted by allowing it to be developed aimlessly in a scattered pattern.”

Accordingly, the Wedges and Corridors Plan recommended two distinct patterns of growth: the urban pattern and the rural pattern. The urban pattern was envisioned as a compact form of urban development, concentrated in the existing urban ring and proposed corridor cities along significant transportation corridors within the region, including the I-95/Route 29 corridor as well as the I-270/Route 355 corridor. The rural pattern, by contrast, was envisioned as serving four broad purposes:

“1) to help mold the urban pattern into an efficient and pleasant one; 2) to provide and protect large open spaces for the “change of pace” and recreational opportunities needed by present and future generations; 3) to provide a favorable rural environment in which farming, mineral extraction, hunting, fishing and other natural resource activities can be

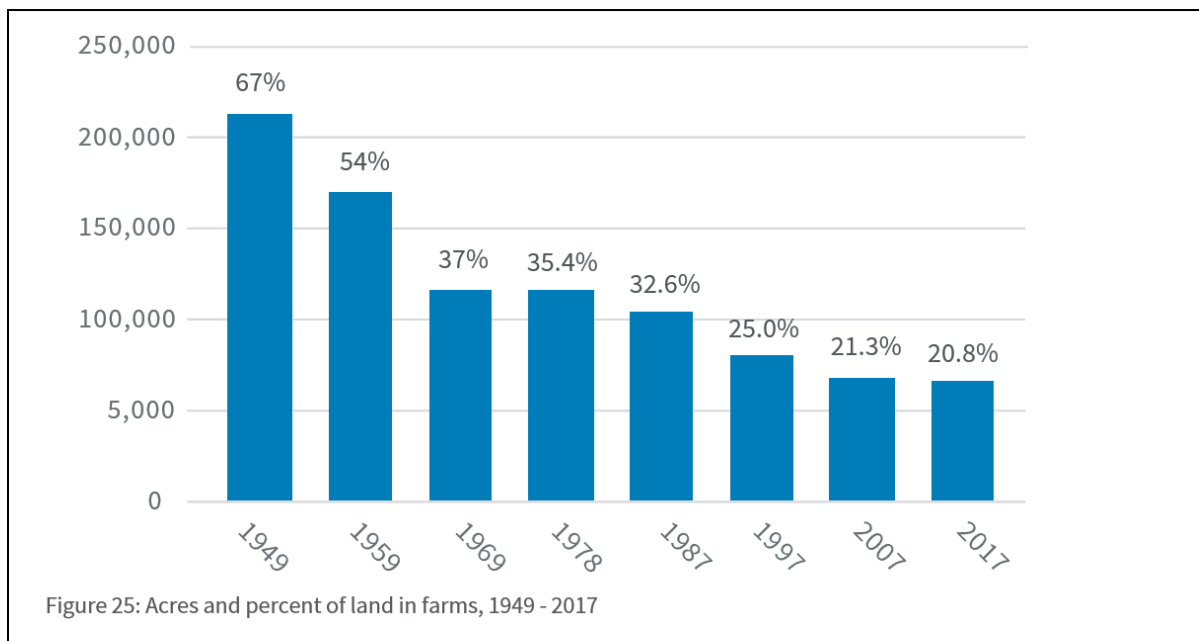


carried on without disruption; and 4) to conserve natural resources and protect the public water supply.”

## What is the problem we are trying to solve? Focusing Growth, Connecting Communities, and Reinvigorating East County

While the Wedges and Corridors Plan was visionary in recognizing the consequences of sprawl and the value of land preservation, subsequent land use and transportation planning decisions did not always adhere to the 1964 plan’s guidance, illustrating the political economy of sprawl. On one hand, resistance to the kinds of dense infill and development in areas within the growth footprint identified by the 1964 plan left the urban form unrealized in many areas, with – for example – only a few Metrorail station areas developed with high density. On the other hand, the desire of property owners to maximize the value of their land in some cases led to more development in outlying areas than contemplated in 1964, with a proliferation of garden apartments and townhouses in places like Aspen Hill. The absence of tighter limits allowed development to disperse, consuming large amounts of land and increasing the cost of roads, water, sewer, and other public infrastructure by limiting economies of scale. This pattern of development also limited opportunities to offer cost-effective transit service.

Conversely, the 1964 plan envisioned corridor cities along I-270, I-95, and Route 29, yet subsequent planning decisions, including the 1993 Refinement, disregarded and ultimately removed the growth corridor along Route 29 and I-95 in the eastern portion of the county. The excision of the Route 29 corridor contributed to effectively directing new public and private investment away from the East County and toward the established urban ring and I-270 corridor. As a result, the I-270 corridor has benefited from successive cycles of investment and reinvestment, even as other corridors – including Georgia Avenue, where Metrorail’s Red Line



was built – were largely left behind. This recurring pattern aggravated the racial and economic disparities between the eastern and western parts of the county that remain today.

Moreover, the Wedges and Corridors plan [neglected to] did not fully articulate how the broader public should expect to benefit from maintaining a rural pattern over much of the county's land area<sup>3</sup>. The plan explained that land preservation is important to recreation, agriculture and conservation of natural resources but did not describe how people living in urban parts of the county would access these opportunities. The result is that many people who live outside what became the Agricultural Reserve are unfamiliar with it and do not take full advantage of opportunities to visit, enjoy and develop an appreciation for the value of continued preservation of land for farming, recreation, and environmental stewardship. Awareness of -- and access to -- the Agricultural Reserve should be improved by providing ways for people throughout the county to experience and take full advantage of this unique resource. Our residents and visitors should not miss out on opportunities to learn about the county's rural heritage, eat and drink locally produced food and beverages, and participate in outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, camping, and fishing.

If we fail to make efficient use of land, the available space for growth, outdoor recreation, agriculture and natural resource conservation will [rapidly] diminish. The cost of building and maintaining water and sewer infrastructure, roads, and public services will become harder to manage. Problems such as traffic congestion and climate change will be exacerbated.

## **What policies will solve the problem? Refining – and Recommitting to - a Compact Footprint**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 proposes redoubling and refining efforts to concentrate growth in centers of activity. Centers of activity that range from large downtowns to medium-sized town centers, to rural villages and neighborhoods [and intensively developed centers of activity, or nodes,]. And makes a new commitment to promoting growth along major transportation corridors to maximize the efficient use of land and create Complete Communities. These corridors [establish] create a web, connecting residents to existing and future centers of activity and Complete Communities. These corridors also either have robust transit service in place or planned or are located close to existing concentrations of jobs, services, and infrastructure in ways that lend themselves to supporting more intensive development to produce the kinds of Complete Communities described later in this plan.

The intensity of development along these corridors should be aligned with the urban, suburban, and rural context of the surrounding area and calibrated to account for existing or planned transit and other transportation infrastructure. Detailed analysis of each area will come through future planning efforts that includes extensive public engagement. Some corridors, such as Rockville

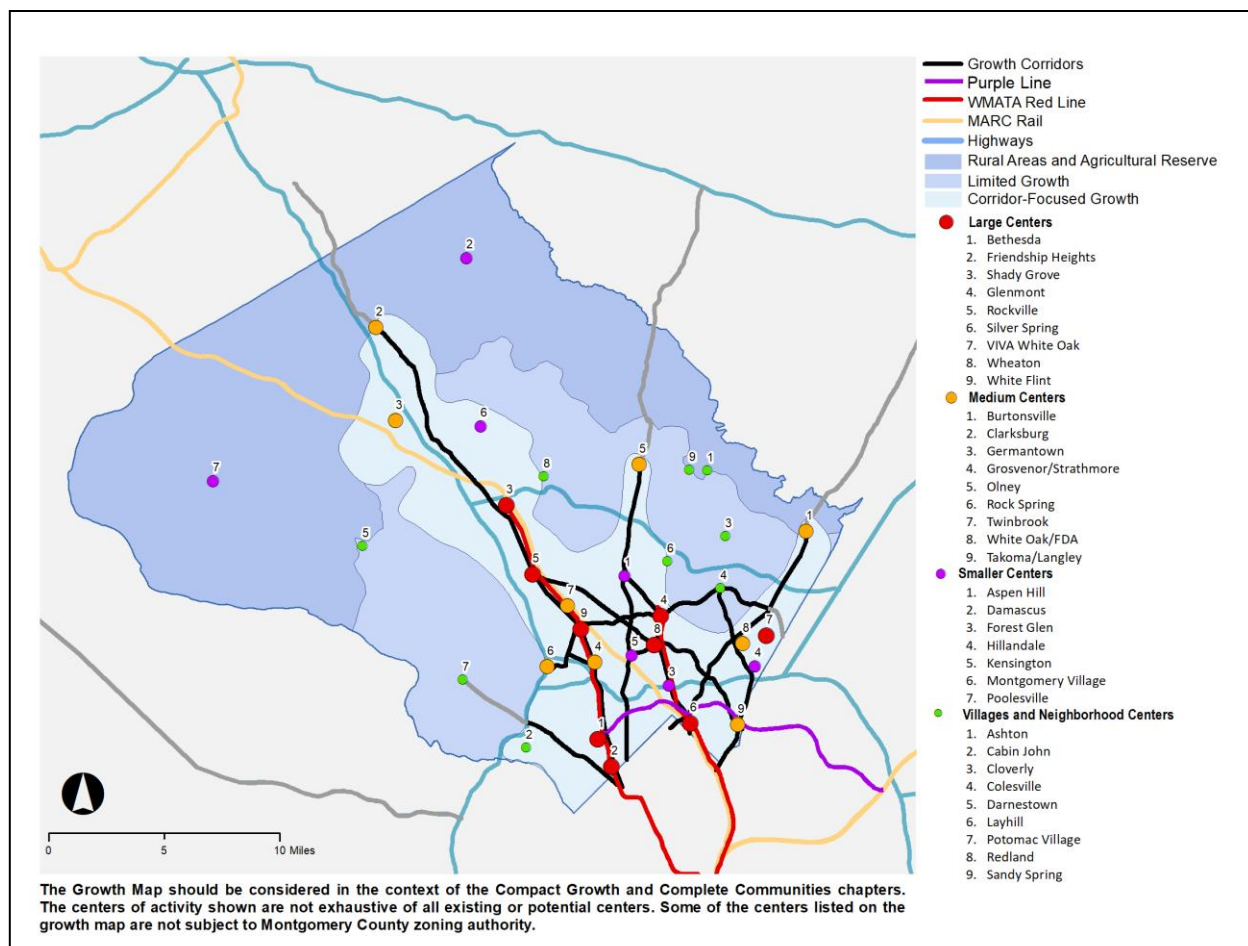
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<sup>3</sup> Approximately 1/3 of Montgomery County makes up the Agricultural Reserve.

Pike, even now connect several centers of activity, making these corridors appropriate for more intensive development. Other corridors will have less intensive development due to their context and level of transit service.

Outside of these corridors, limited, organic growth should be allowed to meet localized needs for services and provide a balanced, diverse, and appropriate range of housing choices; increase racial and socioeconomic integration; and achieve more Complete Communities in all parts of the county. This limited development must be managed in ways that help to form more Complete Communities without expanding established development footprints or encouraging significant intensification of land uses outside of Complete Communities. Preservation of land for recreation, agriculture and environmental management must be ensured for the benefit of the entire county.

The concept of corridor-focused growth is a fundamental organizing element for Thrive Montgomery 2050, as it recognizes not only that intensively developed centers of activity and preservation of land both play a vital role in our quality of life but that neither pattern can exist without the other. By [identifying] describing the types of places where growth should be encouraged, this chapter aim to establish[es] the foundation for Complete Communities, which depend on a compact footprint to give them the coherence, focus, and mix of activities necessary to succeed. The scale of development, building types, and diversity of uses envisioned within this footprint are discussed in greater detail in the Complete Communities chapter. In turn, the design elements that complement and reinforce Complete Communities are discussed in the Design, Arts, and Culture chapter.



The Corridor-Focused Growth area (lightest blue) should have the largest share of new growth. It encompasses the most developed part of the county with highest-density population and employment centers, and the infrastructure to support existing and new development.

The Limited Growth area (medium blue) contains the mainly suburban residential communities where limited, organic growth is envisioned to meet localized needs for services, provide a diverse range of housing choices, and increase racial and socioeconomic integration to achieve Complete Communities.

Rural Areas and the Agricultural Reserve\* (in dark blue) will continue to be dedicated primarily to agriculture, rural open space, and environmental preservation. It can absorb some growth as agriculture evolves and existing residential communities' needs change over time.

The Growth Map identifies several existing and potential centers of activity at a variety of scales, including Large, Medium, and Small as well as Villages and Neighborhood Centers. The centers identified are not exhaustive of all existing or potential centers, but rather are included to demonstrate that centers of activity, where existing and future compact growth should be concentrated, occur within the county's urban, suburban, and rural areas. While future growth should occur in these centers, the amount of growth and intensity of development should be commensurate with the center's location and context.

The Growth Map reflects current land use and is representative of the location and types of growth expected through 2050; however, the corridors and centers shown on the map or fitting the descriptions provided below may evolve over time through future approved and adopted master plans and functional master plans.

**Large Centers** are envisioned as the highest intensity areas generally characterized by significant residential and/or commercial density either existing or planned and are typically close to high quality transit. They include the county's Central Business Districts, existing and future employment centers, the municipalities of Gaithersburg and Rockville, and most of the Metrorail stations which provide an opportunity for significant redevelopment.

**Medium Centers** would be less intense and cover a smaller geography than Large Centers. The Medium Centers could include significant clusters of existing or planned residential density, as well as clusters of commercial density, including large shopping centers and office campuses. Medium Centers are likely to be close to transit.

**Small Centers** are generally characterized by low- to medium-density residential neighborhoods, with clusters of commercial activity, including shopping centers and neighborhood-serving retail.

**Villages and Neighborhood Centers** are the lowest intensity centers containing a small number of neighborhood-serving uses and located in rural areas and low-density residential neighborhoods.

<p>* The Rural Areas and Agricultural Reserve are areas of the county substantially zoned for rural or agricultural land use under the Rural, Rural Cluster, Rural Neighborhood Cluster, or Agricultural Reserve zone.</p>
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More specifically, the following policies and practices should be adopted in order to maximize the efficiency of land use and public investment and establish the building blocks for development of vibrant centers of activity while preserving land for recreation, resource conservation, and agriculture:

**Concentrate growth in centers of activity and along corridors through compact, infill development and redevelopment to maximize efficient use of land.**

- Focus future land use and public infrastructure planning in activity centers and on growth corridors so as to direct development in ways that facilitate the emergence of Complete

Communities. Evaluate appropriate land uses, transportation facilities, and community design that will encourage and enable full use of centers of activity and creation of Complete Communities. (Ec, Env, Eq)

- Amend land use, design, and zoning regulations, including the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, to support corridor-focused compact development. Appropriate densities will vary but should be sufficient to support, at a minimum, the efficient provision of transit service along these corridors. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Improve the environmental sustainability of growth by encouraging infill and redevelopment to curb sprawl and bring areas built out in an era with little or no environmental regulations up to robust standards for stormwater management and other state-of-the-practice environmental standards. (Env)

**Promote and prioritize public investment in infrastructure in activity centers and along growth corridors and leverage it to attract future private investment in a compact form.**

- Consider new methods of financing public infrastructure, such as value capture, tax increment financing, and other mechanisms to facilitate investment and provision of appropriate infrastructure in areas identified as appropriate for more intensive development. (Ec)
- Establish high-quality transit infrastructure along growth corridors through capital investment and ensure reliable, frequent service through operational investment. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Leverage federal, state and local incentive programs, publicly owned land and land investment opportunities for [corridor] infill development and redevelopment in activity centers and along corridors. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Develop a policy framework to ensure that businesses owned or operated by Black, Indigenous or People of Color are accessing opportunities in new development(s). (Ec, Eq)

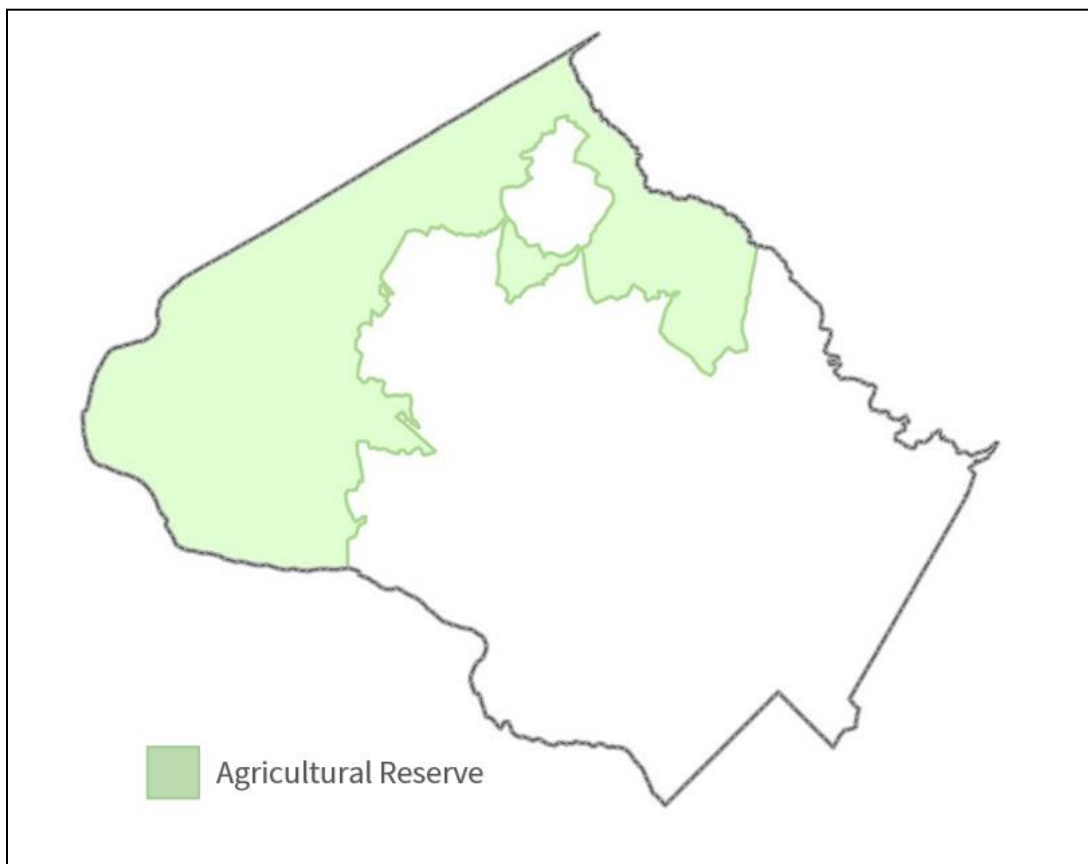
**Limit growth beyond corridors to compact, infill development and redevelopment in Complete Communities to prevent sprawl. Apply principles of urbanism at an appropriate scale along a rural-to-urban transect as outlined in the Complete Communities chapter.**

- Sustainably manage land outside growth corridors and Complete Communities to increase biodiversity, improve the health of natural habitats, preserve privately owned forests, protect watersheds and aquifers, and improve water quality while providing expanded opportunities for outdoor recreation, including vigorous physical activity. (Env, Eq)
- Support alternative clean energy generation, distributed energy, battery storage and grid modernization; and better facilitate composting/food waste recovery and other circular economy initiatives. (Env, Eq)

**Preserve and enhance the Agricultural Reserve and manage it to maintain a rural pattern of development for the benefit of the entire county.**



- Maintain agriculture as the primary land use in the Agricultural Reserve through policies, regulations, easements, and incentives, including those that maintain a critical mass of contiguous farmland. (Ec, Env)
- Maximize the benefits of the Agricultural Reserve through policies designed to ensure the continued viability of farming as an economically productive and sustainable activity, discourage sprawl, facilitate a broad range of outdoor recreation and tourism activities, conserve land and natural resources, and promote practices that advance environmental quality. (Ec, Env)
- Improve awareness of and access to the Agricultural Reserve for the public to experience and directly benefit from this valuable resource for locally grown food, outdoor recreation, and tourism. (Ec, Eq)



## How will these policies further the key objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050?

### Compact Development to Support Vibrant, Diverse, and Sustainable Places

Montgomery County's population is projected to grow by approximately 200,000 people over the next 30 years, and these policies and practices are critical to not only accommodating this

growth but also to achieving Thrive Montgomery 2050's key objectives, including combating and adapting to climate change. Nearly 85 percent of the county's land is already developed or otherwise constrained. If we fail to maintain effective barriers to sprawl, we will likely paint ourselves into a corner where space for farming, recreation, and resource management is exhausted along with space for additional growth.

We must encourage compact, infill development and redevelopment to accommodate anticipated population growth in a way that supports appropriately dense, vibrant, energized communities. The strategy of concentrating growth within [nodes] centers of activity and along corridors will direct population and employment to locations served by infrastructure, services, and amenities – including transit – and create focused centers of activity. This focus [will] should in turn reduce the cost of public infrastructure and deliver more favorable returns on both public and private investment. Compact, infill development and redevelopment also align with the increasing desire of residents, businesses and employers seeking walkable, transit-oriented communities, as demonstrated by transit-oriented areas across the region and country.

### **Economic Health: Compact Form as the Foundation for More Appealing Places**

Keeping the county's development footprint and growth in a compact form along corridors will help to create the kind of places that are attractive to employers and attract new investment. Studies of trends in office development show that major employers are looking for amenity-rich, walkable areas near transit. Traditional, low-density office parks are no longer in favor. The related ideas of Compact Form, Complete Communities and Design Excellence will [result in] encourage the development of places that attract both businesses and residents.

Compact development footprint is an important tool in creating the kind of centers that support a strong economy. The lack of large tracts of vacant, unconstrained land does not mean that Montgomery County cannot grow its economy. However, [the focus] we need[s to switch] to think[ing] differently about where growth happens and compactly developing areas that have not been considered in the past, such as surface parking lots and colocation of facilities. Even though the county is running out of greenfields to accommodate [sprawling] campus-like employment centers or new residential neighborhoods, this plan does not recommend expanding our development footprint well beyond the Corridor-Focused Growth area. Instead, it emphasizes that the current supply of redevelopable land – if developed compactly and creatively – is sufficient to attract and retain a variety of employers, especially advanced knowledge-based industries looking for vibrant centers and a highly trained, diverse workforce. It is important to note that form alone will not create more jobs. Increased density, great transit options and a regulatory environment that supports investment are all required. Other changes are needed in terms of financial incentives, tax reform and investment in infrastructure.

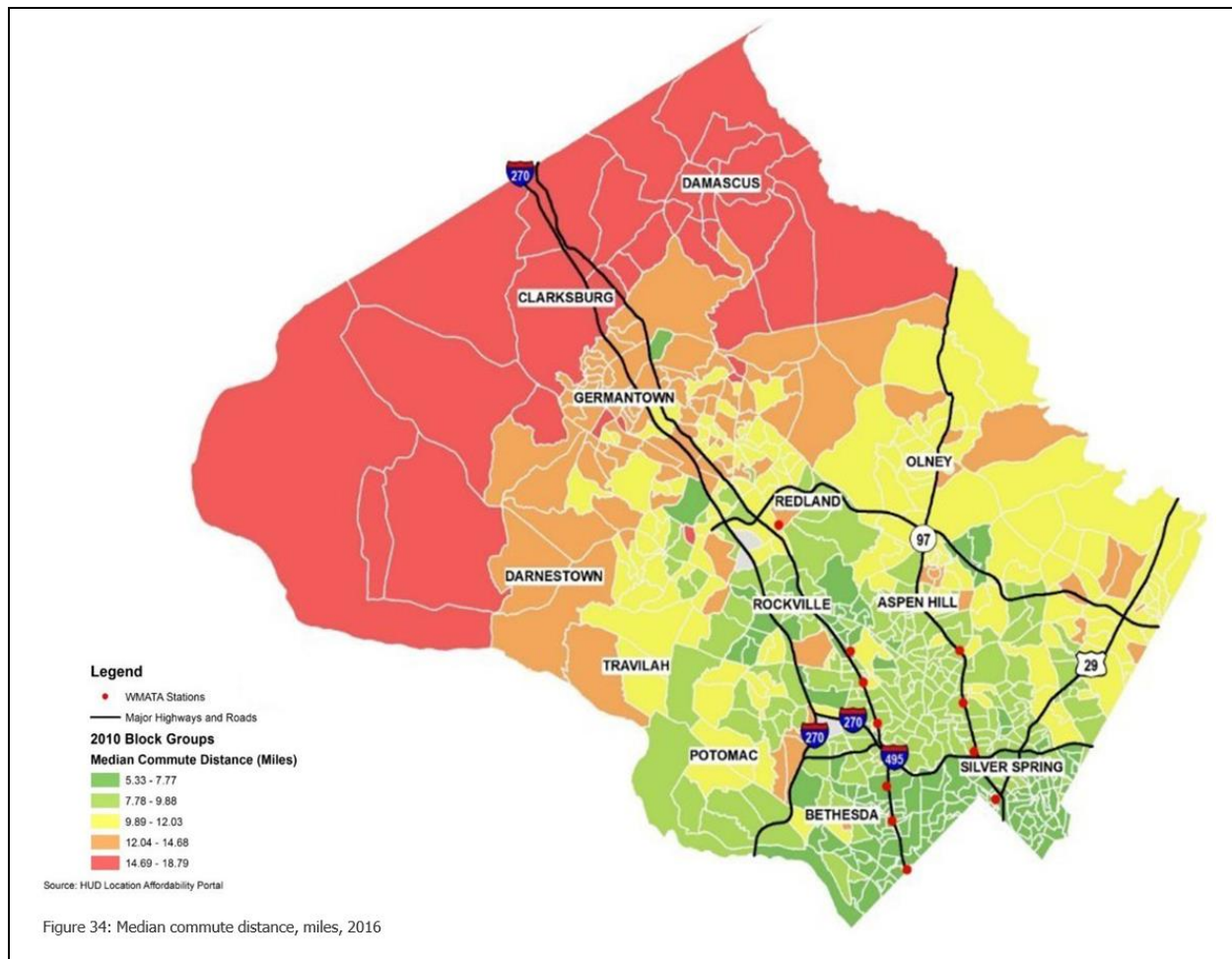
### **Racial Equity and Rebalancing the Geographic Distribution of Opportunity**

The identification of 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 no growth and ensuring that the benefits of growth are more equitably distributed across lines of geography, class, and race. These areas also offer the opportunity for greater return on investment, financially and in terms of Thrive Montgomery 2050’s goals. Previous political opposition to development in the East County – most clearly expressed by the removal of the I-95/Route 29 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 – or even the most important – 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. While the potential for displacement must always be considered – and [this plan calls for] monitoring and addressing dislocation caused by rising real estate values must be part of this plan– by the same token public and private investment are essential to expanding economic opportunity for people and communities that have been left behind or economically and socially isolated. By focusing investment and encouraging development along corridors in the East County, this plan will help to establish the foundation for Complete Communities [that will] and create a more prosperous and equitable future in all parts of the county.

### **Compact Growth and Environmental Performance: Improved Air and Water Quality with More Efficient Use of Land**

Among the most clear-cut benefits of the efficient use of land, including compact corridor-focused growth together with reinforcement of the rural pattern outside of the corridors, is to make development more environmentally sustainable in general and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in particular. By concentrating development in a limited footprint, corridor-centered growth can facilitate[s] walking, biking, and transit use and reduce[s] emissions from motor vehicles. A compact form of development reduces driving even among people who continue to rely on cars, because trip distances are likely to decline as a wider range of needs can be met within a short distance, reducing vehicle miles traveled.



Compact growth can also improve[s] the environmental performance of both sites and buildings, as it allows the redevelopment of areas developed prior to the adoption of modern stormwater controls and often characterized by high proportions of impervious surface cover. A compact form of infill development or redevelopment can reduce stormwater runoff and heat island effect by using green infrastructure, green roofs, and other green cover, as well as building design and orientation to reduce urban temperatures.

Finally, compact, corridor-focused development is essential to the continued protection of the Agricultural Reserve and preservation of land for environmental stewardship and recreation. As our population grows and the region continues to develop, pressure on rural areas and natural systems will increase. The preservation of the Agricultural Reserve reinforces the concentration of growth and maximizes the land available for farming, recreation and natural resource conservation.





Figure 35: At Pike and Rose, infill development reduced stormwater runoff flows by over 70 percent.

While farming should remain the primary use in the Agricultural Reserve, the area set aside for the rural pattern also provides opportunities for recreation, tourism and natural resource conservation, uses that must be acknowledged and supported. The Agricultural Reserve improves the attractiveness and livability of the county because it provides opportunities for locally grown food, outdoor recreation, education, and tourism. The continued preservation of the Agricultural Reserve, along with the county's park system, also protects the county's forests, wetlands, meadows and streams, supports biodiversity and natural habitats, and protects watersheds, aquifers, and water quality.

### How will we evaluate progress?

In assessing future plans, projects, and proposals related to the efficient use of land and measuring the success or failure of the approaches recommended in this plan, relevant measures may include:

- Amount of infill development/redevelopment in activity centers and along major corridors.
- Proportion of new population, employment and housing within a mile (or half-mile) of activity centers and priority corridors.
- Non-auto driver mode share (walking, biking, transit use) and corresponding reduction in VMT.
- Amount of public and private investment in infrastructure, services, and amenities in activity centers and along corridors, overall and by area of county.

- Acres of farmland, natural habitats, forests and environmentally sensitive areas protected.
- Economic productivity of farming.
- Amount of space for outdoor recreation and variety of activities supported.
- Percentage increase in environmental performance of buildings and sites, overall and by area of county.
- Number of visitors from outside the Agricultural Reserve for recreation, commerce, and tourism.
- Maintenance and improvement in measures of stream water quality.
- Reduction in impervious cover and increase in area of impervious cover treated.
- Increase in tree canopy
- Increase in alternative clean energy generation and composting/food waste recovery.

## COMPLETE COMMUNITIES: Mix of Uses and Forms

### Wedges and Corridors and the Separation of Uses – and People

While the Wedges and Corridors Plan was extraordinarily progressive in advocating a transit-oriented, compact form of development, it rejected the idea of mixed commercial and residential uses. The plan said the spaces designated for different uses should ultimately work together to achieve a “pleasant and economically feasible whole” but that these uses should be physically separated. It recommended Euclidean zoning, with areas set aside for multifamily, townhouse, and single-family housing along with isolated commercial and industrial zones, saying:

“[C]ommercial and industrial zones should exclude residences both because good residential neighborhoods cannot be maintained in such areas, and because business and industry can function more effectively where space allotted them is uninterrupted by housing.”

In addition to a rigid separation of uses, the plan insisted on the desirability of barriers, buffers and transitions between land uses to achieve harmony and compatibility:

“[L]ong established commercial centers expand into nearby residential neighborhoods, causing more transitional problems. The end result is a disease known as urban blight. This disease is contagious and is almost sure to spread where preventative measures are not taken.”

### What is the problem we are trying to solve? A Mixed Record with Mixed Use

While the polycentric urbanism embodied by the 1964 plan’s corridor cities concept was fundamentally sound, its approach to the separation of uses and emphasis on transitions and buffers was at best not entirely successful in producing pleasant and economically vibrant commercial districts and at worst served to justify land use decisions that reinforced racial and socioeconomic segregation. Other shortcomings have become increasingly obvious, namely:

- The separate-and-buffer approach failed to anticipate – much less meet – the demand for housing in mixed-use centers of activity. For the most part, the corridor cities neither achieved the densities nor provided for the variety of uses, building types and services necessary to maximize their value in attracting residents and workers looking for more vibrant and appealing places to both live and work.
- A handful of locations in Montgomery County have attracted investment in office, retail, and residential uses, but most lack the combination of elements – including a compact form with diverse housing types, commercial uses, transit, and a walkable public realm – that support the kinds of human interaction common to the most successful places. Meanwhile, the areas surrounding our most eclectic centers of activity largely remain characterized by a separation of land uses and uniform lot sizes, lot coverage, and building forms.

The separation of uses and associated homogeneity in lot sizes, development standards and building forms, coupled with the commitment to barriers, buffers and transitions had the effect – whether intentional or not – of discouraging connections among people and places and sharpening racial, social and economic divisions between neighborhoods and parts of the county.

The implementation of these approaches also made access to the full range of economic, educational and cultural opportunities (as well as services, amenities, and infrastructure) far too dependent on access to cars. By separating uses and investing heavily in roads, we have historically made driving the only practical way for many residents and workers to meet their daily needs – including trips that should be feasible on foot, on a bicycle, or on a train or bus, including for those with disabilities and those with young children.

The preservation and protection of neighborhoods dedicated exclusively to detached single-family houses has left residents disconnected from retail and other services, encouraged the construction of stand-alone public facilities, and perpetuated the inefficient use of land. Our land use policies have evolved in recent years to reflect a changing social and demographic context as well as changing preferences and planning approaches. The county also has evolved from a bedroom community to the District of Columbia to a county with several distinct employment centers. These changes have coincided with the emergence of increasingly strong market preferences for transit-oriented, mixed-use communities with a unique sense of place.

Our plans have been responsive to these trends, but implementation of transit-oriented, mixed-use development has been limited due to economic and regulatory constraints. The basic underlying pattern persists in much of the county despite the 1993 refinement's endorsement of mixed uses and subsequent changes to the zoning code. Of course, some suburban and rural areas may not achieve the mix of uses or support the kinds of transit service that should be expected in more urban areas. Thrive Montgomery 2050 envisions increasing the variety of uses and achieving a people-oriented public realm within the corridor-focused growth areas and centers discussed in the Compact Growth chapter at scales appropriate to their context, so as to provide people in all parts of the county access to a wider range of services and amenities in closer proximity to their homes and workplaces.

## **Beyond Transit-Oriented Development: Complete Communities and 15-Minute Living**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 recognizes the benefits of transit-oriented development, which often uses mixed use zoning as a complement to high-quality transit service, but it updates and recalibrates ideas about the role of mixed uses by adding “complete communities” and “15-minute living” as organizing principles for thinking about planning of neighborhoods and districts. Complete Communities are places that include the range of land uses, infrastructure, services and amenities that allow them to meet a wide range of needs for a variety of people. They include housing suitable for different household types, income levels, and preferences, helping to



support racial and socioeconomic integration. The specific mix of uses, amenities, parks, public facilities, and building types in Complete Communities vary depending on factors such as the size and location of the neighborhood or district; proximity to transit, [parks and public facilities;] variation in physical features such as topography and environmental resources; and other factors unique to the history and context of each place.

The related concept of “15-minute living” has emerged as a way of reimagining existing communities to maximize their attractiveness and efficiency by mixing housing, offices, and retail uses [in each neighborhood or district] so services, infrastructure, facilities, and amenities to serve the daily needs of people who live or work there are within walking distance. While a literal or rigid application of 15-minute living may not be practical outside of the corridor focused growth areas and centers, the concept is a useful way to generate concrete recommendations to make communities more complete and help them succeed.

## Different Ingredients for Different Communities

The combination of strategies that can help create a more Complete Community in any particular place depends heavily on context. The scale (village vs. town center vs. downtown), location (inside vs. outside the growth footprint, within one of the State’s four growth tiers<sup>4</sup>) and type [of district or neighborhood] (e.g. office park vs. central business district vs. residential neighborhood vs. suburban shopping center) all influence which elements should be incorporated and how they should be tailored. Despite the varying needs and conditions of different parts of the county, however, the concept of encouraging more diversity of use and form is relevant in almost every location. For example:

- Existing suburban office parks in locations such as Rock Spring or Clarksburg’s COMSAT site have large existing buildings that can accommodate employment but lack the integration of uses, services, and amenities necessary to succeed in an increasingly competitive office market. Complete community strategies can help reposition these employment centers through infill and redevelopment to incorporate a variety of housing, restaurants, retail, public facilities, and parks and public spaces along with better transit service, making them more attractive to both residents and employers.
- Likewise, for places the county hopes to see emerge as important centers for office employment, such as White Flint, White Oak, or Germantown, the integration of additional housing options can help to encourage activity beyond regular business hours, creating the sense of energy and activity during the evening and on weekends.

Centers of activity in suburban and rural areas, which range from large retail shopping centers such as Aspen Hill, to clusters of commercial and neighborhood serving retail uses like the shopping areas in Potomac Village or Four Corners, offer convenience retail for surrounding subdivisions but often lack safe pedestrian accommodations, good transit connections, or high-quality parks and public spaces. In some places, new kinds of commercial development, such as

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<sup>4</sup> As defined by The Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012, Senate Bill 236.

medical offices, will be viable even where office space or other employment-related uses are difficult to attract. The recommendations in this chapter and elsewhere in the plan can help make these [neighborhoods] developing centers of activity more walkable and livable.

## The Connection Between Complete Communities and Corridor-Focused Growth

As explained in the chapter on Compact Growth, development of new or substantially expanded centers of activity should be focused along growth corridors to avoid sprawl and achieve the critical mass required for each center to be economically sustainable. Limited, organic development beyond the corridors and defined growth areas should be allowed to increase the diversity of housing types in existing residential neighborhoods and make these areas more complete, particularly near existing centers of activity or development. Opportunities for increased housing diversity outside the defined growth areas will allow neighborhoods to evolve over time to address current and future housing needs and become more racially and socioeconomically integrated.

Implementation will be organic and incremental, through infill and redevelopment within centers of activity along corridors as well as within existing downtowns, town centers and rural villages. This implementation will be primarily market driven, using the development review process to funnel contributions from private developers to streetscape improvements, dedication and construction of parks and public spaces, and the addition of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Specific strategies will be needed to recognize and minimize the negative impacts of gentrification on communities and businesses at risk of displacement, including the recommendations described in the chapter on housing together with policies outside the scope of this plan, such as direct assistance to small and minority-owned businesses and housing subsidies. Specific strategies also will be needed to ensure that the infill and redevelopment does not have negative environmental consequences such as expanding urban heat islands and increasing stormwater run-off problems.

## What policies will solve the problem?

To ensure that demand for future development in Montgomery County is harnessed to embrace Complete Communities and 15-minute living – both by building new centers of activity along corridors and by making existing ones more complete – the county should pursue a number of policies, which must be suitable for all areas of the county. The specific policies and practices recommended to further Complete Communities and 15-minute living include:

**Identify and integrate elements needed to complete centers of housing, retail, and office development and plan to make 15-minute living a reality for as many people as possible.**

- Promote zoning allocations and standards to encourage the integration of varied uses, building types and lot sizes. (Ec, Env, Eq)

- Apply flexible approaches to accommodate infill and redevelopment that improve access to amenities, active transportation, parks, and open spaces, and a broader range of housing types at the neighborhood scale. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Prioritize neighborhood-level land use planning as a tool to enhance overall quality of community life and avoid reinforcing outdated land use patterns. (Eq)
- Allow sufficient densities to make a wide range of uses economically viable in Complete Communities. Encourage densities sufficient to support convenience retail and other local-serving amenities at the neighborhood level. Provide guidance for accommodating additional density in a context-sensitive manner. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Ensure that Complete Communities are integrated into their surroundings and supported by a public realm that encourages walking, biking and rolling, accessible for all, as well as social interaction through the configuration of sidewalks, paths, landmarks, parks, and gathering spaces. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Adopt planning approaches that prioritize providing more Complete Communities in service to improving the quality of community life throughout the county. (Eq)
- Develop strategies to ensure that the infill and redevelopment does not result in negative environmental consequences such as increased stormwater run-off, loss of tree canopy, and the expansion of urban heat islands. (En)

**Encourage co-location and adjacency of all essential and public services, especially along growth corridors and in Complete Communities.**

- Maximize the accessibility and utility of public facilities by locating them in places that promote integration with other public and private uses and infrastructure. (Env, Eq)
- Promote active transportation improvements that prioritize walking, biking, rolling, and transit use to enhance public access to these co-located facilities, including access for seniors and those with disabilities. (Env, Eq)
- Develop standards for colocation of public facilities that promote mixing of uses or services and compact development strategies. Encourage public-private partnerships and ensure they promote social interaction and physical activity. (Ec, Env, Eq)

**Retrofit centers of activity and large-scale older facilities such as shopping centers, abandoned federal campuses, office parks, and other single-use developments to include a mixture of uses and diversity of housing types and to provide a critical mass of housing, jobs, services, and amenities necessary for vibrant, dynamic Complete Communities.**

- Ensure employment uses in economic clusters develop in a mixed-use format along with housing, retail, amenities, parks and public spaces, and transit, and ensure they are integrated into the surrounding communities in a context sensitive manner. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Allow creation of co-located housing, discussed further in the Affordable and Attainable Housing Chapter, including for industries that employ large numbers of employees (permanent or seasonal). (Ec, Env, Eq)

- Encourage higher density economic and housing cooperatives (live/work areas such as home occupations, artist villages, farmers' market/villages, tech/life-science startup incubators).  
(Ec, Env, Eq)

## How will these policies further the key objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050?

### Economic Health: Complete Communities as Magnets for a Variety of People, Businesses, and Jobs

Montgomery County has reached a stage where greenfield opportunities largely have been exhausted and the general locations of business districts, residential neighborhoods, and farmland have been established, or are at least planned. For example, the downtowns of Silver Spring and Bethesda; the new life sciences hubs anticipated in the Great Seneca Science Corridor and White Oak; and the emerging town centers in Germantown and White Flint have zoning capacity as well as physical space for tens of millions of square feet of development.

The task of this plan, therefore, 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 to residents and workers, which in turn will help attract employers. The central premise is that making [individual neighborhoods and districts]centers of activity, regardless of scale more complete is among the most effective ways to accomplish this goal. Combined with a compact development footprint, clear standards to ensure quality of design; complementary transportation infrastructure to support walking, rolling, and riding; and appealing parks and recreation offerings for active lifestyles; more complete communities are essential to our competitiveness.

Planning for Complete Communities, with a true integration of uses, diversity of building types, and variety of lot sizes, represents a departure from the automobile-oriented land use planning of the last several decades and the embrace of a planning paradigm that is far more likely to help attract employers, workers, and residents by offering convenience, walkability and a quality of place only available when the needs of people are considered ahead of the needs of cars.

As previously explained, the creation of vibrant, dynamic Complete Communities that include housing, a diversity of jobs, services, amenities, parks and public spaces, and opportunities for social gathering and interaction [will]are likely to attract employment, advancing our economic performance and competitiveness. This approach will not be sufficient standing alone and it is not intended as a substitute for other elements of a comprehensive economic development strategy. 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, however, it is currently considered one of the best strategies available to local government to attract and retain employers.

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

In addition, flexible use and development standards that allow variety in lot sizes, building types, and building placement offer an opportunity to increase commercial and residential diversity within neighborhoods. A broad assortment of retail, office, and live-work spaces designed to fit the needs of individual businesses can support different kinds of work and employment arrangements. The diversity of housing and employment types provides a means for renters, first-time homebuyers, or new business owners to access and participate in competitive markets. Diversity in development is especially important to producing housing that matches the needs of our future. The integration of accessory dwelling units, duplexes, and 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.

## **The Role of Complete Communities in Environmental Resilience: Community Gap-Filling as Sustainability Strategy**

Finally, Complete Communities [will also] have the potential to create long-term sustainability for both human and environmental health. A mixture of uses and forms, together with a built environment that facilitates active lifestyles, allows more trips to be completed by walking, biking, rolling, and transit, reducing vehicle miles traveled and dependence on cars while increasing physical fitness and opportunities for social interaction. Establishing Complete Communities in the corridor-focused growth areas and within centers throughout the county reduces the distance that people, particularly those within suburban and rural areas, must drive to meet their daily needs, further reducing vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions. Likewise, the mixture of uses, co-location and adjacency of public services and amenities can improve[s] sustainability by reducing building footprints and cutting energy use. Co-location can also help[s] to maximize community use and social interaction.

## **How will we evaluate progress?**

In assessing proposals related to the creation of Complete Communities and measuring the success or failure of the approaches recommended in this plan relevant measures may include:

- Population density in centers of activity along corridors as well as within existing downtowns, town centers and rural villages
- Diversity of uses and structures
- Racial, ethnic, and income diversity
- Median age/life stages concentration

- Percentage of employment growth overall and by area of the county
- Car ownership levels
- Transit usage for inter-county travel
- Weekend transit usage
- Numbers of co-located facilities/amenities
- Public investment ratios for walking, biking, rolling, transit, and automobile
- Median vehicular expense per county household
- Median housing expense per county household
- Emergence of key population and mixed-use centers
- Increasing commercial activity in otherwise residential neighborhoods

# DESIGN, ARTS & CULTURE: Investing and Building Community

## Introduction: Why Design Matters

Design of the built environment can strongly influence our quality of life. The pattern of development across a city, county, and region; the configuration of neighborhoods and districts; and the architecture of individual buildings collectively shape our perception of places and shape how we choose to travel, recreate and socialize. Arts and cultural practices touch every corner of life and are among the most visible indicators of the social values and diversity of a place. Public art and cultural institutions highlight new perspectives, preserve local history and traditions, deepen our understanding of others, and expand our imaginations.

Design serves functional and aesthetic purposes. Functional considerations dictate where structures are placed and how they connect to the sidewalks, streets and spaces around them to facilitate movement, social interaction, and physical activity. Aesthetic aspects of design, along with the integration of arts and cultural elements, influence how streets, buildings and spaces look and feel to create beauty and a sense of place and inclusion.

As we strive to enhance the quality of life in Montgomery County for all of our residents and strengthen the appeal of our community as a place to live and work, both the functional and aesthetic aspects of design are more important than ever. For example, adding sidewalks and bicycling infrastructure can help make alternatives to driving safer, but detailed attention to the relationship between buildings and streets, the placement of street trees and quality of landscaping, and the cultivation of a sense of place are essential to making walking, biking, and transit attractive – and these are the same elements that make a neighborhood or business district inviting and inclusive.

Montgomery County has evolved into one of the most diverse jurisdictions in the nation and our arts and culture sector is impressive in its scope and depth. Public art and cultural institutions contribute significantly to the county's economy by attracting talent and spurring innovation through exchange of ideas. Taken as a whole, the sector would be the sixth-largest employer in the county. Arts and cultural practices touch every corner of life and are among the most visible indicators of the social values and diversity of a place. The arts and culture sector helps to foster the growth of creative, social, and economic ecosystems, and its practitioners have developed tools that can share untold stories, encourage empathy, and empower civic voices, fostering dialogue and building connections among people with different backgrounds and perspectives. This chapter focuses on the urban design principles applicable to blocks and individual development sites, the architecture of public and private buildings, the landscape of plazas and public spaces, and elements of street design. And it emphasizes [supporting] the importance of a healthy arts and culture ecosystem that can highlight new perspectives, preserve local history and traditions, deepen our understanding of others, and expand our imaginations.

## What is the problem we are trying to solve?

The Wedges and Corridors Plan envisioned a variety of living environments and encouraged “imaginative urban design” to avoid sterile suburban sprawl. Unfortunately, design approaches intended to serve a range of functional objectives and aesthetic aspirations took a backseat to the convenience of driving and the assumption that different land uses, building types, and even lot sizes should be separated. Over time, these priorities produced automobile-centered design approaches that compromised quality of place at the expense of lasting economic and social value. The shift to mixed-use development in the last two decades has created more vibrant and walkable places around major transit hubs but the legacy of automobile-oriented development is evident even in our most walkable neighborhoods and districts.

## Greenfield Regulatory Tools in a Post-Greenfield County

When the subdivision of farmland was the primary strategy for accommodating growth, the focus of land use regulation was on the entitlement process, which allocates development rights and responsibility for the provision of basic infrastructure such as roads and sewer pipes. The form and orientation of buildings to each other and to the public realm were a subsidiary consideration.

Entitlement-centered rules are well-suited to standardized subdivisions but poorly adapted to enable the design of distinctive projects that respond to local geography, history and culture and address the needs of increasingly constrained development sites. We [must]should prioritize whenever possible the attributes of neighborhood and site design that strongly influence perceptions of the quality and potential of a place. Dispersed buildings and sprawling parking lots lead to underbuilt sites that are poorly suited to repositioning, infill, and redevelopment and reduce the utility of investment in parks, transit, and other public amenities and infrastructure. In addition, a future focus on form-based rules will allow for a more equitable process and outcome. The process is more equitable in that all stakeholders – the property owner, the community, the reviewers – understand the parameters governing the review of a development application and can address community concerns about growth. The outcome is more equitable because it may facilitate the implementation of diverse housing types and neighborhood-serving retail, which will lead to more mixed income neighborhoods with essential services within walking distance.

## Design for Cars at the Expense of People – and Adaptability

Automobile-oriented design led to the provision of abundant and visually prominent surface parking, with buildings placed in the middle of large asphalt lots or entrances and front doors obscured by driveways and garages. Buildings were disconnected from public spaces and set back from streets. Streets were widened, pushing buildings farther apart and preventing a sense of enclosure, which discouraged walking by making it less convenient and comfortable. Space for sidewalks, seating, and greenery was sacrificed to make more space for parking and roads,



shrinking the size and utility of public spaces. Other elements of street design such as lighting and signage were enlarged to make them more visible to passing motorists, making streetscapes less engaging to pedestrians and degrading the quality of the public realm.

Commercial buildings designed to accommodate single uses, while less expensive when considered in isolation, are inflexible and costly to reuse. Malls, office parks, and other large, single-use buildings are often difficult to repurpose and the high cost of adapting their layouts to meet new spatial needs due to technological shifts, demographic changes, and market preferences shrinks their useful lives and makes them less sustainable. The consequences of the limited adaptability of our building stock are evident in persistently elevated office vacancy rates accompanied by an acute shortage of housing.

These problems are every bit as evident in the design of public buildings as in private development. Typical parcel size standards for public buildings such as schools are too large to fit most available sites, limiting the location of new facilities. The shortage of “adequate” sites along with a growing student population leads to a tear-down-and-rebuild approach with larger and larger numbers of students in bigger and bigger buildings. Boundary areas draw students from farther away, leading to the allocation of more space for parking, less walking and bicycling, longer bus rides and drives for parents as well as longer commutes for staff.

## **Recalibrate Investments in Arts and Culture with Equity in mind**

Placemaking and public art are essential in building great and inclusive communities. However, while the county makes significant investments in arts and culture, these investments are not always equitably distributed. Emerging organizations that support underserved communities often lack the funding and base of support enjoyed by some of their more established counterparts. Artists and arts organizations cite the lack of affordable living, working, and sales spaces as a major challenge. The field of public art has been expanding to embrace a wider range of approaches including civic and placemaking practices, but the county’s art programs lag in its ability to apply these approaches. Making countywide investments in public art and placemaking will educate, connect, and build communities that thrive into the future.

## **What policies will solve the problem? Better design and more reliance on form-based tools to provide clear direction and build great places**

In order to maximize the contributions of design – along with arts and culture - toward creating strong communities with lasting value, the county [will] should pursue the following policies and practices:

**Use design-based tools to create attractive places with lasting value that encourage social interaction and reinforce a sense of place and inclusion.**

- Consider changes to codes, design guidelines, and regulatory tools as well as broader use of form-based zoning that focuses on the physical forms of buildings, streets, and spaces to ensure development across the county satisfies the following:
  - Ensure that all architecture and landscape designs physically define streets and public spaces as places of shared use that engage the pedestrian and are configured to encourage social interaction. (Eq)
  - Link individual architectural projects seamlessly to their surroundings irrespective of style. Civic buildings and public gathering places [must]should be treated as important sites whose design reinforces community identity and a culture of inclusion and democracy. (Eq)
  - Design buildings, streets, and parking to prioritize the pedestrian scale and encourage walking and bicycling through smaller blocks, narrower streets, buffered bike lanes and sidewalks. Slow vehicle speeds and minimize surface parking while adequately accommodating automobiles. (Eq, Env)
  - Accommodate new development with a context sensitive approach to architecture and landscape design that acknowledges neighboring structures, local climate, and topography. (Env)
  - Physically integrate government and private development sites into their surrounding neighborhoods such that they welcome the public and support economic development by facilitating movement, and fostering interaction [of] between people and the transfer of ideas and innovation. (Ec, Env)
  - Preserve, renew, and reuse existing and historic buildings, districts, and landscapes to affirm the continuity and evolution of communities while celebrating local culture and identity. (Eq)
- Support the development of housing by replacing [vague and subjective] concepts such as “compatibility” with clear standards for form, site layout, setbacks, architecture, and the location of parking.
  - Examine options for allowing a wider variety of housing types such as tiny houses, cottages, courtyard clusters, duplexes, multiplexes, small apartment buildings; shared housing, co-housing and accessory dwelling units (ADUs). (Eq, Env)
  - Determine what changes may be needed to land-use, design, and zoning regulations, including the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, to remove regulatory barriers and facilitate development of range of housing types. (Eq, Env)
- Consider updating [Update]the zoning code to include basic form-based elements for all zones. Adopt context-sensitive design guidance for all master planning efforts.

**Promote design strategies and retrofits to make new and existing buildings more sustainable and resilient to disruption and change.**

- Encourage state-of-the-practice sustainability features such as net-zero/carbon-positive buildings, biophilic design and on-site energy generation for new public buildings and large private developments on sites across the county. (Env)

- Promote cost-effective infill and adaptive reuse design strategies to retrofit single-use commercial sites such as retail strips, malls, and office parks into mixed use developments. (Ec, Env)
- Incentivize the reuse of historic buildings and existing structures to accommodate the evolution of communities, maintain building diversity, preserve naturally occurring affordable space, and retain embodied energy of structures. (Eq, Env)
- Establish standards for public facilities that align with infill and redevelopment strategies and acknowledge the county's limited land supply and ambitious climate-action goals. (Env)
- Implement policies to ensure that new buildings and parking structures are adaptable to changing technologies and market preferences and are able to mitigate effects of climate change over time. (Env)

**Support arts and cultural institutions and programming to educate, connect and build communities that celebrate our diversity and strengthen pride of place.**

- Promote an inclusive arts-and-culture environment by establishing a refreshed vision that sets goals, criteria, and priorities to support the county's arts-and-culture sector. (Ec, Eq)
- Promote public art, cultural spaces, and cultural hubs along corridors and in Complete Communities. (Ec, Eq)
- Eliminate regulatory barriers to live-work spaces, home studios, galleries, and other small-scale art-making and creative businesses to improve access for artists and arts groups to affordable living, working, and presentation spaces with a focus on economic, geographic, and cultural equity. (Eq)
- Enable all residents to experience public art daily by incorporating it into the design of buildings, streets, infrastructure, and public spaces. (Eq)
- Use new public facilities to demonstrate principles of architecture as civic art and broader cultural representation. (Eq)
- Encourage property owners, non-profit organizations, and government agencies to maximize use of parks and public spaces for artistic and cultural programming, activation, and placemaking.
- Partner with agencies to strengthen data collection about investments so as to ensure that arts-and-culture related policies align with Thrive Montgomery 2050's goals of economic competitiveness, social equity and environmental resilience. (Ec, Eq, Env)

## How will these policies further the key objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050?

### Great Design Creates Great Places that Draw People and Businesses

Well-designed places attract all kinds of residents and businesses. Workers in creative or knowledge-intensive occupations are particularly focused on quality of place, which includes an open and tolerant attitude toward different people, cultures, and lifestyles along with attention to the built and natural environment and excellent public services.

Design and public art, through their contribution to the built environment, help to create economically successful communities. Design-based tools [will] help to create attractive buildings, streets, and public spaces that are likely to retain greater economic value over time. The thoughtful arrangement of these elements [will] can create places that become destinations for commerce and social activity and add value to their surroundings, encouraging neighboring owners to reinvest in their own properties to match and take advantage of adjacencies. Places designed with pedestrians in mind will lead to more healthy physical activity as well as human interaction, facilitating the exchange of ideas, attracting innovative companies and creative professionals. Comfortable, tree-lined streets will meet market demand for walkable places.

In addition to contributing to the built environment, the entire arts-and-culture sector generates energy and creativity that spur economic growth. Affordable living, administrative, working, and presentation spaces for artists [will]can help to showcase our diversity and attract and retain cultural uses and arts-related businesses. Strategic investments in these kinds of spaces can increase the economic contribution of arts and culture over the long run by reinforcing the role of the sector in building centers for social gathering and cultural events which may in turn attract other business and investment.

### **Better Design Strengthens Community and Highlights the Benefits of Cultural Diversity**

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. Public spaces that encourage [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.

Design codes that are well thought out, developed with community input, and based on physical form [will]can serve as more predictable guides for change, address community concerns [over]about accommodating growth, 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 standards governing acceptable form [will] may, depending on market conditions, encourage the introduction of different housing types and neighborhood- serving retail, facilitating the creation of mixed income neighborhoods where essential services are within walking distance of most residences.

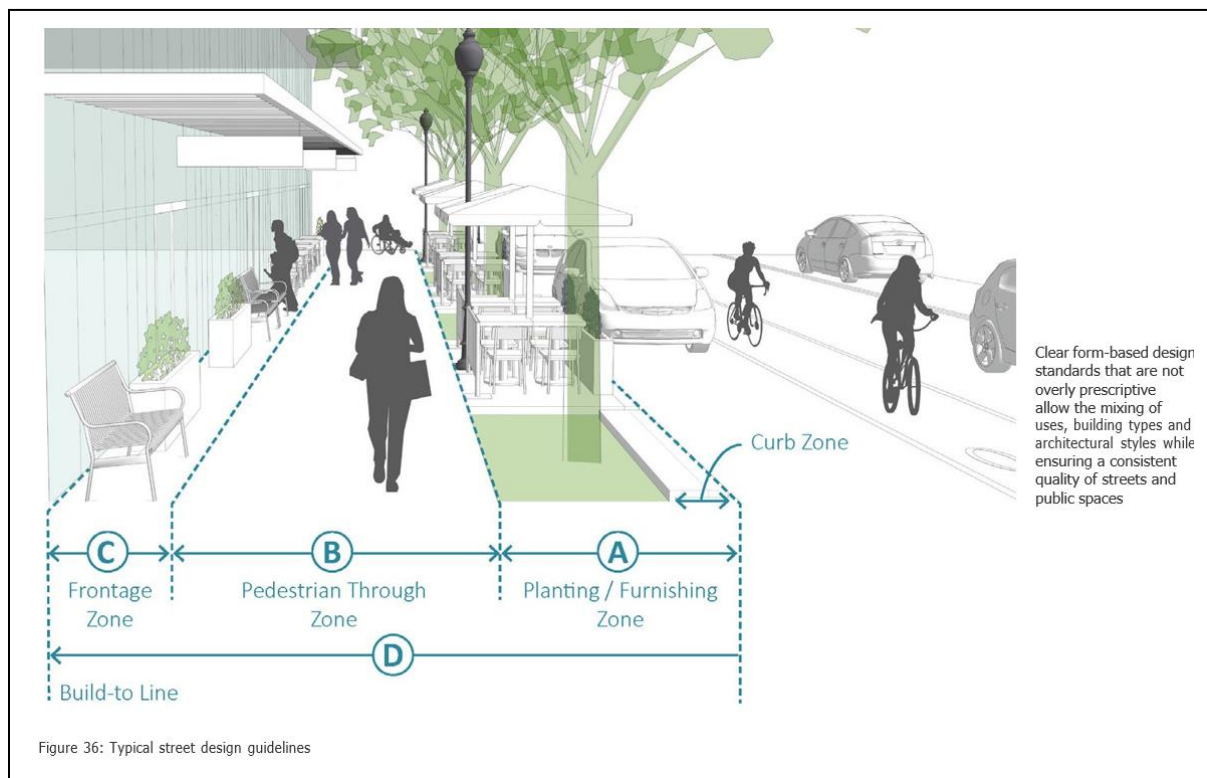


Diagram shows ~~potential~~ infill, adaptive reuse, and partial redevelopment of a typical office park that creates smaller development blocks connected by a complete street network and varying open spaces.

[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.

### **Design Plays a Critical Role in Environmental Performance**

Sustainable design strategies for new construction and retrofits will enhance the environmental performance of buildings and neighborhoods. Promoting sustainability features in new public and private buildings will retrain and may reduce the ecological impact of growth. Strategies for onsite energy generation, new tree plantings in redeveloped parking lots and along streets, and state-of-the-practice stormwater management will help increase the resilience of the power grid and mitigate the negative effects of flooding and excessive heat, resulting in more adaptable development in the face of a changing climate.

Encouraging adaptive reuse of existing buildings and incentivizing cost-effective retrofits of single-use sites into mixed-use projects will help reduce energy consumption and greenhouse-gas emissions. Compact site standards and colocation of public facilities along with state-of-the-practice sustainability features will help achieve ambitious climate action goals and make more efficient use of public land.

A focus on form and adaptability rather than use and density in regulatory systems will provide flexibility to respond to changing market conditions and demographic trends and help us take advantage of disruptive technological and cope with environmental change. Designing buildings and parking with adaptability in mind will prolong the useful life of structures and reduce scrape-and-replace development practices, conserving energy embodied in existing structures.

### **How will we evaluate progress?**

In assessing proposals related to design, arts, and culture and measuring the success or failure of the approaches recommended in this plan, relevant measures may include:

- Types and amounts of publicly- and privately-owned public-use space
- Pedestrian traffic in downtowns and suburban activity centers
- Visitation and time spent in urban, suburban, and rural gathering places
- Number and spatial distribution of public art installations, temporary and permanent
- Number and spatial distribution of publicly and privately funded community events such as festivals, street fairs, sporting tournaments, etc.

- Number, use type, square footage, and economic activity generated by businesses classified in cultural categories by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) or its successor
- Average rent, total square footage, and spatial distribution of available art/creative/maker-space
- Retention and growth of arts- and culture-related businesses
- Number and spatial distribution of cultural heritage and historic designations
- Number of adaptively reused, retrofitted, and repositioned structures and structures designed with flexibility for future uses and/or adaptability in mind
- Number of environmentally certified buildings (e.g. Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, LEED) in the county
- Amount of tree canopy in the county

# TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION NETWORKS: Connecting People, Places, and Ideas

## The interdependence of transportation and land use

No land use plan can be successful without a complementary transportation plan, because even the most forward-thinking land use policies will fail if they are not supported by transportation infrastructure and services that reinforce – or at least avoid undermining – their objectives. As the Wedges and Corridors Plan recognized more than half a century ago:

“An efficient system of transportation must include rapid transit designed to meet a major part of the critical rush-hour need. Without rapid transit, highways and parking garages will consume the downtown areas; the advantages of central locations will decrease; the city will become fragmented and unworkable. The mental frustrations of congested highway travel will take its toll, not to mention the extra costs of second cars and soaring insurance rate. In Los Angeles where an automobile dominated transportation system reigns supreme, there is still a commuter problem even though approximately two-thirds of the downtown section is given over to streets and parking and loading facilities. There is no future in permitting the Regional District to drift into such a ‘solution.’”

Despite this prescient warning, we remain heavily dependent on automobiles, with more than two-thirds of workers in the county driving alone to and from work. Montgomery County communities outside the Beltway have low percentages of commuters who walk, pedal, roll, or ride transit, and our transportation system is currently a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.

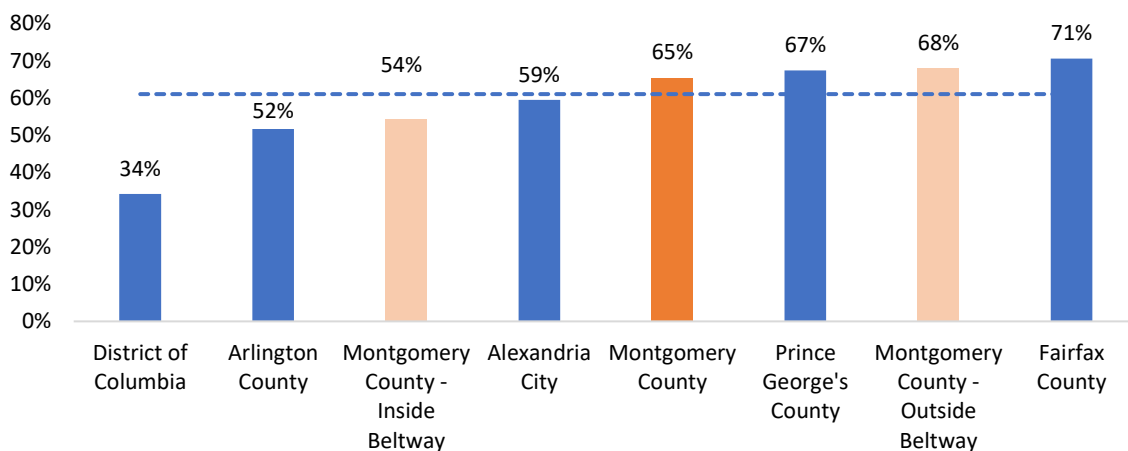
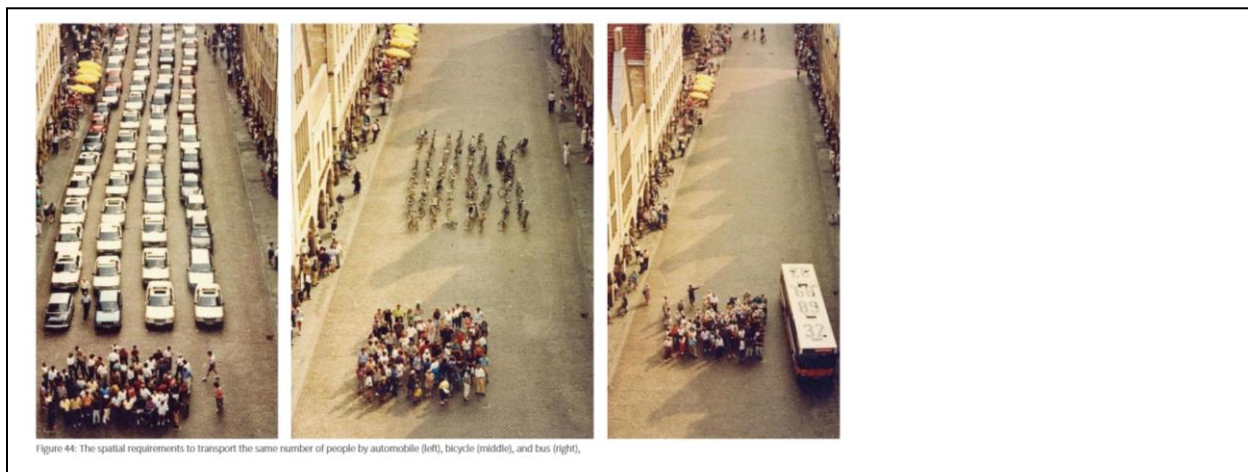


Figure 38: Percent of commuters who drive alone, by jurisdiction, 2019.



Thrive Montgomery's 2050's focus on compact growth and infill – along with the limited availability of land for expanding rights-of-way – makes it essential that over the 30 years of the plan we [decisively reject the impulse to ensure that driving remains as easy and convenient as possible in favor of] work to make[ing] walking, rolling, bicycling, and transit the most practical, safe and attractive ways of getting from one place to another. Cars – even cars equipped with autonomous driving technology - require much more space per passenger than buses and trains, and walking, rolling, and bicycling are the most spatially efficient forms of travel of all. Market preferences have shifted [dramatically] in recent decades to favor locations with transit, bike and pedestrian access over place oriented around automobile travel, and the importance of reduced reliance on driving to meet our greenhouse gas emissions goals is obvious. However, we must keep in mind the importance of roads for the delivery of goods and services, including police, fire, and emergency services, as well as the fact that until other forms of transit are more fully developed, adequate roads are necessary. In addition, roads in Montgomery County serve as evacuation routes during natural disasters and national security events, including Continuity of Government plans.

[Just as importantly, the addition of highways, travel lanes and grade-separated interchanges may help to relieve congestion in the short term, but] Particular characteristics of the currently planned roadway network - new highways, wide roads, and high-speed access ramps – in some locations are fundamentally at odds with efforts to design neighborhoods and districts to encourage human interaction and foster a sense of place. This makes it imperative to embrace the long-term economic, environmental, and social benefits of walkable, bikeable, and transit-oriented neighborhoods and districts and avoid undercutting our land use goals with auto-dominated road design and transportation infrastructure.



**What is the problem we are trying to solve? Successive generations of investment in automobility have created a vicious cycle**

Our dependence on driving is rooted in part in generations of efforts to facilitate the movement of as many automobiles as quickly as possible while funneling traffic to a handful of north-south arterial roadways that tie otherwise disconnected subdivisions to job and retail centers. Successive widenings to these roads have added more and more lanes for vehicles at the expense of space for pedestrians, bicycles, dedicated lanes for transit vehicles, street trees and anything else that might slow cars. This makes alternatives to driving less practical and appealing, which leads to more driving and in turn generates demand for wider roads.

Reinforcing this vicious cycle is the fact that optimizing major arterials for cars has made these corridors unattractive and unsafe, discouraging private investment and compact, transit-oriented development even where high-quality transit infrastructure is already in place (as evidenced by several large, underutilized properties along corridors near Metrorail stations).

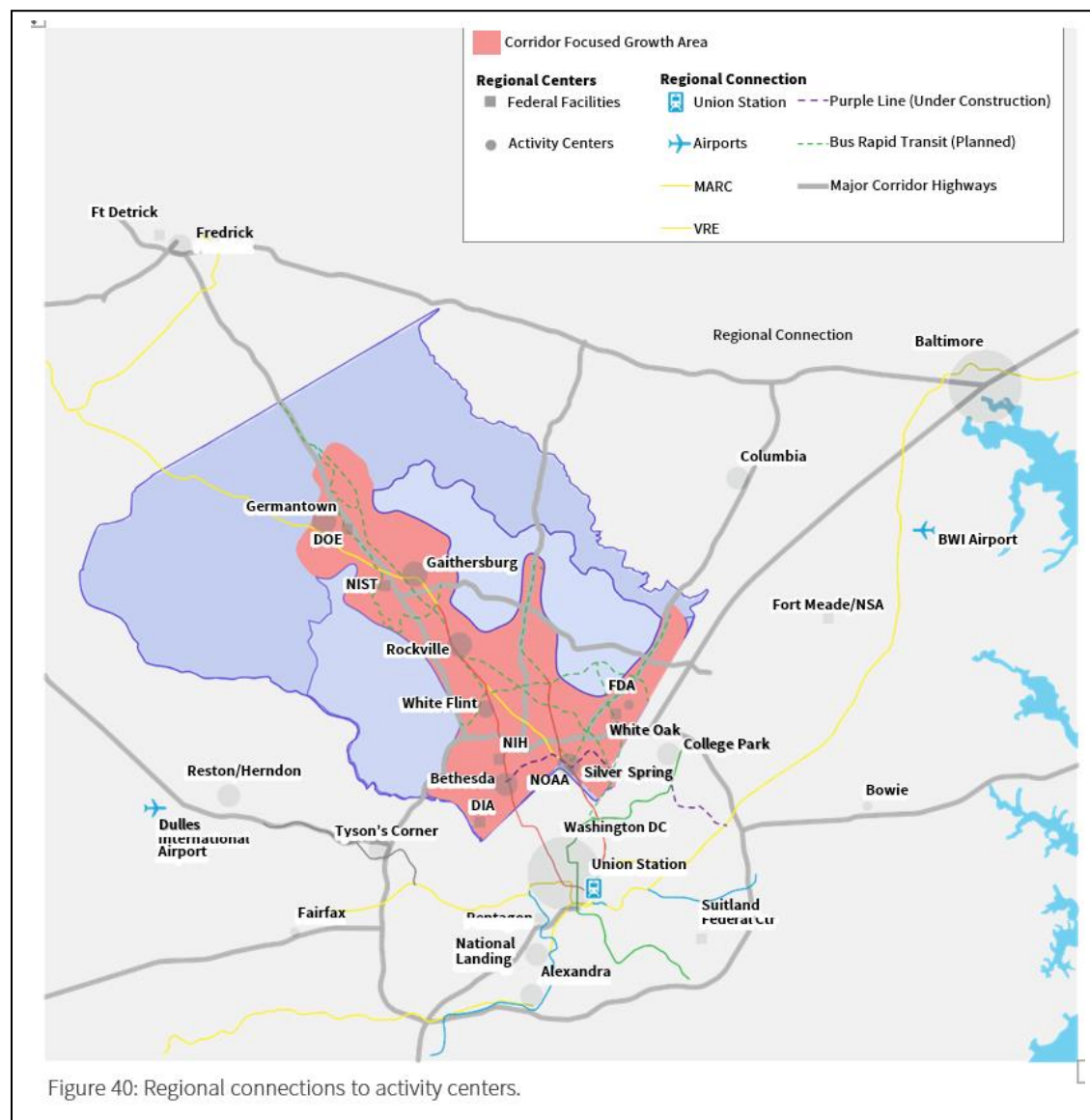
### **Excessive dependence on cars threatens safety, erodes quality of life and reduces resilience**

The most obviously and acutely damaging consequence of this dynamic is that pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers are killed or seriously injured with disturbing frequency. Somewhat more subtle[, but perhaps just as significant,] is the effect that automobile-oriented design has on the vitality and appeal of neighborhoods and commercial districts alike. Safe, attractive streets encourage people to get out and walk, pedal, or roll, whether simply to get some exercise, to run an errand, to go to work or school, or to reach an intermediate destination such as a bus stop or rail station. This kind of activity supports physical and mental health and facilitates the casual social interaction that build a sense of place and community. [Ugly, unsafe roadways are] Some roadways can be barriers that degrade the quality of life of everyone who lives and works near them, even if they are never involved in a traffic collision [and even if they do not personally enjoy walking, rolling or bicycling].

Although Montgomery County's investment in transit has contributed to a slight decline in vehicle miles travelled (VMT) per capita, due to population growth overall VMT has continued increasing, which has a huge impact on the county's efforts to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. In 2018, 42 percent of the County's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were generated by the transportation sector (on-road transportation, aviation, rail, and off-road vehicles). Motor vehicles accounted for 36 percent of emissions in 2018. Private cars accounted for approximately 75 percent of all trips taken in the county followed by buses at 10 percent, rail with 5 percent, walking at 2 percent, taxi/ride hailing services (such as Uber and Lyft) with 1 percent, and biking at less than 1 percent. [Without a significant intervention] Until a majority of the current fleet transitions to electric and other zero-emission power sources, the current pattern will continue to increase our transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of pollution.

The 1964 hub-and-spoke model of arterial corridors radiating from Washington[, The radial pattern of automobile-centric corridors,] limited infrastructure to support alternatives to driving, and the absence of street grid connections also make our transportation network less adaptable and resilient. The radial pattern of road corridors [The hub-and-spoke model of arterial corridors] was a logical way to link suburban enclaves to jobs in and around the District of Columbia, but other important centers of activity have emerged since then. Our prosperity depends on access

to Frederick, Prince George's, Howard, and Baltimore as well as Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudoun. The lack of efficient transit connections to schools, businesses, laboratories, and other important centers of economic, intellectual, and social activity in these jurisdictions leaves us unable to take full advantage of our presence in one of the most dynamic regions in the country, if not the world. In addition to the existing Metrorail and MARC services to the District of Columbia, master plans call for new transitway connections to Prince George's County (the Purple Line and University Boulevard BRT) and the District of Columbia (the New Hampshire Avenue BRT). However, there is a growing need to provide transitway connections to Howard and Frederick Counties, and to Northern Virginia as well.



Even for travel within Montgomery County, our legacy road network has serious shortcomings. Our central business districts and major suburban corridors generally lack the grid of streets that create the building blocks of a thriving community, with frequent intersections and narrower

vehicle lanes to facilitate slower speeds and safer crossings to make walking, rolling and bicycling more practical and attractive and to provide access points and routing options for automobiles. More and more residents and workers prefer transit and other alternatives to driving alone – and a significant number do not have access to a car – but most jobs in the county are not located near high-quality transit, and many of our neighborhoods lack even sidewalks. Combined with the absence of efficient east-west connections, especially for transit riders, this pattern 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.



The failure to provide robust alternatives to driving and the inability to provide additional space for roads – in combination with low rates of housing construction – leaves more commuters stuck in traffic and pushes jobs as well as people to other jurisdictions. The result is that the county loses residents, jobs, and tax revenue while simultaneously increasing traffic congestion as more people drive through the county on the way to jobs and homes in other places. Meanwhile, the importance of virtual connections, including the deployment of high-speed wireless networks and fiber optic cable, continues to grow.

### **What policies will solve the problem?**

Successful mixed-use centers require a transportation scheme that supports modes of travel appropriate to the trips users need to make to meet their needs. For example, a rail-based transit line may serve to connect jobs to housing in different parts of the county or region, while sidewalks and bikeways connect offices to shops, restaurants, transit stations, or apartment buildings in a town center or between a downtown and the residential neighborhoods surrounding it. The point of this plan's emphasis on supporting alternatives to automobile travel is not to eliminate driving, but to make short trips around town by bicycle or bus safe and

appealing. A quick trip to the grocery should be manageable on foot, while a visit to another town might require a trip by car, train, or even airplane. The most desirable places to live and work are the ones that offer a menu of choices that make all sorts of travel effortless and delightful while supporting best practices in land use rather than relying on a single mode of travel at the expense of every other consideration.

Recent and ongoing advances in technologies and travel modes may have a dramatic impact on the nature of travel demand. These include—but are not limited to—the introduction of or expansion in electric and other zero-emission vehicles, connected and automated vehicles, delivery drones, ridehailing, bikesharing, dockless bikes and scooters, and telecommuting. Finally, robust investment in the county’s digital infrastructure is needed to connect residents to online job opportunities, encourage continued teleworking to reduce commuting trips, dilute rush-hour traffic, enhance worker productivity and improve quality of life, increasing the county’s overall [attraction] attractiveness and competitiveness.

The county will base its efforts to improve connectivity on the following policies and practices:

**Develop a safe, comfortable and appealing network for walking, biking, and rolling.**

- Expand the street grid in downtowns, town centers, transit corridors, and suburban centers of activity to create shorter blocks. (Ec, Env)
- Stop proposing new 4+ lane roads in master plans. (Env)
- Give a lower priority to construction of new 4+ lane roads, grade-separated interchanges, or major road widenings. (Env)
- Convert existing traffic lanes and on-street parking to create space for walkways, bikeways, and street buffers with landscaping and street trees, in a manner consistent with other County policies. (Env)
- Prioritize the provision of safe, comfortable, and attractive sidewalks, bikeways, roadway crossings, and other improvements to support walking, bicycling, and transit usage in capital budgets, development approvals and mandatory referrals. (Env)
- Transform the road network by incorporating complete streets design principles with the goal of eliminating all transportation-related roadway fatalities and severe injuries and supporting the emergence of more livable communities. (Eq)

**Build a world-class transit system.**

- Build a network of rail, bus rapid transit, and local bus infrastructure and services—including demand-responsive transit service—that make transit the fastest, most convenient and most reliable way to travel to centers of economic, social and educational activity and opportunity, both within and beyond Montgomery County. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Convert existing general purpose traffic lanes to dedicated transit lanes, in a manner consistent with other County policies. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Connect historically disadvantaged people and parts of the county to jobs, amenities, and services by prioritizing investments in increasing access to frequent and reliable morning to late night transit service. (Eq, Env)
- Ensure safe and comfortable access to transit stations via walking, rolling, and bicycling. (Eq, Env)

**Adapt policies to reflect the economic and environmental costs of driving alone, recognizing car-dependent residents and industries will remain.** (Eq, Env)

- Employ pricing mechanisms, such as congestion pricing or the collection and allocation of tolls to support walking, rolling, bicycling, and transit. (Env)
- Manage parking efficiently by charging market rates and reducing the supply of public and private parking where appropriate. (Ec, Env)
- Encourage the proliferation of [non-polluting] zero-emission vehicles by upgrading government fleets and requiring appropriate infrastructure. (Env)
- Consider exemptions for policies such as congestion pricing and reduced parking for low-income individuals. (Eq)

**Develop and extend advanced communications networks**

- Facilitate construction of high-speed fiber optic and wireless infrastructure and other information and communication technology to supplement transportation links with improved virtual connections. (Ec, Eq)
- Focus investment in communications infrastructure and services to connect people and parts of the county that lack convenient access to jobs and educational opportunities. (Eq)
- Support teleworking by accelerating deployment of information and communications technology and making working from home easier by facilitating Complete Communities. (Ec, Env)
- Support strategies and partnerships to address the “digital divide” and bring network resources to vulnerable communities. (Eq)

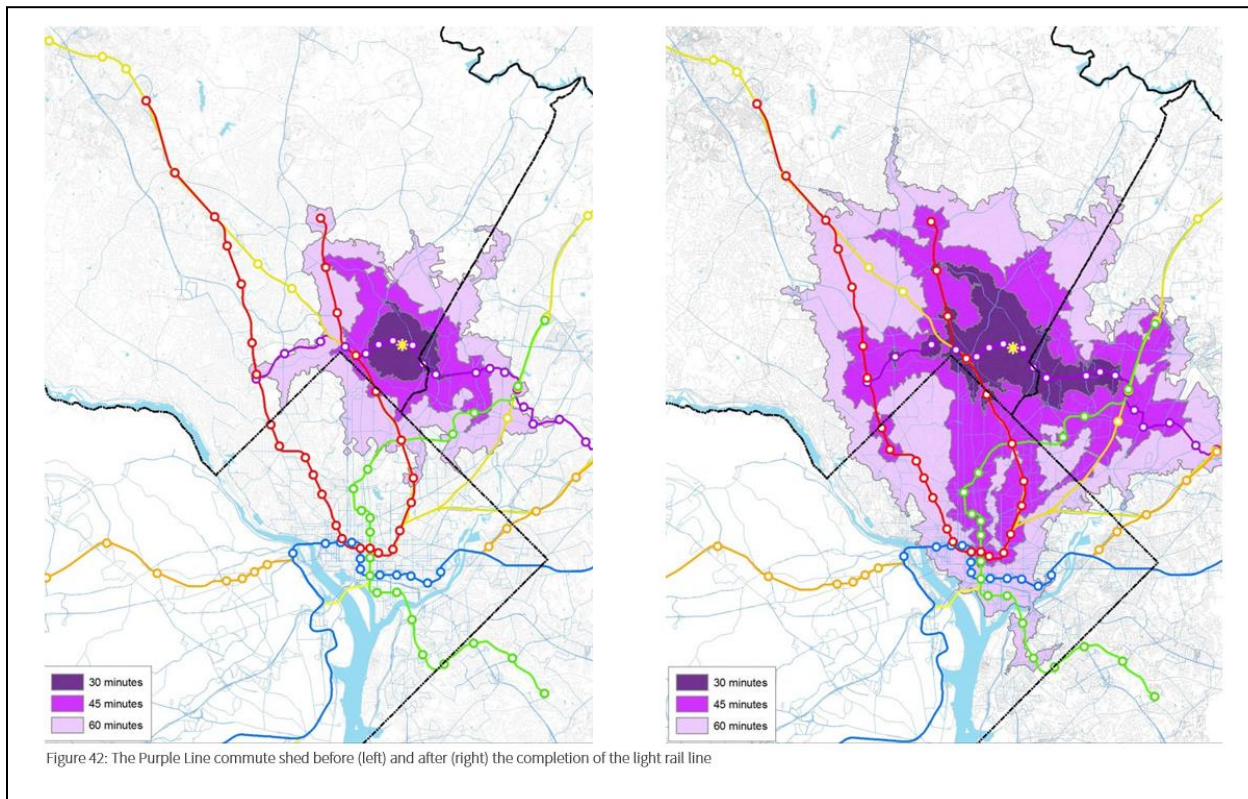
These proposed transportation and communication policies should be evaluated to ensure equitable impacts from policies affecting certain types of vehicles users – like congestion pricing on minorities with high auto ownership.

**How will these policies further the key objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050?**

**Walkable, bikeable, transit-connected neighborhoods and commercial districts support economic vitality**

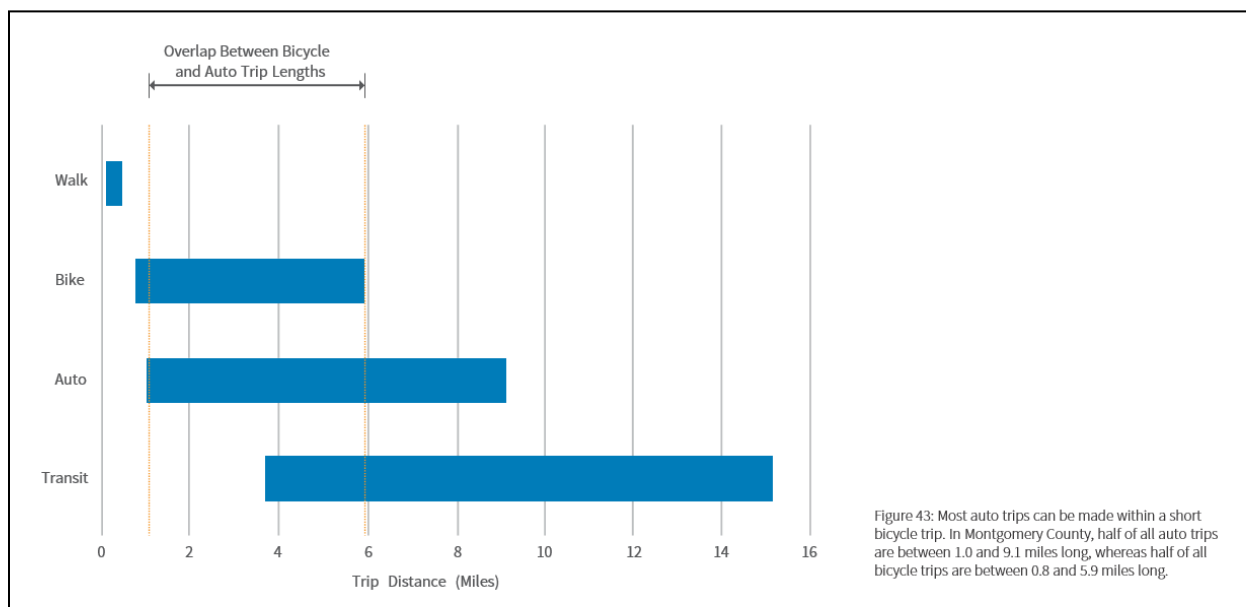
These policies are not enough by themselves to ensure the county’s economic success, but they are [essential] significant building blocks for stronger economic performance. Better transit connections to job centers, for example, will help make the county a more attractive choice for employers by making it easier for their current and future employees to get to work. The total number of jobs within a 30-minute commute is a common measure of an area’s suitability for investment. With drive times and pass-through automobile traffic predicted to continue growing, investments in transit can significantly increase our “commute shed” and help to avoid ever-longer drives to and from work.





A higher priority for investments in transit, walking, rolling, and bicycling infrastructure is also 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 are seeking. This can create [is true because transit exerts a gravitational pull on real estate development by creating] incentives and opportunities to locate a variety of uses, services, and activities near station locations – and to each other.

Another essential building block of economic competitiveness is information and communications technology and telecommunications networks. Montgomery County should continue to prioritize advancing new technologies and making deployment of high-speed wireless networks and fiber optic cable – or other new communication systems – an important part of infrastructure planning.

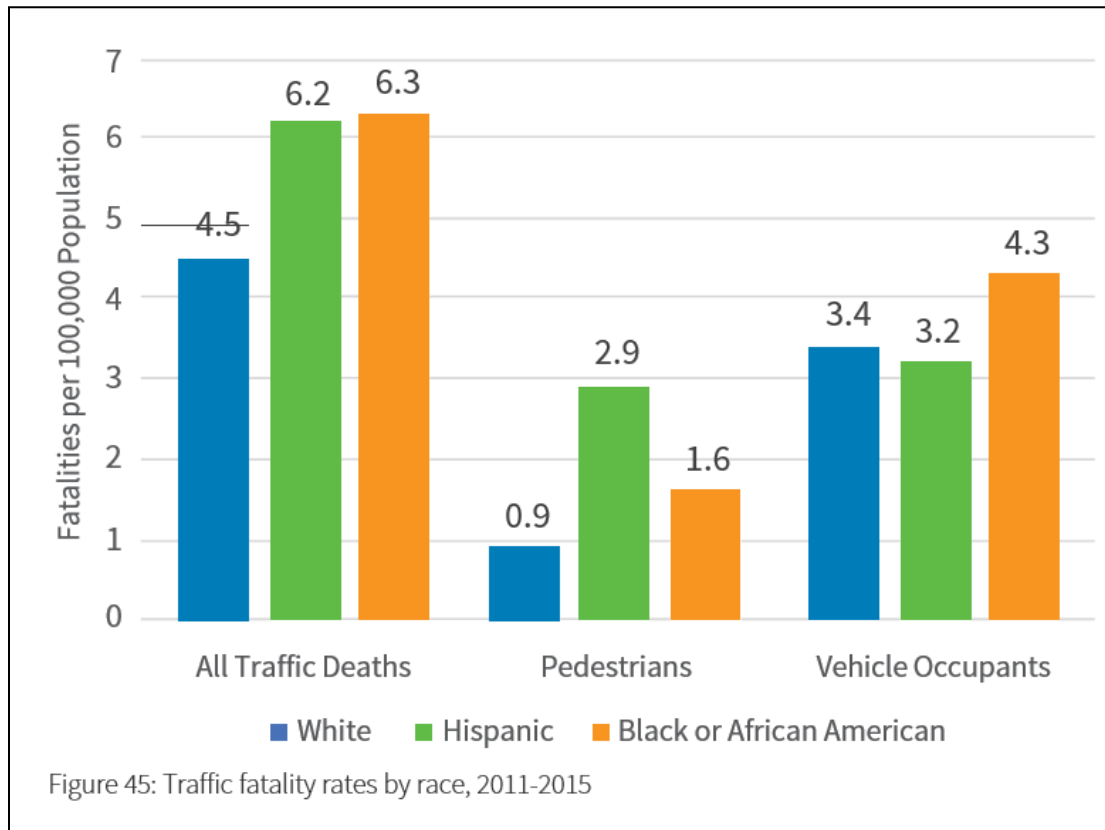


### Expanding alternatives to driving helps build more equitable communities

A transit-focused approach that facilitates walking, rolling, and bicycling also promises 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, and at an accessible cost 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] can enhance human interaction and build social capital. Pedestrian-friendly rural, suburban, and urban centers [will enjoy the benefits of] can build 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, especially among low-income residents.





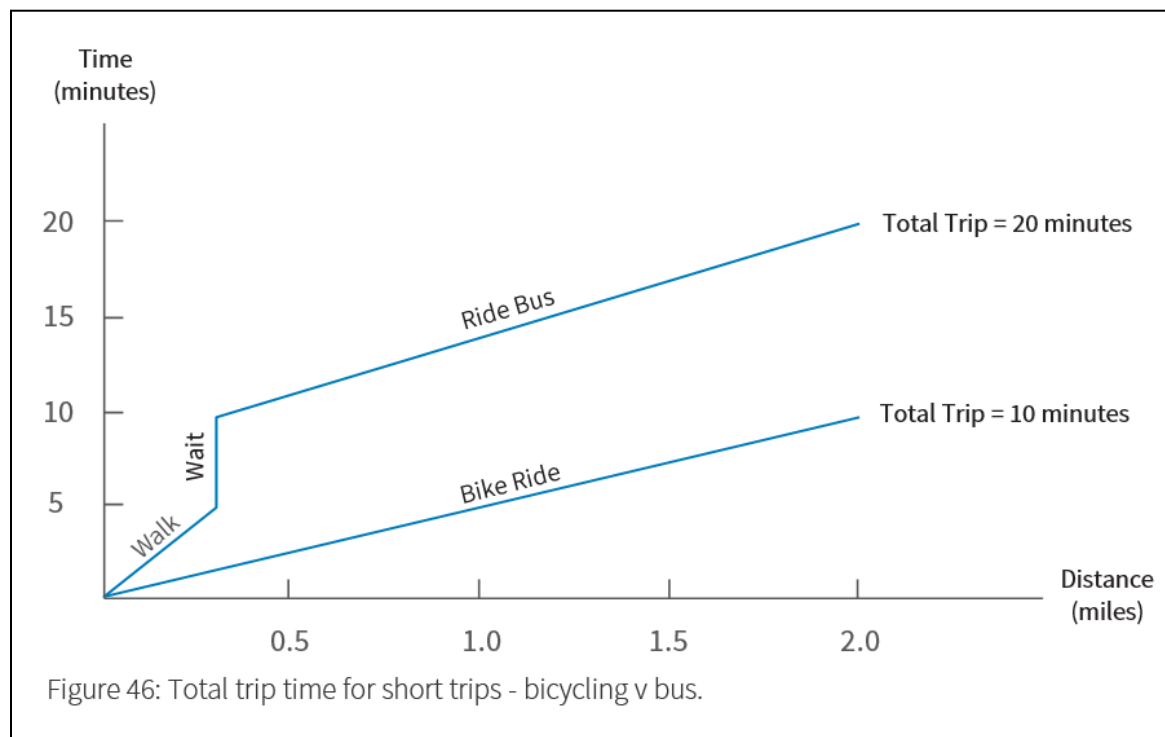
### Land use and transportation strategies that encourage walking, biking and transit use improve environmental performance

The evolution of corridors originally planned for the convenience of drivers into multimodal streets where transportation and land use are harmonized to support [focused] development of a compact mix of uses and building types will reduce driving and make our transportation system more sustainable and resilient. In particular, filling in missing connections between streets and breaking up large blocks to create a finer-grained network of streets along our suburban corridors will be challenging[,]. [but a] A more connected street grid is perhaps the single most important step to make our streets safer, more attractive for walking, biking and rolling, and to reconnect communities divided by [overbuilt] highways. An interconnected grid system will increase choice of modes, provide multiple routes for travel, and be better equipped to handle extreme weather and other disruptions. For this reason, the addition of local street connections should be a top priority in both capital budgets and development review.

Investing in pedestrian, bicycling, and transit infrastructure will make active transportation a viable alternative to many vehicle trips and should also be a high priority in capital budgets. For many, [B]bicycling has especially strong potential as a substitute for automobile trips of less than 3 miles, which comprise about half of all trips taken in the region. Survey research demonstrates that bicyclists are much more likely to say they enjoy their commute than people who use other

modes to get to work. Integrating pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure in parks and open spaces will extend the transportation network and expose more residents to nature on a daily basis, boosting mental and physical health. In addition, funding for frequent and reliable transit service should be a priority in annual operating budgets.

As indicated in the introductory chapter of this plan, Montgomery County has made progress in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions but has much farther to go to meet its goal of eliminating them by 2035. In addition to transitioning from carbon-based fuels to renewable energy sources, reducing vehicular travel is critical.



Reducing the supply of parking – and the amount of land allocated to parking spaces – over time will increase the amount of space available for economically productive activity, reduce the cost of development, and relieve pressure on undeveloped land, all of which will enhance the county’s economic and environmental performance. Shared parking strategies and eliminating minimum parking requirements for new developments promote mixed-use development, improve pedestrian-friendly design, and encourage social interaction, while redevelopment of parking lots into higher and better uses improves environmental sustainability by creating opportunities to add tree cover, incorporate infrastructure for stormwater management, and create more landscaped areas that provide habitat for local pollinators, birds, and animals.

## How will we evaluate progress?

In assessing proposals related to transportation and communications and measuring the success or failure of the approaches recommended in this plan, relevant measures may include:

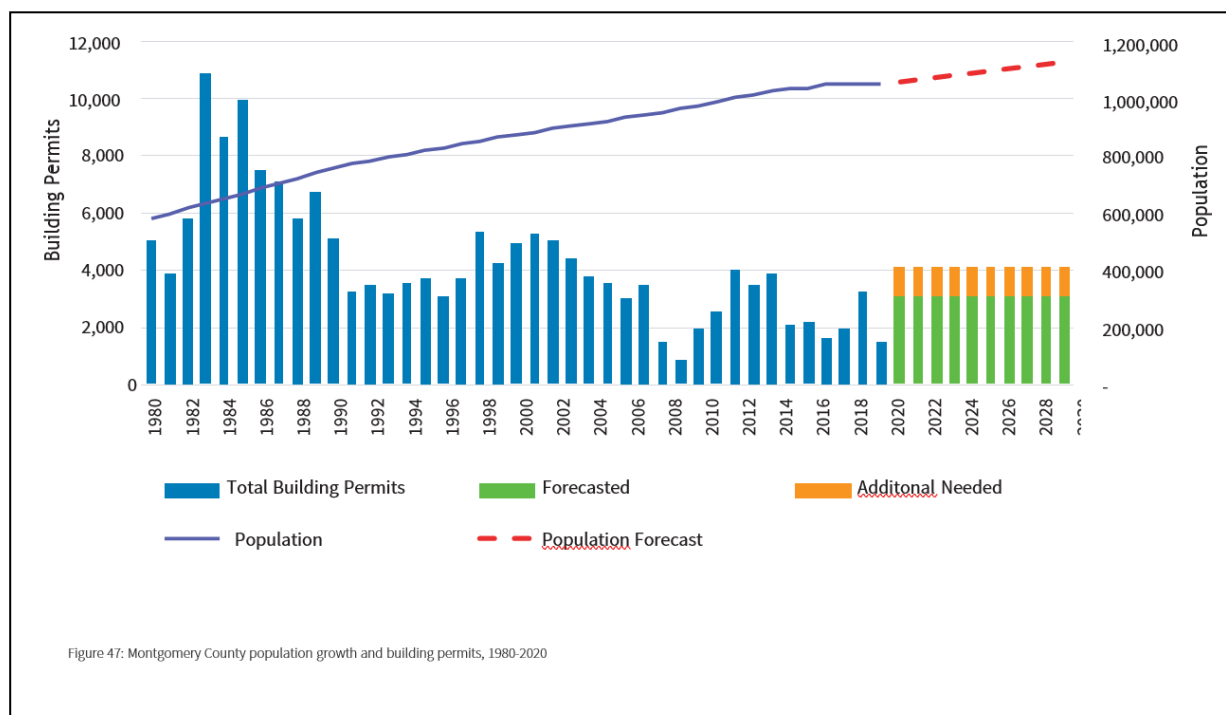
- Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)
- Non-Auto Driver Mode Share (NADMS)
- Average commute time, by mode
- Difference between average commute time by car and transit
- Person Trip accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Accessibility by all modes and especially via transit to jobs and amenities
- Number of traffic-related severe injuries and fatalities
- Transportation system's [GHG] greenhouse gas emissions
- Miles of auto travel lanes per capita
- Teleworking
- Motor vehicle parking per unit of development
- Access to high-speed wireless networks

Note that many of these metrics have an equity component and should be evaluated through an equity lens.

# HOUSING FOR ALL: More of Everything

## Introduction: Housing Lags Population and Job Growth

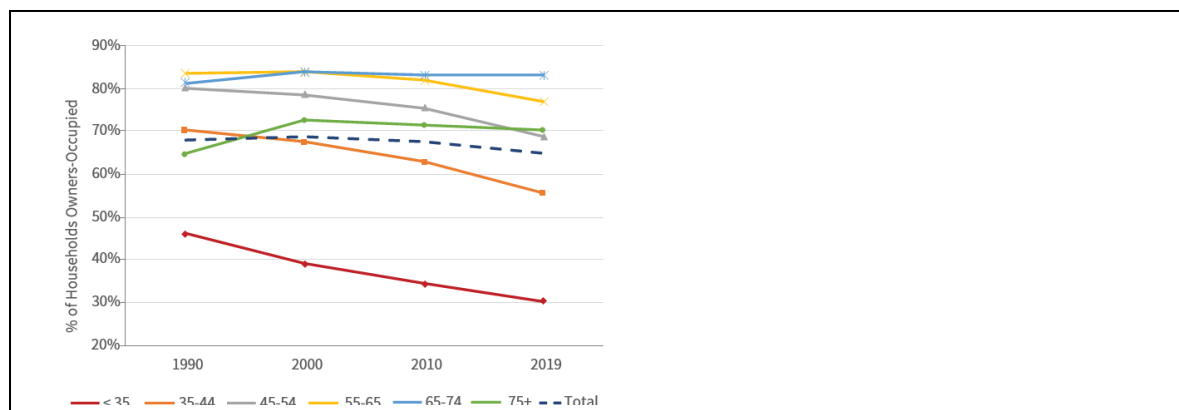
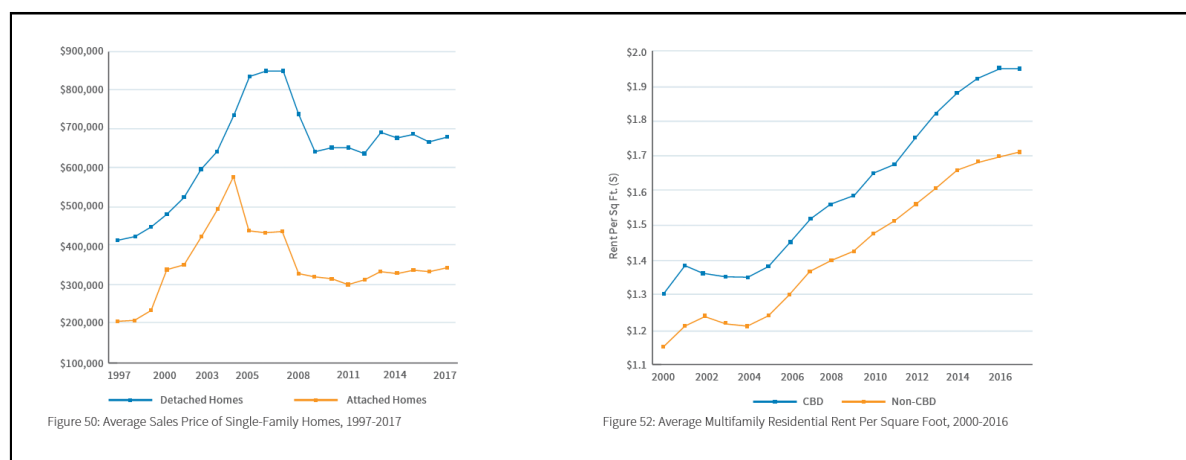
The Washington region has experienced slow but steady growth in recent decades, even as many parts of the country have struggled to attract residents and economic opportunities. Unfortunately, the region (including Montgomery County and most neighboring jurisdictions) has not generated enough new housing – particularly housing that matches the incomes and needs of the workforce – to match this relatively moderate pace of population and job growth. From 1980 to 2018, the average number of dwellings built each year in Montgomery County has steadily declined, both in absolute terms and relative to the rest of the region. Building permits have lagged well behind the 4,200 a year average that the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) has estimated are needed to address inadequate housing production and supply.



## What is the problem we are trying to solve?

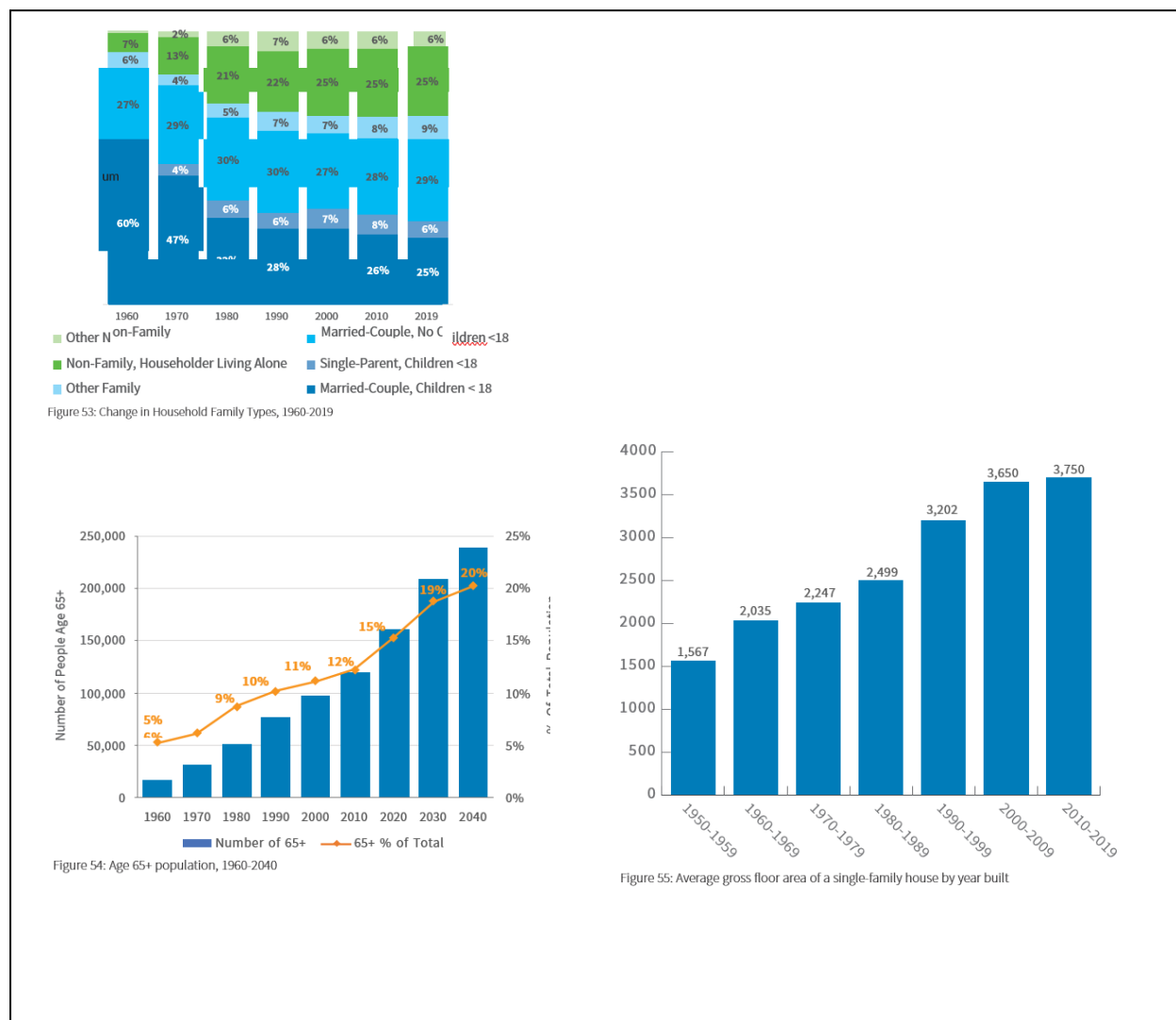
While the county’s median household income remains relatively high, disproportionate growth in the number of households at the high and low ends of the income spectrum has created a barbell effect, with increasing numbers of low-income renters burdened by housing costs. Economic development strategies that improve incomes and employment options can help to

combat this problem, but more attention and resources directed at affordable housing are also necessary. A mismatch of supply and demand, where demand exceeds [Weak] supply, raises the price of housing for both renters and those who want to own their home. The number of households spending at least 30 percent of income on housing has continued to grow. Housing price increases have outpaced growth in incomes, leading some people to leave the county in search of more affordable places to live. Homeownership rates have been in decline, especially for adults under the age of 35. The obstacles faced by young workers in finding housing they can afford makes it harder for employers to attract and retain the employees they need, [damaging]hurting our economic competitiveness.

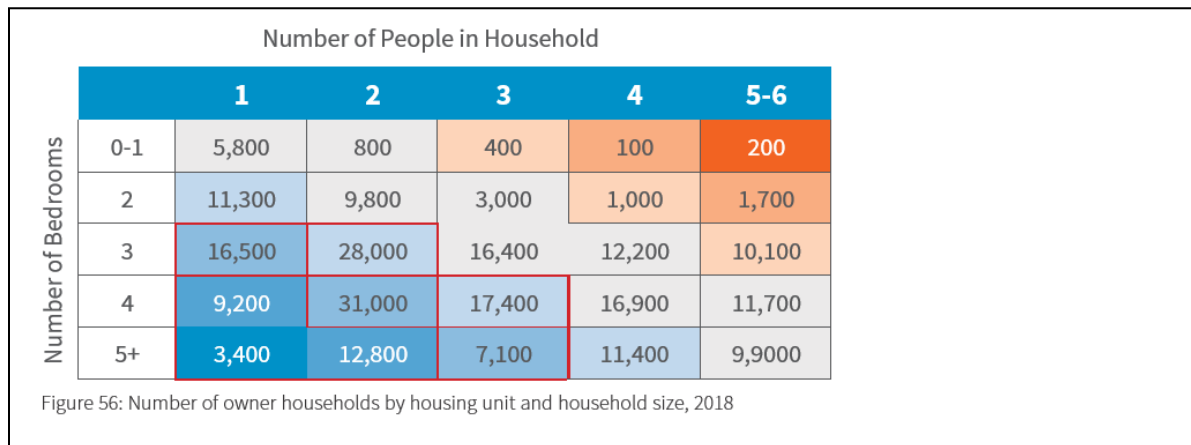


The county's housing challenges are not limited to the slow pace of new construction. Social and economic changes have opened a growing gap between the living patterns of the early 21st century and the housing stock of earlier generations. The [stereo]typical family household of the 1950s, consisting of a married couple with children living at home, represents a steadily diminishing share of all households. The percentage of households consisting of one person living alone increased from seven percent in 1960 to 25 percent in 2019, partly as a result of a trend toward deferring marriage and childbirth, and partly because a larger number of older people are divorced or widowed. The percentage of households consisting of a married couple with

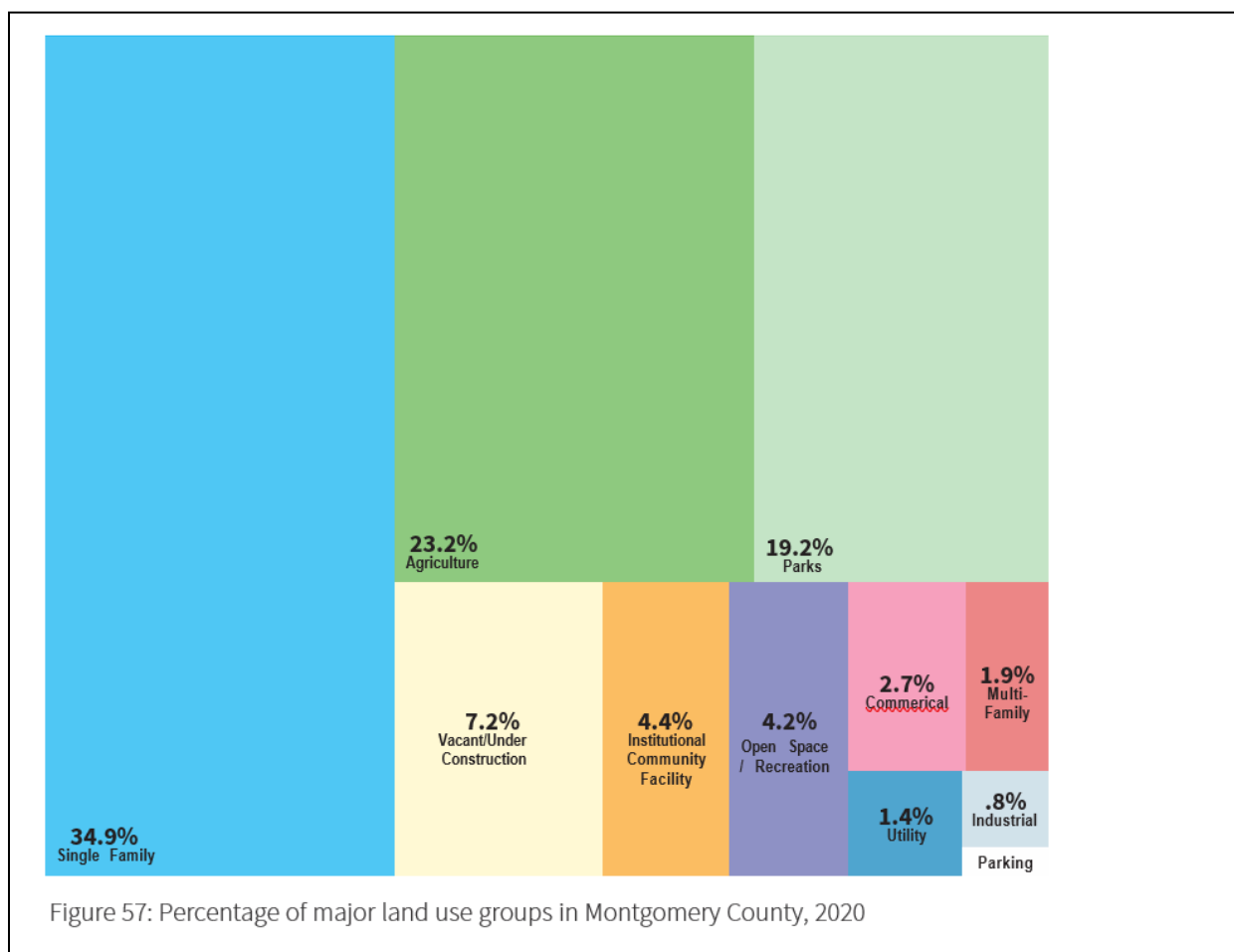
children and the percentage of households consisting of one person living alone have remained fairly stable since 1990.



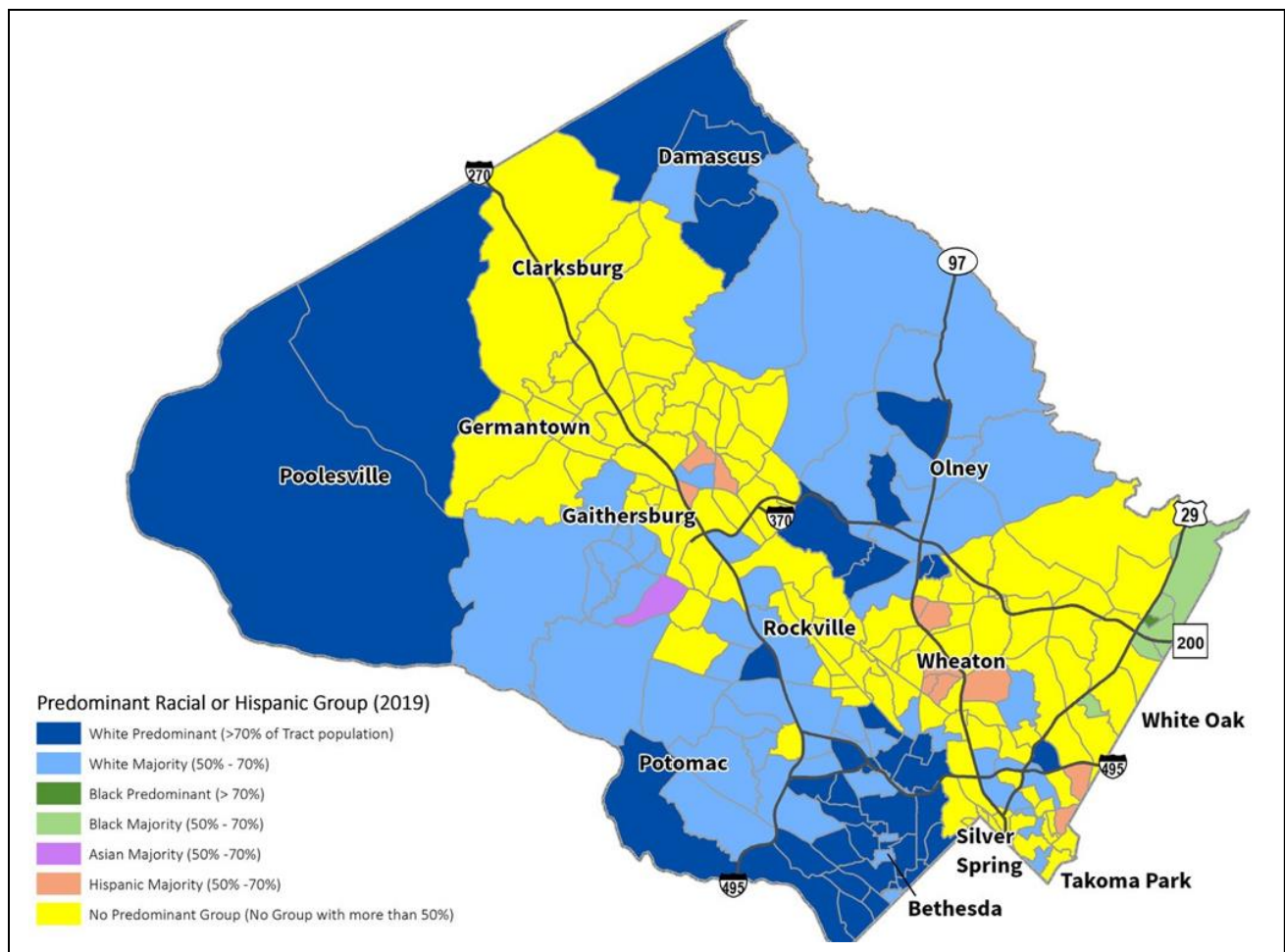
Despite the shrinking size of households, new single-family homes are getting larger, and single-family dwellings make up two-thirds of the county's housing stock. Options to buy a starter home [or downsize] are limited. [ , and] So are options to downsize. By some estimates, as many as one in three owner households are "over-housed"- that is, they have at least two more bedrooms than residents. [Because] With more than one-third of the county's land area [is] zoned for single family housing, more than ten times the area zoned for mixed use development, our ability to provide a greater variety of housing units in desirable locations is constrained. This limits the ability of long-time residents who want to relocate to a different type of home in their neighborhoods, and limits the availability of starter homes.



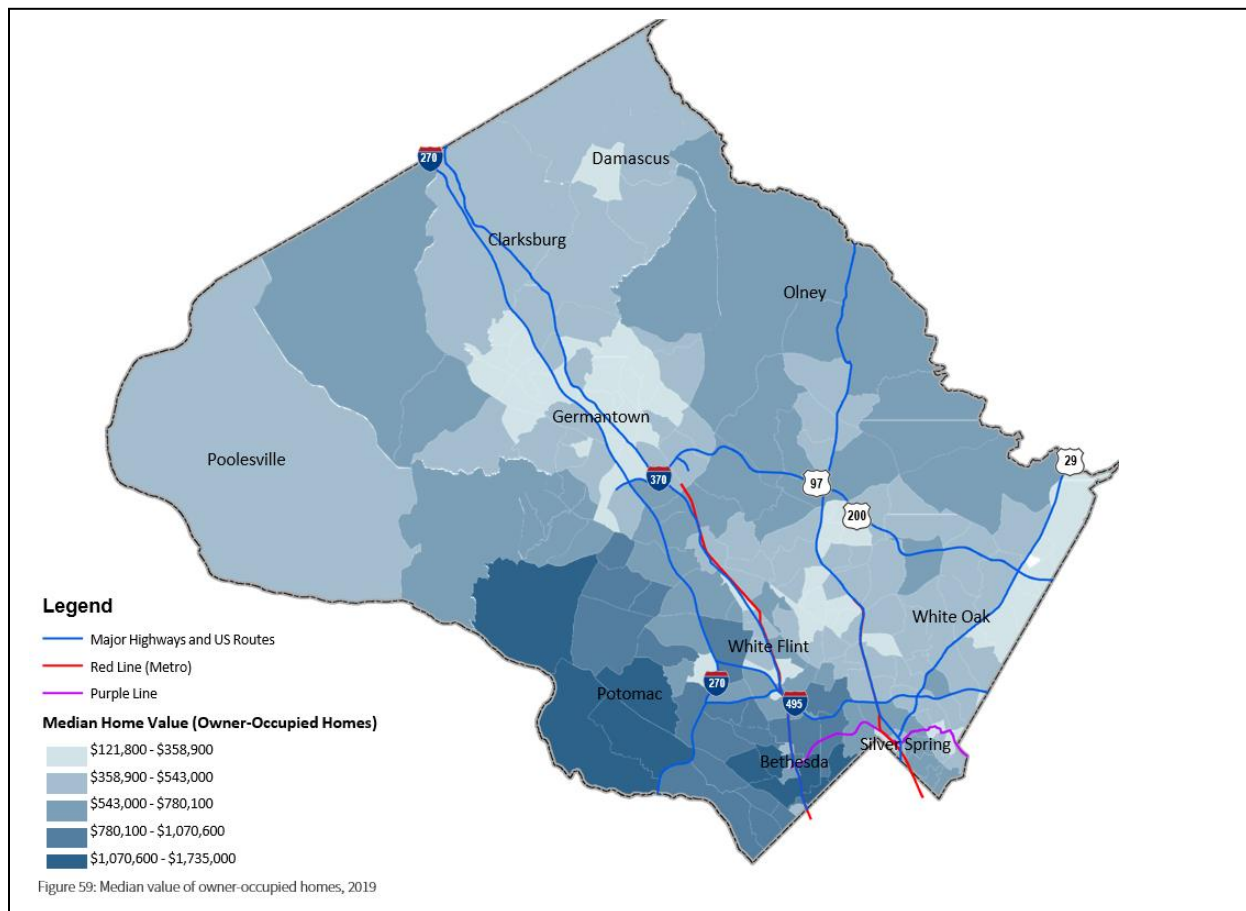
80,000 owner households or 32 percent of owner households, are over-housed, compared to only 3 percent of renters households by the same measure.



The high cost and limited variety of available housing exacerbate inequality and segregation by race and economic class. Home prices vary widely in different parts of the county, closely tracking the racial and economic characteristics of neighborhoods, with [predominantly] white residents living in more expensive neighborhoods with better access to jobs, schools, and transportation options than the [African American or Latino] residents of less expensive neighborhoods, which are home to a disproportionate number of the County's African American, Latino, and other resident of color. These inequities reinforce the legacy of racism and both de facto and de jure segregation and continue to influence the geographic distribution of opportunities and resources, too often leading to inequitable outcomes in educational attainment, economic opportunity, and public health.



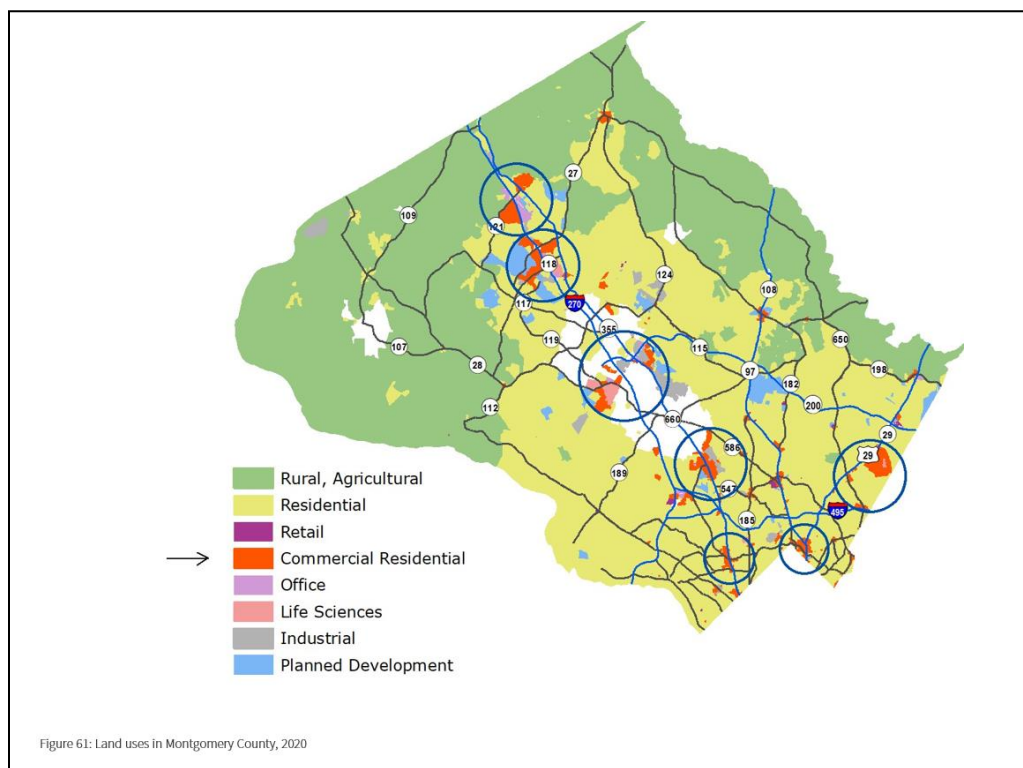
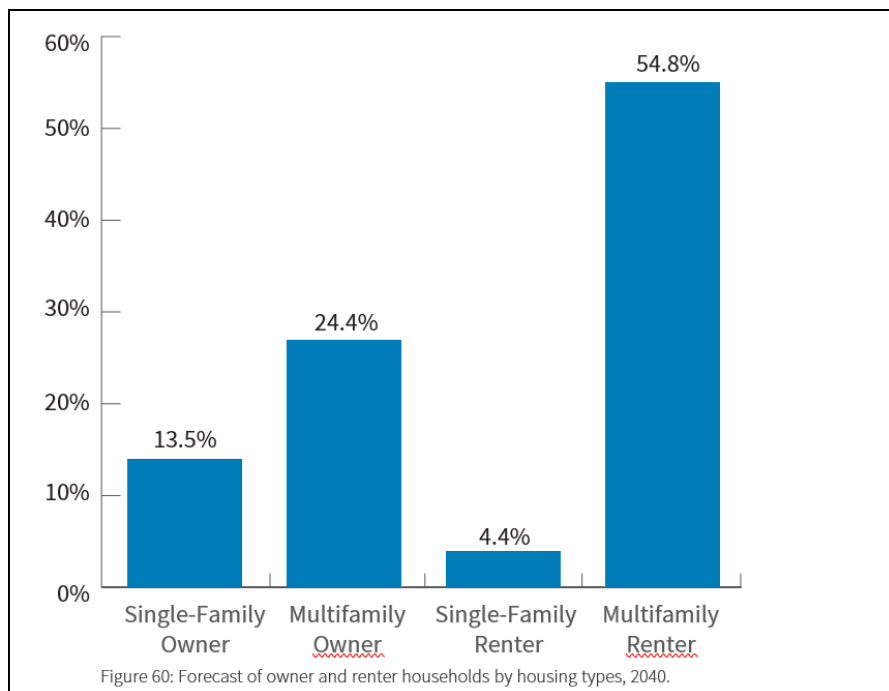




Without more housing in general and an increase in the availability of smaller, less expensive housing in particular, housing will become less affordable to a broad swath of the county's residents. Some will leave the county, either commuting long distances from home to work or departing the region in search of a more affordable place to live. Others will struggle with the burden of paying their rent or mortgage, reducing their standard of living.

Between 2020 and 2040, Montgomery County is expected to [need to] add 63,031 new households, both working households and non-working households with[, specifically] new residents who are seniors or persons with disabilities.

Over the 2020 to 2040 period, forecast assumptions suggest that Montgomery County will need to add the following types of housing units to accommodate the forecasted households.



## What policies will solve the problem?

Montgomery County needs housing at a wide range of prices. [because] The current crisis of housing affordability affects households at all income levels (except the most affluent), not just low-income households. The term affordable housing, generally used for subsidized housing, does not encompass the housing needs of middle-income households that constitute the largest segment of the county's population who are hurt by [the] rising housing costs and limited supply. In [addition], all non-subsidized market rate housing needs attention if Montgomery County is [ever] going to change the current trajectory of housing affordability. Montgomery County must view access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing as a basic human right. Every resident of Montgomery County should have a place to call home and no resident should be homeless.

[Expansion and diversification of our housing stock also is an essential step toward reducing racial and socioeconomic inequality.] By 2045, people of color are forecast to make up 73 percent of the county's population, with a significant percentage of these residents earning less than \$50,000 a year. [Unless] Without economic strategies that are successful in reducing the projected percentage of households at low incomes, about half of all new dwellings will need to be rental units in multifamily buildings (including both apartment and townhome, duplex, triplex, and quadplex units) and more than one quarter will need to be for-sale units in multifamily buildings (including condominiums and other attached and semi-detached building types) in order to match the amount and types of housing to the needs of our residents. Expansion and diversification of our housing stock is an essential step toward reducing racial and socioeconomic inequality.

In order to address the county's need to increase the amount and variety of housing, the county [will] should pursue the following policies and actions:

### Encourage the production of more housing to better match supply with demand

- Expand opportunities to increase residential density, especially along major corridors and in locations where additional housing can assist in the development of Complete Communities. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Increase the number of income-restricted affordable housing units, especially for low-income households with particular attention to high-income areas to ensure that people who work in retail, service and other low wage earning employment sectors have the option not to commute. (Eq,)
- As part of the commitment to the Housing First approach, develop strategies to build deeply affordable housing and provide permanent supportive housing in support of unsheltered populations and those who may be aging out of youth programs. (Eq,)
- Support building code amendments that [to] reduce costs by accommodating innovative construction methods and materials including modular prefabricated housing and mass timber. (Eq, Env)
- Prioritize use of public land for co-location of housing and other uses, particularly where government agencies design new facilities or dispose of real property. Consideration of

increased opportunities for housing low and very low-income households should be included in the analysis of how best to leverage county assets. (Eq, Env)

- Increase regulatory flexibility to incentivize residential infill, redevelopment, and repositioning of office parks, shopping malls, and other underutilized properties. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Provide financial and other incentives to boost housing production for market rate and affordable housing, especially near transit and in Complete Communities. (Ec, Eq, Env)

#### **Plan for a wide range of housing types and sizes to meet diverse needs**

- Facilitate the development of a variety of housing types in every part of the county but especially in areas near transit, employment, and educational opportunities. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Support creative housing options including personal living quarters and/or micro units; “missing middle” housing types such as tiny houses, cottages, duplexes, multiplexes, and small apartment buildings; shared housing, cooperative housing, co- housing, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs), to help meet housing needs and diversify housing options throughout the county. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Consider features of other housing models such as social housing that, in addition to providing long-term affordability for low and moderate-income households, emphasizes architectural quality, environmental performance, and social stability. (Eq, Env)
- Encourage provision of multi-bedroom units suitable for households with children in multifamily housing. (Eq, Env)
- Integrate people with disabilities, people transitioning from homelessness, and older adults into housing with appropriate affordability, amenities and services sized and designed to accommodate their households. (Eq,)

#### **Promote racial and economic diversity and equity in housing in every neighborhood**

- Calibrate the applicability of the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) program and other affordable housing programs to provide price-regulated units appropriate for income levels ranging from deeply affordable to workforce. (Ec, Eq,)
- Develop targeted strategies to minimize gentrification and displacement while promoting integration and housing choice and avoiding a concentration of poverty. (Eq,)
- Refine regulatory tools and financial and other incentives with the goal of avoiding a net loss of market-rate and income-restricted affordable housing stock without erecting disincentives for the construction of additional units. (Eq,)
- Identify and allocate additional revenue for the Housing Initiative Fund (HIF) and other county programs to meet the needs of low-income households. (Eq,)
- Expand existing programs designed to increase access to homeownership, especially among low-income residents, people of color, and young adults; create new programs

and entities such as community land trusts to maintain long term affordable homeownership opportunities. (Eq.)

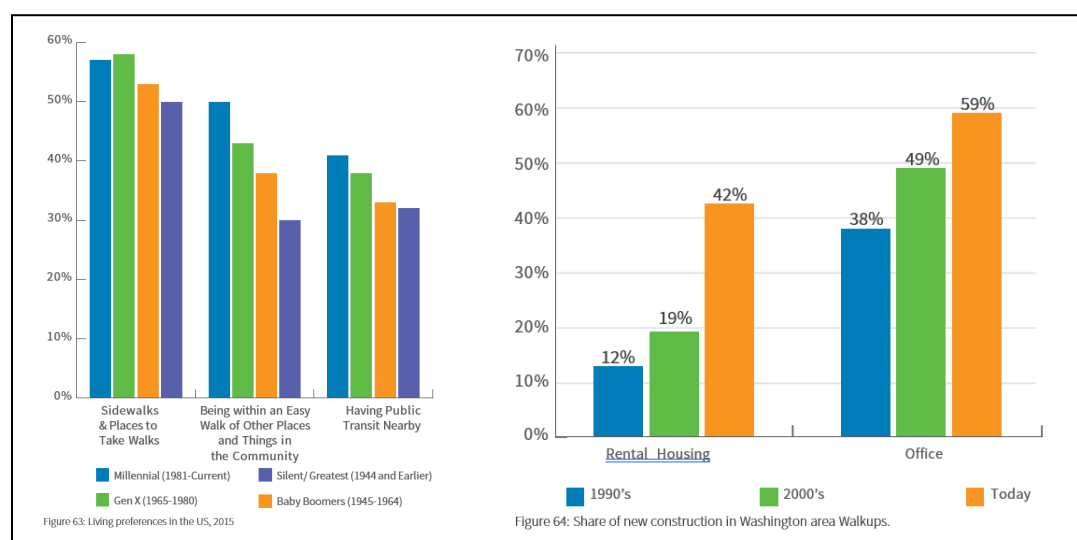
- Support and strengthen housing code regulations and tenant protections to ensure healthy and fair housing. (Eq.)
- Examine options to expand housing access through the elimination of fair housing barriers and enforcement of fair housing laws to protect residents from discrimination. (Eq.)
- Improve collection of data on neighborhood change to monitor and address involuntary displacement, disinvestment, and related phenomena. (Eq.)

## How will these policies serve the goals of Thrive Montgomery 2050?

A healthy supply of [new] housing that is suited to meet the needs of households of different sizes, incomes, needs, and preferences is central to achieving Thrive Montgomery's key objectives:

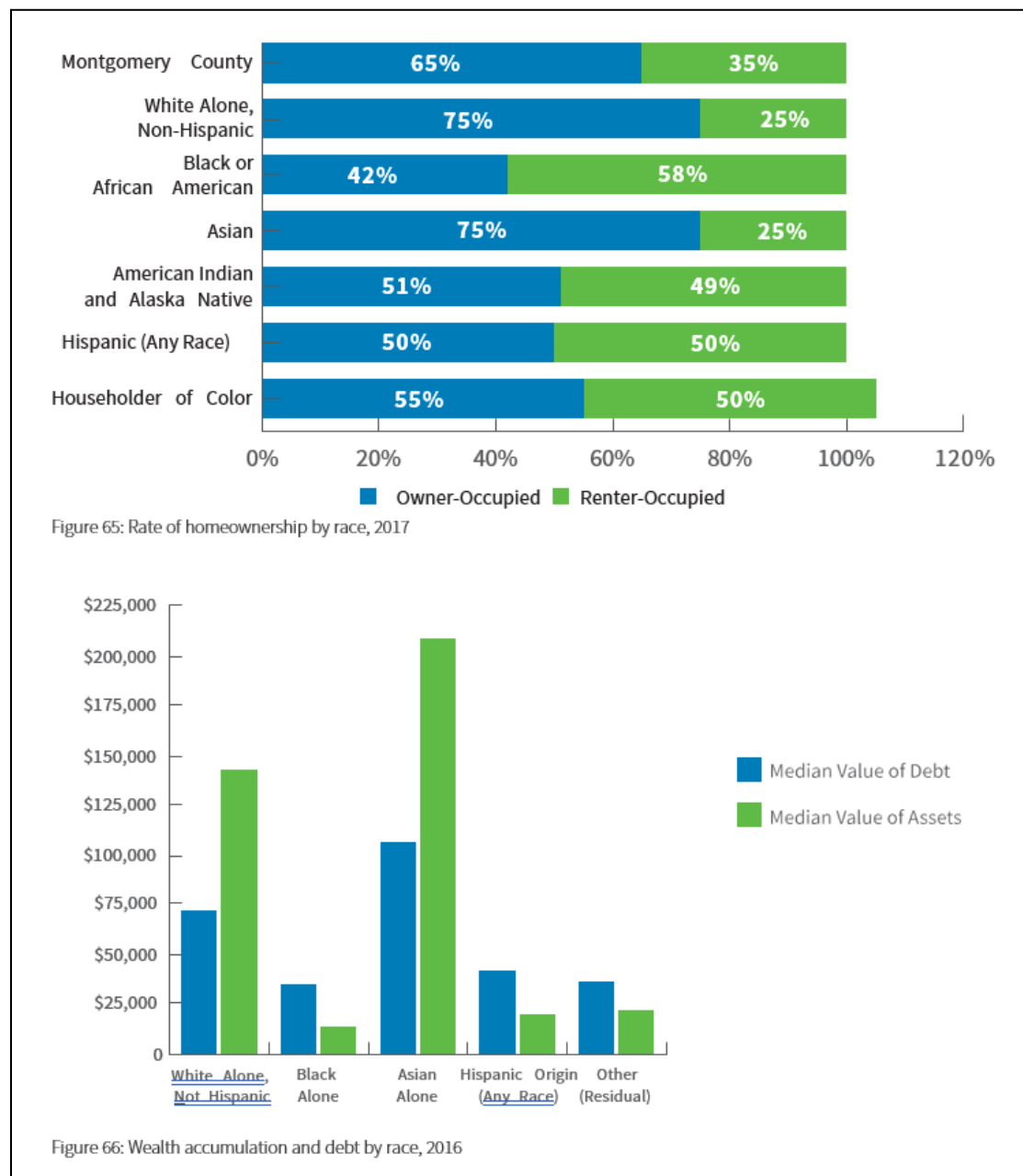
### Housing Supports the Workforce Needed to Grow Our Economy

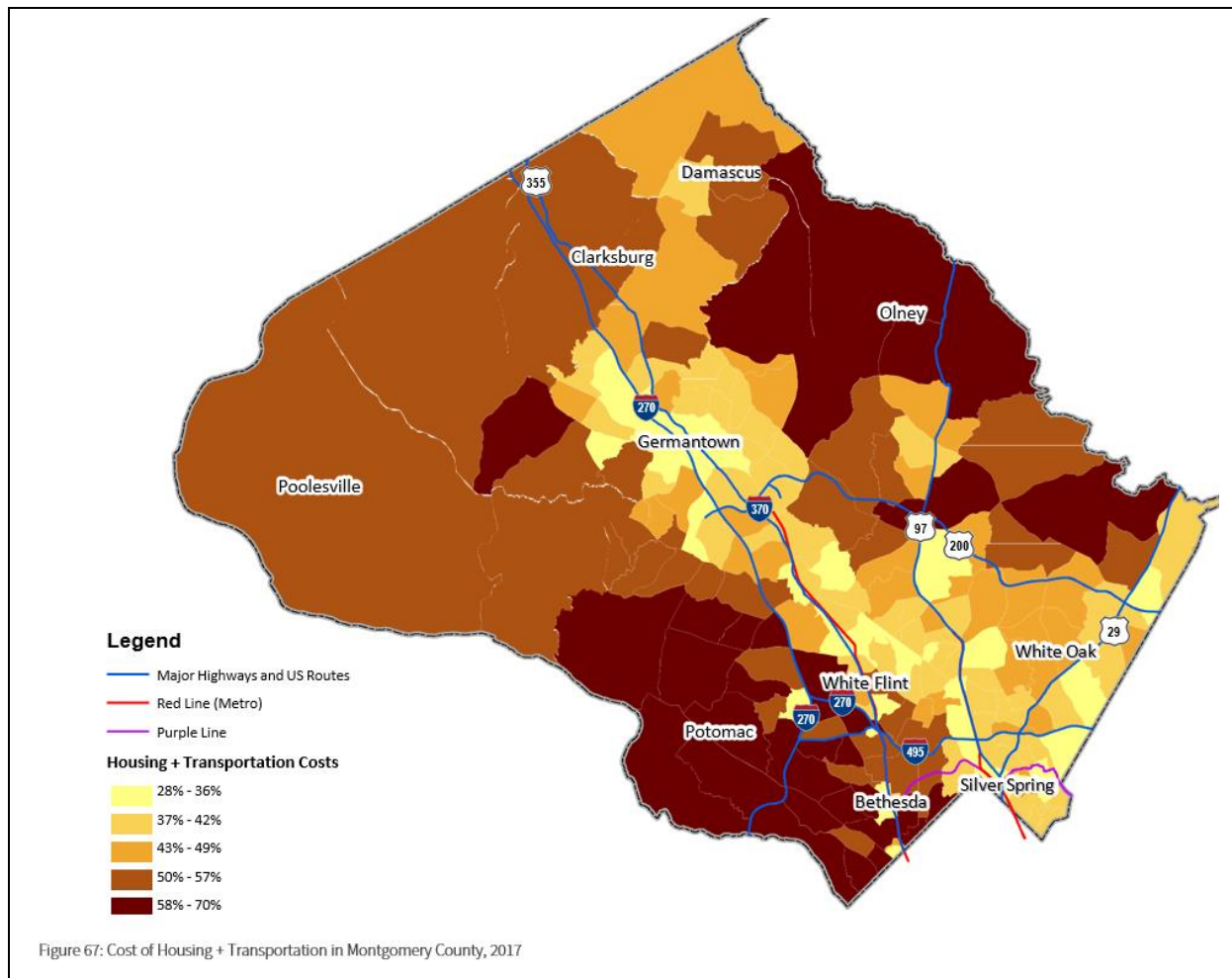
First, increasing the supply of [new] housing near transit, jobs, and amenities will improve the quality of life for everyone in the county while helping to attract and retain the broadly skilled workforce that employers need, helping to make [making] the county more economically competitive. The increased 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.



## A Range of Housing Types Priced for a Range of Incomes Is Essential to Integration and Equity

Second, 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.





Adding more “Missing Middle” 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 to more neighborhoods is intended to [will] provide more choice, enhance intergenerational interaction, promote aging in place, and build social capital.

Missing middle housing will not necessarily be “affordable” in the same sense as price- or income-restricted units that receive public subsidies or are covered by the county’s moderately priced dwelling unit program, but it [will]can fill crucial gaps in the housing market. For first-time buyers who struggle to save enough for a down payment on a large, single-family house, a duplex or tiny house can provide an accessible point of entry to home ownership. For empty nesters who want to downsize but cannot find a smaller, less expensive home in the neighborhood where they raised their family, a small apartment building or a courtyard bungalow could provide a welcome alternative to relocating from the area.

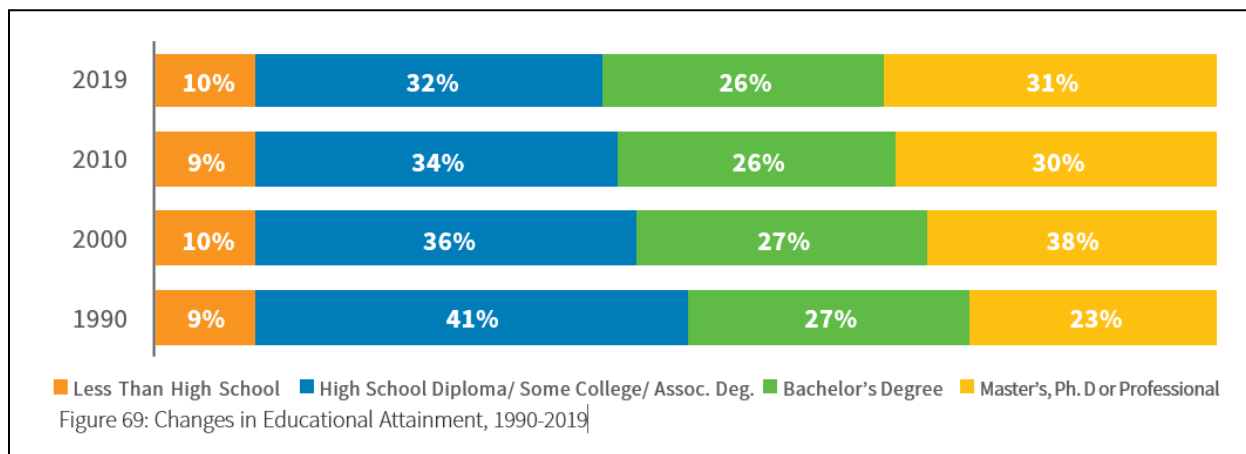


Of course, missing middle housing by its nature is highly likely to be more affordable than single-family detached houses in the same neighborhood because these housing types require less land, employ relatively inexpensive wood frame construction, and are designed for people looking for smaller and more efficient living spaces. We need less expensive alternatives to single-family detached dwellings because a wider variety of options accessible across the spectrum of incomes, family sizes, and lifestyles will make the housing market function more effectively for all of our residents at every stage of their lives.



Preservation of both naturally occurring and regulated existing affordable units will minimize gentrification and displacement as these communities see future investments in transit infrastructure, schools, and amenities. Building new affordable housing for families in existing amenity-rich neighborhoods will expand access to quality education for a wider range of students, leading to more integrated schools and helping close the achievement gap for people of color. Over time, these efforts are expected to minimize de facto segregation based on income between school districts and encourage greater social mobility. Mixed-income housing in communities lagging in investment will help mitigate the concentration of poverty and enhance access to amenities and recreational opportunities for current residents.



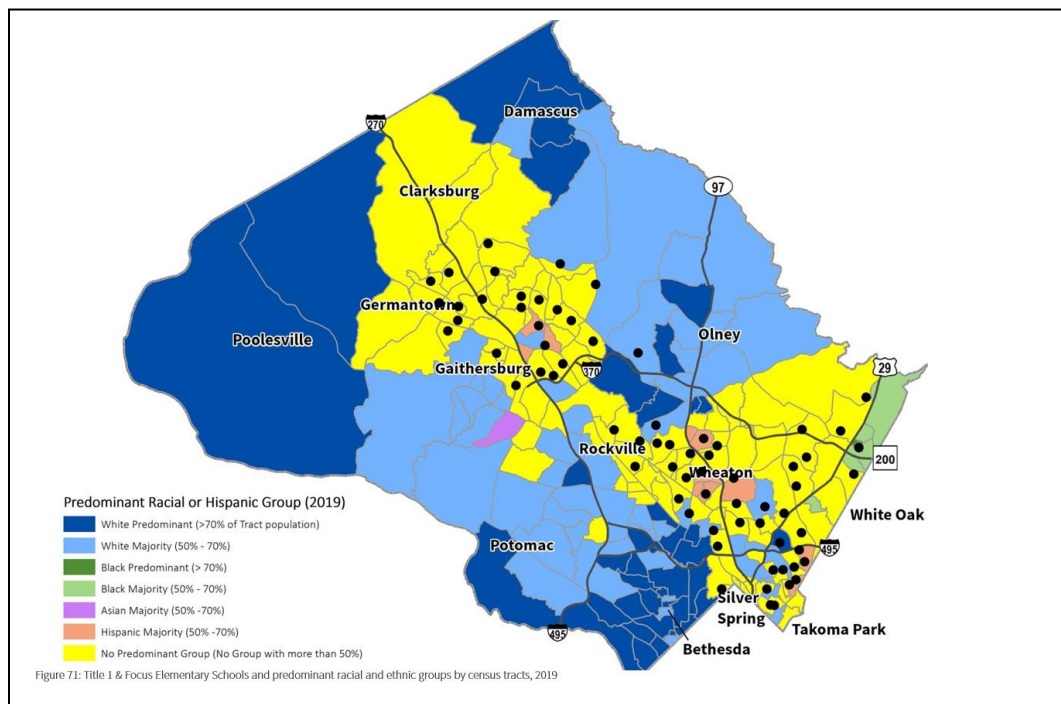
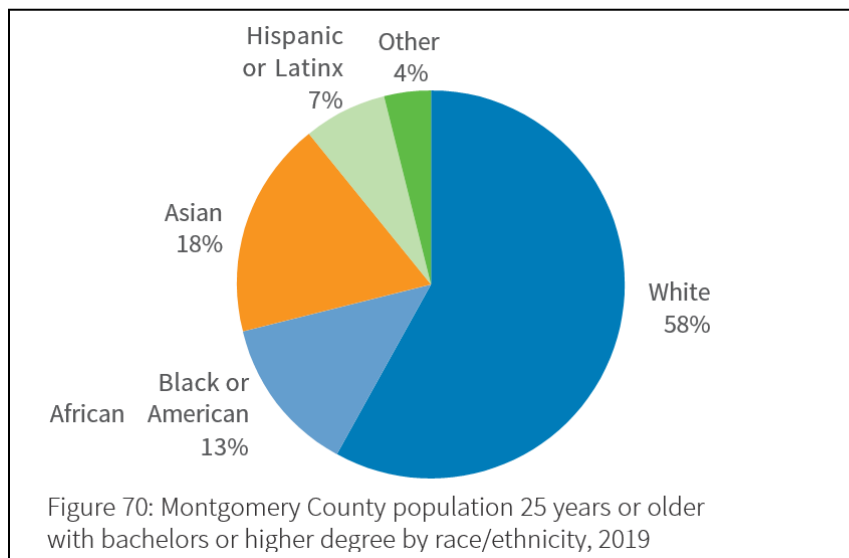


### A Wider Variety of Housing Types Is Crucial to Reducing the Environmental Impact of Growth

Third, a broader range of housing types – particularly the inclusion of multifamily buildings of varying scale depending on their location – will reinforce the benefits of Complete Communities because flexible residential zoning [will]should allow more people to live closer to work, increase the walkability of neighborhoods, and limit the development footprint on the environment. By allowing smaller residences and more multifamily building types, encouraging infill and repurposing, and adding housing near transit and jobs, these recommendations will collectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve other measures of environmental health. New construction can also help mitigate environmental impacts by increased use of stormwater management, use of clean building materials and technology, more energy efficient lighting and appliances, and plumbing fixtures that conserve water.

Historically, many people who fill critical jobs in Montgomery County, such as teachers, police and first responders, and the service workforce have lived in [had to move to] more remote parts of the County or outside [of] Montgomery County altogether, [and] driving long distances to reach their places of employment. Creating a wider range of more housing options through infill, redevelopment and adaptive reuse of existing buildings [will] should provide these workers the opportunity to live closer to their employment, which would also reduce vehicle miles traveled while using valuable land more sustainably.

Montgomery County's naturally occurring affordable housing can also [have]play a role in mitigating [their]its environmental impact as [they]the housing ages. The rehabilitation of these facilities presents an opportunity to shepherd in environmentally sustainable practices. [as they age and are rehabilitated]. Rehabilitation offers environmental benefits through adding more eco-friendly and modern features, like newer appliances and HVAC systems.



## How will we evaluate progress?

In assessing proposals related to the supply of housing and measuring the success or failure of the approaches [recommended]proposed in this plan, relevant measures may include:

- Rates of homeownership by race, income, age, and area

- Number of and proportion of cost-burdened households disaggregated by race, income, and age
- Combined housing and transportation costs disaggregated by race
- Rent and mortgage payments as a proportion of household income disaggregated by race, income, and age
- Number and percent of low-income households in a census tract (concentration of poverty)
- Number and percent of low-income households lost in a census tract over a period of time (displacement)
- Racial and income diversity [within neighborhoods] across a variety of areas throughout the county
- Proportion of housing units proximate to transit routes and job centers
- Number of residential units issued building permits, overall and by area of county
- Number of affordable units by type, overall and by area of county
- Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing preserved, overall and by area of county
- Number of homeless residents
- Proportion of missing middle housing units and units in multifamily buildings
- Range of home prices by housing type
- Greenhouse gas emissions and energy use from residential buildings and transportation per capita

# **PARKS AND RECREATION: For an Increasingly Urban and Diverse Community- Active and Social**

## **Introduction: Evolving and Expanding Roles for Parks and Recreation**

Montgomery County has long been a leader in adopting forward-thinking policies for the preservation of land for parks, recreation, agriculture, and resource conservation. The M-NCPPC has won the National Recreation and Parks Association Gold Medal for the country's best large parks system a record six times. Like other aspects of planning, however, the success of our approach to parks, recreation and open space must continue to evolve to meet changing needs.

The story of the Parks Department closely tracks the ways in which American suburbs – and the attitudes, lifestyles, and values of their residents – have changed:

- In the 1920s and 1930s, developers of early down-county subdivisions dedicated stream valley floodplains to the M-NCPPC. The resulting parks helped to market these subdivisions and provided a place for water and sewer infrastructure along with parkways for pleasure driving. This was a period when restrictive covenants were used in some residential neighborhoods to exclude racial and religious minorities, and public recreational facilities such as swimming pools were also often segregated.
- In the early post-war period, Montgomery County's role as a bedroom community for a growing capital city increased demand for organized recreation in park activity buildings, ballfields, and tennis courts. The development pattern throughout these early decades of the Parks Department's history was characterized by subdivisions of single-family homes with backyards grouped by residents with similar income and social structure and designed with the assumption that residents could, would and should drive to major amenities.
- By the 1960s and 1970s, the influence of the environmental movement – sparked in part by Silver Spring's Rachel Carson – led the park system to devote more attention to resource stewardship. The 1980s and 1990s saw the introduction of "smart growth" and increased appreciation for the benefits of a compact form of development, with park acquisition and the Agricultural Reserve working together as part of a comprehensive approach to land conservation policy as a tool to protect the environment and discourage sprawl.
- By the mid-1990s, the Parks Department had begun to recognize the importance of preserving and interpreting significant sites in local African American history. For example, it established the Underground Railroad Trail and related programming to help tell the story of slavery and emancipation as these events played out in Montgomery County. The Department did not, however, give much thought to disparities in the distribution of recreational opportunities or access to nature.
- At the turn of the 21st century, the desire to revitalize central business districts led the Parks Department to plan and build more urban parks, initially as "buffers" to protect abutting

single-family neighborhoods from more intensive – or simply different – types of development such as apartment buildings, townhouses, or commercial uses.

- In recent years, the Parks Department has developed analytical tools such as “equity mapping” to ensure racial, socioeconomic and geographic equity in parks and recreation budget and programming decisions. Projects like the Josiah Henson Museum and Woodlawn Manor Cultural Park help to educate residents about the history and legacy of slavery, and staff with deep expertise in historic preservation, archeology, and cultural programming work to document the stories of African Americans and their role in the county’s history.

### Montgomery County Parks Timeline 1930 to 2010

**1930s-1940s**



**Stream Valley Parks  
Water Protection**

**1950s-1960s**



**Regional Parks  
And Athletic Fields**

**1970s**



**Neighborhood Parks**

**1960s-1970s**



**Environmental Awareness**

**1980s-1990s**



**Smart Growth  
Open Space Preservation**

**2000s-2010s**



**Urban Park Shortage**

### What is the problem we are trying to solve? Closing the Gaps in Park and Recreation Planning to Meet the Needs – and Serve the Values - of a Changing Community

The Parks Department has built a well-deserved reputation for environmental stewardship, and it has made progress in providing a wider range of recreational opportunities, such as cricket, to meet the needs of a more culturally diverse population. It has room, however, for improvement:

- Our highest density areas are far from most parkland, which is difficult to reach without access to a car.
- Conservation-oriented parks can include carefully designed trails and other low impact recreation areas; however, many of these parks lack appropriate access for hikers and bikers, limiting their availability to the greater public.
- Parks conceived as buffers often act as separators rather than gathering places for people.
- Park facility standards and acquisition strategies conceived during a period of greenfield expansion are incompatible with infill development and adaptive reuse of sites.

Meanwhile, the role of land conservation and stewardship in addressing the county's environmental sustainability goals is as important as ever. Urban redevelopment and infill will reduce the environmental impact of future growth by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and help reverse the damage from earlier development by incorporating modern state-of-the-practice stormwater management features. Nonetheless, the environmental performance of green infrastructure on public land must keep getting better to improve water quality, limit property damage and erosion from flooding, and add tree and forest cover.

In addition to maintaining its leadership role in environmental management, the Parks Department must continue to take on new roles:

- Improve service to residents of downtowns, town centers, and other intensively developed areas
- Focus on social engagement and community building as a central role of parks and recreation
- Encourage vigorous physical activity for people of all ages, abilities, and cultures

Over the coming decades, our challenge is to acquire, develop and program parks, recreation, and privately owned public spaces that provide a range of active recreation and community building opportunities throughout the most intensively developed parts of the county while continuing to apply sound environmental stewardship practices to public lands.

### **What policies will solve the problem?**

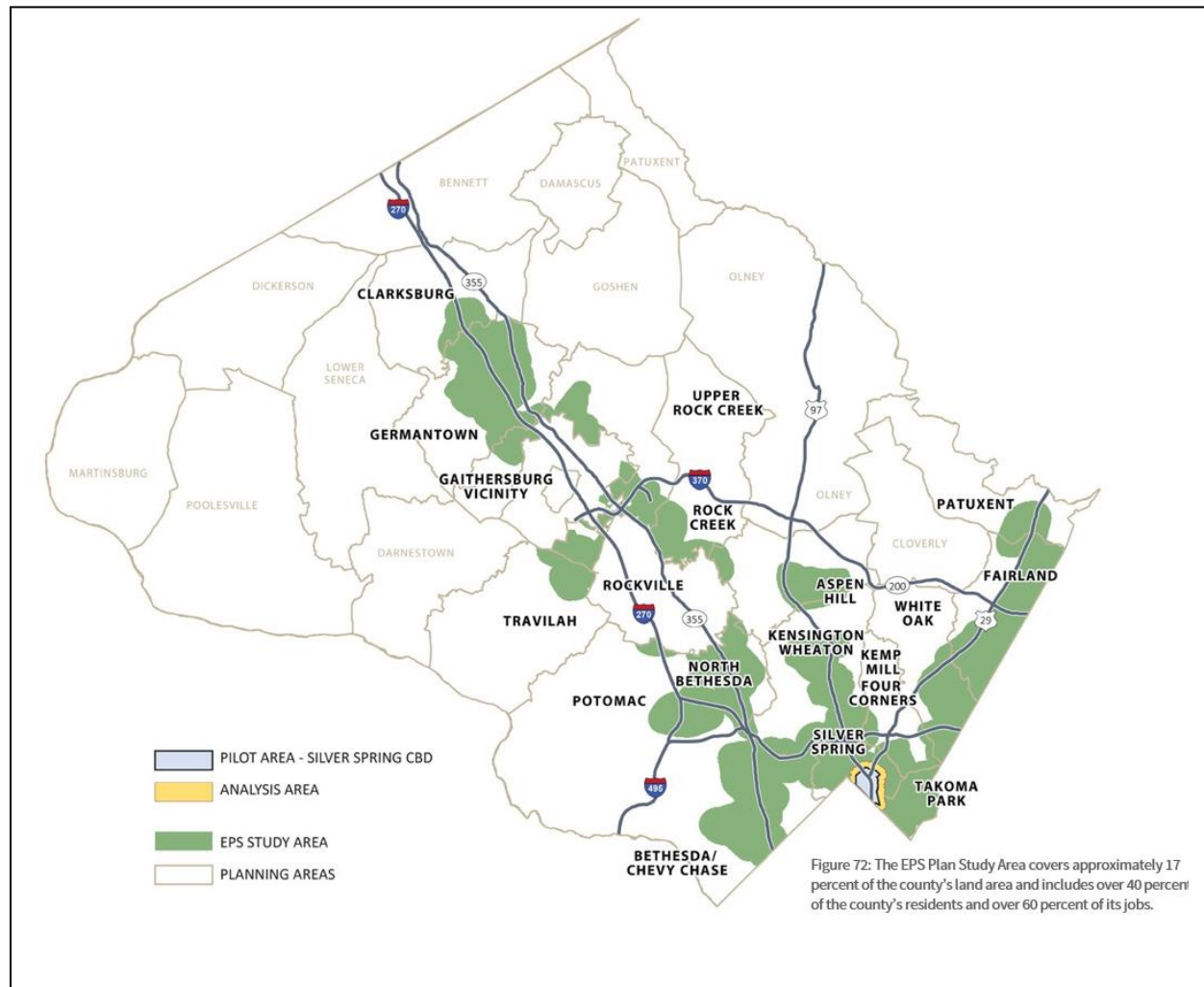
In order to maximize the contributions of parks and recreation towards creating strong communities with lasting value, the county will pursue the following policies and practices:

#### **Focus on creating high quality urban parks.**

- Prioritize acquisition of land for parks in urban centers and other intensively developed places along growth corridors and in Complete Communities using the Legacy Urban Space CIP commitment, the Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan (EPS Plan) and the Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan as starting points. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Offer programs in urban parks to encourage visitation, increase the amount of time spent in parks and make these spaces centers of activity. (Eq)
- Implement the EPS Plan to ensure that densely populated parts of the county enjoy walkable access to a full range of park experiences. (Ec, Eq)



- Integrate privately owned public spaces (POPS) with the park/recreation system to supplement publicly owned and managed gathering spaces and athletic facilities, using a range of ownership and management approaches to public space. (Eq)
- Coordinate land use and park planning to ensure Complete Communities have access to a range of park types, including athletic facilities, through a combination of public and privately owned [facilities] resources.

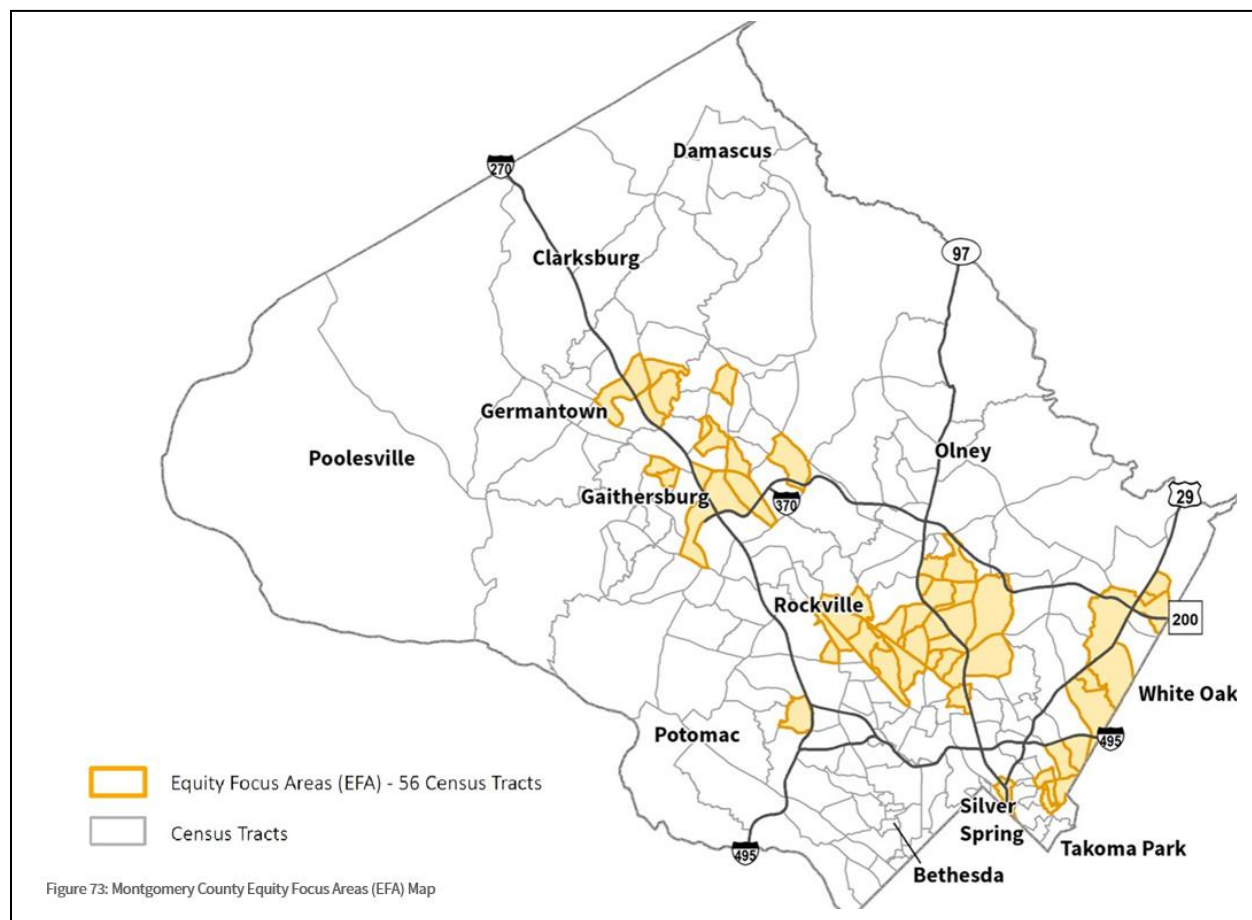


### Use park and recreation facilities/programs to promote active lifestyles.

- Include active recreation as an integral element in park planning and design.
- Encourage active recreation as a key component of POPS in all parts of the county.
- Deliver park and recreation facilities and programs designed to encourage residents of all ages, cultural backgrounds, and abilities to engage in vigorous physical activity. (Eq)
- Support the continued renovation and maintenance of high-quality athletic fields.

- Integrate park trails and paths into transportation planning and better use them to connect residents to jobs, centers of activity, and other parks and trails. (Ec, Eq)
- Ensure that residents in urban, suburban, and rural areas all have access to a wide variety of parks and programs.

CDC data from 2019 indicates that only 14.6-20.5 percent of Maryland adolescents (grades 9-12) achieve one hour or more of moderate and/or vigorous physical activity daily. Recent survey data show that the percentage of children under age 12 who played team sports “regularly” has declined in recent years, from 42 percent in 2011 to 38 percent in 2018.



**Ensure that parks and recreation opportunities are equitably distributed along racial, socioeconomic, and geographic lines.**

- Amend the EPS Plan study area to incorporate a more refined analysis of equity in its methodology. (Eq)



- Expand and improve the use of racial and socioeconomic equity measures in developing capital budgets for park and recreation facilities. (Eq)
- Gather data on – and address – barriers to participation in park and recreation programs. (Eq)
- Improve accessibility of park and recreation facilities via walking, biking and transit. (Eq)
- Ensure that urban, suburban, and rural areas all have access to great parks. (Ec, Eq)

**Make social connection a central objective for parks and recreation.**

- Design park, recreation, and related infrastructure and services around building community, creating opportunities for interaction, and making parks and recreational amenities a central element of Complete Communities. (Eq)
- Connect neighborhoods and people to parks with a world-class trail network. (Ec, Eq)
- Include food/beverage in planning and programming parks and recreational facilities where appropriate. (Ec)
- Provide park amenities that appeal to visitors with different interests and physical abilities. (Eq)

**Update park facility standards and acquisition strategies to align with infill development and adaptive reuse strategies.**

**Coordinate with county agencies to accommodate multiple needs, including recreation, education, community-building, and resource stewardship - through colocation, adaptive reuse, co-programming and other combined or shared land and facilities.**

**Maintain high standards of environmental stewardship in park management and operations.**

- Reaffirm the Parks Department’s commitment to resource conservation, stewardship, and sustainability practices such as innovative stream and habitat restoration projects. (Env)
- Selectively acquire additional land where needed to protect sensitive natural resources, improve water quality, increase tree cover, enhance wildlife corridors, curb invasive species, and achieve other environmental goals. (Env)
- Create a resiliency plan to improve the ability of park and recreation facilities and natural resources to withstand the effects of climate change. (Env)
- Prioritize the equitable distribution of green infrastructure.

**Integrate parks/rec/public spaces into economic development strategies and land use planning to attract employers and workers, build social connections, encourage healthy lifestyles, and create vibrant places, especially as part of Complete Communities.**

**How will these policies serve the goals of Thrive Montgomery 2050?**

These policies will strengthen the role of parks and recreation in economic competitiveness, racial equity, environmental sustainability and promote an active, healthy community for all.

## **Parks create vibrant, economically competitive places**

World-class places require world-class park, 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. Parks are essential to creating vibrant, economically competitive places. In fact, parks and the amenities they provide are regularly cited as among the most important factors influencing decisions by businesses about where to relocate or expand.

Multiple academic studies have shown that parks increase adjacent property values from 5 percent to 20 percent, providing incentives for property owners to contribute to the creation of public parkland or to build POPS as part of their development projects. This data also shows that taxpayer-funded investment in parks and related programming and amenities deliver strong economic returns on investment to the public.

## **Parks improve Equity, Social Interaction and Public Health**

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. The Parks Department has made major strides in recent years in incorporating quantitative measures of equity in its capital budget recommendations, and this approach should be expanded to include analysis of programs and facilities managed by other agencies, such as Montgomery County Public Schools, the Department of Recreation, and the Department of Libraries.

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 and focal points for response and recovery during natural disasters and other emergencies.

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. Trails for example, are a great way to motivate people to explore public spaces and new parts of the county, expose residents to different neighborhoods and encourage exercise and healthy lifestyles. Likewise, community gardens 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.

## **Parks will play a larger and more complex role in environmental management**

Of course, parks also play a major role in environmental sustainability. Climate change has resulted in increased frequency, intensity and/or duration of fires, flooding and intense rain events, drought, high winds, and extreme temperatures. This rapid destabilization of climate patterns jeopardizes the ecological stability of nearly all global communities. Parks and natural areas help address the effects of climate change and enhance environmental resiliency. Stream restoration and stormwater management projects on parkland protect against flooding and improve water quality. Parks provide wildlife corridors that can account for changes in habitat patterns. Urban tree canopy mitigates thermal pollution, helps limit the heat island effect of intensive development, filters pollutants, and sequesters carbon. Habitat restoration provides wildlife with natural terrain, reduces human-wildlife conflict, and improves overall ecosystem performance.

These benefits to the natural environment are especially important in parts of the county that have not been the beneficiaries of high levels of public and private investment. Sustainability is and will continue to be incorporated into every aspect of the Parks Department's work, and it should be accomplished in ways that complement and support investments in facilities and programs designed to expand access to active recreation and social connection rather than operating in competition with or opposition to these investments.

## **How will we evaluate progress?**

In assessing proposals related to parks and recreation and measuring the success or failure of the approaches recommended in this plan, relevant measures may include:

- Number of urban parks
- Miles of streams restored, and stormwater runoff treated
- Childhood obesity
- Stream water quality
- Urban tree canopy
- Additional miles of trails built
- Park and recreation patronage/participation by race/ethnicity, language spoken and age
- Awards and other recognition of excellence in urban parks and trails
- Patronage at community gatherings
- Proportion of population within 15-minute walk of three park experiences
- Proportion of park and recreational facilities serving equity focus areas
- Access to park and recreational facilities, including athletic fields via walking, biking, and transit
- Number of high-quality athletic fields, noting those with lights, on MCPS, County, and MNCPPC property
- Number of play spaces on MCPS, County, and MNCPPC property

## Conclusion

Our community has experienced major social, economic and environmental changes over the life of the Wedges and Corridors plan, and even more dramatic shifts are on the horizon.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 establishes a framework for responding to economic, demographic, social, and environmental change in ways that are rooted in enduring lessons about what has made places successful in the past, while remaining adaptable to unforeseen circumstances. That is why the plan emphasizes the basic concepts of compact form; diversity of building types and design; and complementary transportation infrastructure instead of attempting to predict the pace and direction of technological innovation or the consequences of catastrophic events, whether natural or man-made, whose long-term effects are impossible to forecast with certainty.

This plan seeks to ensure that we are prepared to face multiple futures. This document is a guidebook, not an exhaustive list of prescriptions. It does not address every topic relevant to our future, but it provides strong direction for decisions about land use, transportation, and related issues within the ability of local government to influence.

### Montgomery County has a lot going for it yet there's room for improvement

In addition to the advantages Montgomery County has enjoyed by virtue of our location in the national capital region, the County has benefitted from a tradition of thoughtful planning that has allowed us to develop and grow while preserving land and other resources in ways that have supported a high quality of life. The Wedges and Corridors Plan was exceptionally progressive for its time, and it helped us to build high quality park and school systems, preserved natural resources and farmland, and laid the groundwork for transit-oriented smart growth. Thrive Montgomery 2050 has attempted to provide an unflinching assessment of the Wedges and Corridors Plan and provide policies and practices that will build on its ideas but also address its shortcomings that have adversely impacted parts of the County.

The federal government's presence has given us a foundation of good jobs and a concentration of public investment in life sciences and information technology that provide enviable opportunities. But the stability and reliability of the base of employment tied to government should not make us complacent. Policies and investments need to capitalize on those opportunities and ensure that Montgomery County is a strong competitor with a diverse economy that brings our residents good paying jobs. Because land is scarce, there is less room for error and discipline is needed in how land is used, and design excellence [is] can be fostered to respond to market forces and attract both businesses and residents to call Montgomery County home.

We must also address the reality that Montgomery County's prosperity has not benefited all our residents equitably. The urgency of demands for racial justice and the need to rebuild bonds of trust and community are clear. 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 inequitable practices has grown increasingly urgent.

As for environmental sustainability, Montgomery County's past record of support for water quality protection, forest conservation, and land preservation are helpful but ultimately will not be sufficient to shield us from the effects of climate change. More creative strategies to build resilience and improve sustainability of both the built and natural environments are critical.

While these economic, social, and environmental changes will not be easy to navigate, Montgomery County is well-positioned to make the decisions and investments necessary for success. Our community is in the 99th percentile of all counties in the country in terms of household income and educational attainment, with annual economic output of almost \$100 billion and an amazingly diverse population. We can draw on tremendous human and physical resources; our assets would be the envy of almost any local jurisdiction anywhere. With Thrive Montgomery 2050 as a guide, we can plan carefully and act decisively to make the changes needed to help Montgomery County thrive well into the future.

## **How Thrive Montgomery 2050 will be Implemented**

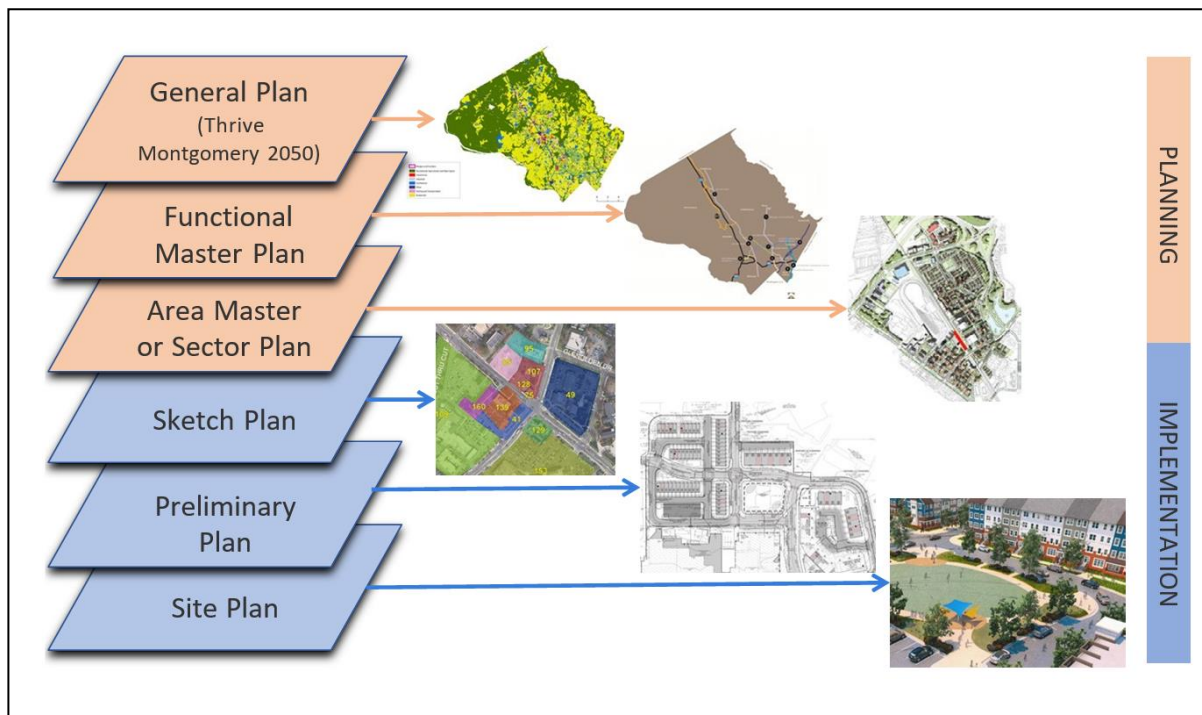
Thrive Montgomery 2050, as the County's General Plan, is a guidebook, not a roadmap. It lays out an overarching vision for the future of the county. Its policies and practices are not self-implementing. Instead, the General Plan's role in land use is to guide future decision-making and actions so that its policies become a reality on the ground. Some of these actions we know are needed now, others will become clear as conditions, opportunities, challenges, and technologies change over time. Thrive Montgomery's vision of compact growth, complete communities, and integrated design arts and culture serve as an umbrella under which tactical tools such as master plans, regulations, codes, and future development will be the building blocks for a more equitable, sustainable, compact, and walkable Montgomery County where all residents can thrive.

### **Cooperation among public and private sectors in implementation**

Implementation of Thrive Montgomery 2050 will occur over several decades and will require changes in master plans, zoning and building codes, subdivision regulations, the adequate public facilities ordinance and many other county rules and processes – they are not made in the adoption of this General Plan.

The Planning and Parks Departments will lead much of the work, but full implementation of Thrive 2050's recommendations will require collaboration or approval of other government bodies and public input. For example, updating the zoning code will require coordination with Department of Permitting Services, while changes to street design standards require coordination with the Department of Transportation and the State Highway Administration. Agencies such as the Arts and Humanities Council [will lead]can embark of the creation of a new

cultural plan, and the Department of Recreation, working with the Parks Department, will help expand opportunities for physical activity. The County Council will be asked to review and approve many of these efforts in both land use and budget decisions.



### The Role of the Public and Private Sectors

Market-driven development will play an important role in implementing Thrive Montgomery 2050. Montgomery County is embarking on an ambitious effort in an age of intense competition and disruption in the private sector and shrinking fiscal capacity of government entities at all levels. To successfully implement these bold ideas, the county will need to align public and private investments to maximize their long-term benefits. Future growth will need to be focused in a compact footprint through private sector-led real estate projects. Infill and redevelopment along major corridors will create a finer-grained network of streets and add gathering spaces that complement publicly-owned parks. Property owners will retrofit outdated buildings for new uses and enhance environmental performance by redeveloping surface parking lots and incorporating stormwater management. Private investment in diverse housing types and neighborhood serving retail will fill in missing amenities and lead to more Complete Communities.

Of course, growth requires improvements and additions to public infrastructure and services. Public infrastructure is provided mainly through the county's Capital Improvements Program (CIP), but the private sector makes important contributions pursuant to the county's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance and impact tax law, which require property developers to build, dedicate, or provide money for parks, roads, schools, and affordable housing. These rules are

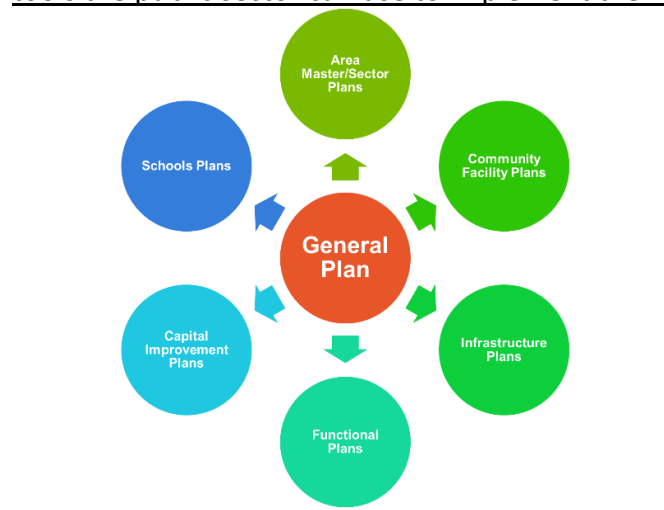
the mechanism by which new development at its inception generates revenue for the public sector to fund infrastructure improvements. New sources of funding and more effective use of county assets, such as public land and right-of-way, also may be needed. The combination of such public and private investments is the most reliable long-term strategy for creating built environments likely to attract[ing] new residents, businesses, and a skilled workforce to the County[high-quality Complete Communities]. The anticipated outcome [will be] is an economically competitive and sustainable county with a strong tax base and broadly shared opportunities.

### Compliance with Maryland State Requirements for Planning

Maryland law requires local jurisdictions and agencies to meet specific standards and requirements for the exercise of planning authority delegated by the state. Thrive Montgomery 2050 complies with multiple state laws that govern requirements for comprehensive/general plans by local jurisdictions. For further details, please refer to Appendix A: Compliance with state law requirements.

### Tools to Implement the General Plan

Thrive Montgomery 2050 sets a high-level policy framework to guide the future land use. While non-government entities will play a role in its implementation, the public sector—Montgomery Planning, Montgomery Parks, the Montgomery County government, and other government agencies—will all play critical roles in implementing the Plan. The following section describes the tools the public sector can use to implement the Plan’s policies over the coming decades.



#### **Master Plans**

Master plans (or area master plans or sector plans) are long-term planning documents for a specific place or geographic area of the county. All master plans are amendments to the General Plan. They provide detailed land use and zoning recommendations for specific areas of the county. They also address transportation, the natural environment, urban design, historic resources, affordable housing, economic development, public facilities, and implementation techniques. Many of Thrive Montgomery 2050’s policies and practices



cannot be implemented with a one-size-fits-all approach. Area master plans will help refine and implement them at a scale tailored to specific neighborhoods.

### **Functional Plans**

Functional plans are master plans addressing a system, such as traffic circulation or green infrastructure, or a policy, such as agricultural preservation or housing. A functional master plan amends the General Plan and may include recommendations on land use and zoning. The Master Plan of Highways and Transitways, the Energized Public Spaces Functional Master Plan, and the Master Plan for Historic Preservation are functional plans that do not include land use or zoning recommendations; however, the Preservation of Agriculture & Rural Open Space Functional Master Plan does. New and revised functional master plans can help refine and implement Thrive Montgomery 2050 recommendations that affect county-wide systems and/or policies.

### **Montgomery County Code Chapter 59 – Zoning Ordinance**

The division of a locality into zones is done for the purpose of regulating the use of private land. All land in Montgomery County is zoned. Within each zone, the Zoning Ordinance allows certain uses by right and allows others conditionally with approval by the Hearing Examiner. The Ordinance also excludes or limits certain uses from each zone. For each zone, the text of the Ordinance specifies the uses allowed, the density of development, the bulk of buildings, the required open space, the necessary off-street parking, and other prerequisites to obtaining permission to develop. The County Council, acting as the District Council (which has the legal oversight authority over land use), makes the final decision on changes to the Ordinance and changes to a property's zone.

The Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance is maintained as Chapter 59 of the Montgomery County Code. Updates to the Ordinance are proposed as zoning text amendments and must be adopted by the County Council. Implementing Thrive Montgomery 2050 policies will likely require changes to the zoning code.

### **Other Regulations**

In addition to Chapter 59, other chapters in the Montgomery County Code include regulations governing land use and development in the county. Chapter 50 of the County Code contains the subdivision regulations, which govern the legal division and subsequent transfer of land to ensure new developments are coordinated with other existing and planned developments. Chapter 50 also includes the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance which ensures transportation and public school facilities are planned and in place to serve new development.

### **Capital Improvements Program (CIP)**

The implementation of Thrive Montgomery 2050 will require major public investments in infrastructure over many years. The Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is the mechanism by which the County plans for and funds major infrastructure projects, including new and renovated schools, streets, and parks. The County adopts a new six-year CIP on even



numbered years. The General Plan, master plans, functional plans, and the Growth and Infrastructure Policy are important planning tools for informing which projects are prioritized in the CIP. These plans provide a link between the needs for specific projects and county-wide or neighborhood development needs.

#### **Facilities Plans**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 includes guidance that applies specifically to the design, placement, and funding of public facilities. Future planning for public facilities, including County government facilities, park facilities, public schools, and Montgomery College, should reflect this guidance and direction in order to ensure they are compatible with and help implement the goals of Thrive Montgomery 2050.

#### **Other Funding Sources**

Given constraints on the amount of money the county can borrow, Thrive Montgomery 2050 recommends consideration of new sources that could fund the provision of more community amenities. The Plan recommends, for example, exploring the creation of alternative funding tools to support the acquisition and development of parks in urban areas.

#### **Other Resources**

Other county plans with tactical guidance such as the Climate Action Plan (CAP) and Economic Development Strategic Plan are key resources beyond master plans to implement the vision of Thrive Montgomery 2050.

### **Relationship between Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the Climate Action Plan**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 was developed in coordination with the county's Climate Action Plan (CAP). Thrive Montgomery 2050 addresses generally where and how land will be conserved or developed for housing, office buildings, parks, agriculture, recreation, transportation, and other types of public and private infrastructure - decisions that have a major influence on greenhouse gas emissions, carbon sequestration, and adaptation to climate change. The CAP, on the other hand, focuses on specific near-term actions to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 and mitigate or adapt to the effects of increased heat and flooding, high winds, and drought. Thrive Montgomery 2050's climate change-related recommendations will be implemented in concert with the CAP.

### **Modifications to other plans, policies, and rules**

As stated many times already, Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a broad policy document and does not, in and of itself, change land uses, zoning or transportation. Key to implementing Thrive Montgomery 2050, Montgomery County will need to undertake a variety of future actions. These actions will guide the priorities for future work programs of the Planning Department, the Parks Department, and other government agencies over the next several years. An appendix that includes a list of actions will be developed and reviewed after adoption of the Plan. [are not

specified in detail in this document but will be fleshed out in future work programs for the Planning Department and other agencies. Some future actions may include, but are not limited to:

- Reviews of existing policies, regulations, and programs;
- Studies and new master, functional, or facility plans to delve more deeply into the topics addressed in the policies, collect and analyze data, and identify detailed strategies for decision making and implementation;
- Development of tools and templates to support master planning, regulatory review and other planning processes; and
- Changes to agency governance and practices that shape how decisions are made.]

## Measuring Progress - Indicators

The County undoubtedly will encounter issues not anticipated by this plan. The indicators listed below are intended, along with the more detailed metrics listed in previous chapters, to guide how these types of issues and potential responses should be evaluated and allow for periodic assessments of progress to inform priorities and set shorter-term goals. These indicators address the three overarching objectives of the plan and are broader than the more specific measures included in each chapter. The following list should not be considered exhaustive and may be modified or expanded to suit future needs:

- Economic performance and competitiveness
  - Wage and job growth
  - New business formation
  - Economic output per capita
- Physical activity and public health measures
  - Daily and weekly exercise and physical activity
  - Participation in organized and informal sports and fitness activities
  - Adverse health outcomes associated with physical inactivity
- Racial equity and social inclusion
  - Racial and economic diversity of neighborhoods and schools
  - Measures of social capital, civic engagement, and community trust
  - Equitable life outcomes across race, income, age, gender, etc.
- Environmental sustainability and resilience
  - Greenhouse gas emissions
  - Vehicle miles traveled
  - Water and air quality

The indicators, along with the [metrics]measures provided in the preceding chapters, will be further refined over time. [The]An appendix that includes a list of actions [that] will be developed and reviewed after Thrive is adopted. [should]This appendix will also include a section on indicators and metrics, using the measures of progress included at the end of each chapter to develop specific metrics. The section on indicators and metrics should include [providing]

detailed information on how the metric or indicator [will be]is measured, the agency responsible for collecting the associated data, [and how frequently] the frequency the metric or indicator will be publicly reviewed and reported, and the frequency indicators and metrics will be evaluated to monitor their relevancy and use. An overall assessment of Plan progress should be conducted every five years.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Marc Elrich  
County Executive

Scott E. Goldstein  
Fire Chief

MEMORANDUM

September 26, 2022

TO: Gabe Albornoz  
President, Montgomery County Council

FROM: Scott E. Goldstein  
Fire Chief

eSigned via SeamlessDocs.com  
*A. Michael Kelley*  
Key: c6c9238310fd299b9d0298a8b737b8e7

SUBJECT: Thrive Montgomery 2050 PHED Committee Draft

MCFRS continues to monitor the planning process surrounding the County's updated general plan, *Thrive Montgomery 2050*. Although I have no specific revisions to offer, there are policies and actions that may have an impact on fire and rescue services over the course of the next 20-30 years:

- Thrive Montgomery proposes the creation of complete, compact communities with mixed residential and commercial uses, allowing residents access to basic, day-to-day services within a 15-minute walk, bike, or roll. The plan identifies 32 activity centers, categorized into four types of centers (large, medium, small, village) in which the concept of "complete communities" may be realized. Growth activity is also projected along major transportation corridors, such as I270, I95, Routes 355, 29, 97, among others; as well as around transportation hubs including train, bus, and rapid transit terminals. Of the 37 existing fire/rescue stations, only 14 are county owned. Redevelopment of any of the existing station properties could have a negative impact on the LFRD-owned stations and the MCFRS. The availability of land to build on impacts the cost and the size of a new station, which can also impact the types of apparatus that can be located at that station. The MCFRS is open to design ideas, contests, and incentives for co-location, but cannot afford to overlook the many factors that determine location and placement of stations and resources.

- How can we ensure that public safety is not compromised by urban design and street safety improvements? The policy recommendations for realignment and reconfiguration of roadways to accommodate increased pedestrian and bicycle traffic and creating more frequent intersections and narrower vehicle lanes may negatively impact fire-rescue travel and response times. In 2019, the Department of Permitting Services released the [Fire Department Access Performance-Based Design Guide](#). The Thrive 2050 PHED draft does not even reference the design guide. However, the draft Thrive 2050 plan states: *Clear form-based design standards that are not overly prescriptive allow the mixing of uses, building types and architectural styles while ensuring a consistent quality of streets and public spaces* (p. 41, Figure 36). What is *overly prescriptive*? There are some prescriptive requirements in National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1, outlined in Chapter 2 of the design guide. How can we be sure developers are using this guide? MCFRS recommends adding a reference to the design guide in this section, or later in the plan, specifically in the section on cooperation among public and private sectors for implementation (p. 81).
- Finally, with the development that is proposed within this plan, MCFRS recommends that the partners in this design guide reconvene to take a stronger stance (requirements vs recommendations) on the undergrounding of utilities/water storage tanks.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to provide this feedback. MCFRS will continue to be involved in this process and will monitor and review any subsequent revisions to the County master plans and provide more specific feedback and impact statements, as needed.

SEG



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Marc Elrich  
*County Executive*

Adriana Hochberg  
*Acting Director*

MEMORANDUM

September 22, 2022

TO: Meredith Wellington, Land Use Planning  
Policy Analyst  
Office of the Montgomery County Executive

FROM: Steve Shofar, Intergovernmental Affairs *SSS*  
Division Chief  
Department of Environmental Protection

SUBJECT: Comments – Thrive 2050 Environmental Chapter

We are grateful to the Council staff for reinserting an Environmental Chapter into Thrive 2050; however, we have some serious concerns with the adequacy of the chapter. Everything in the document is sound, but old school with its primary focus on smart growth and compact development. It reads like a statement of principles and promotion of ideas as opposed to specific actions that are commensurate with the climate crisis.

The environmental recommendations are largely indirect and flow from the thrust of the plan -- compact development, infill, complete communities, etc. -- with an emphasis on how these translate into shorter and less vehicle trips, more energy efficient buildings, modern/enhanced stormwater management, etc. While these are all beneficial, the Environmental Chapter almost seems to assume that we just need more of this and a deeper embrace of the complete communities approach. But we surely need more than that and should be pursuing more sweeping land use actions that directly address reforestation, increasing tree canopy, regenerative agriculture, pollination, biodiversity, distributed energy, battery storage, grid modernization, composting/food waste, circular economy solutions, resilience hubs, local and sustainable food, food security, and import substitution strategies to address supply chain disruptions associated with climate hazards.

The fundamental premise of Thrive 2050 is that we can improve the environment and address the impact of climate change while continuing to grow through compact growth and compact communities. This premise is not accurate. Even “smart growth” is highly likely to result in increased

negative environmental impacts despite our well-intended efforts to mitigate these impacts. Smart growth ultimately designates many areas as ecological dead zones and often completely ignores the necessity to have sustainable green infrastructure, including tree canopy, in these areas. The focus seems to more on ensuring that we grow where we have the transportation infrastructure. Most of our data shows that despite our progressive approach to land use planning in the county, we continue to have declining water quality, loss of tree canopy and loss of biodiversity. Continuing to grow without making changes to land use policy that will better protect the environment will only make things worse.

The plan includes the concept of promoting opportunities to improve stormwater management and green infrastructure in redevelopment but doesn't explain how this will be accomplished. Currently many already developed areas of the county do not have the adequate space to implement actions that could address either water quality, tree canopy or flooding issues. Land needs to be dedicated in any plan to address these challenges.

The chapter specifically references how THRIVE will support the actions in the CAP and improve the environment through relevant land use actions. That is important, but it doesn't spell out what those land use actions should be. This document should spell that out. The chapter does not really speak to the unique and urgent challenges, and the opportunities that can be seized.

**DHCA Comments on Thrive 2050 PHED Draft**  
**September 27, 2022**

1. **Housing Equity— The draft needs specific recommendations to address displacement.** As supported by the newly completed Racial Equity and Social Justice chapter, housing choice should be “a strategic goal for future outcomes.” RESJ Review p. 50. That includes both sides of the coin – providing affordable units for lower income households in high-income areas of the county as well as protecting against displacement where higher income housing is built in existing low-income areas. While the current draft includes a list of guidelines to “promote racial and economic diversity and equity in housing in every neighborhood” (PHED Draft page 65), it only references a goal of avoiding net loss. There is no *strategy* to avoid displacement.

Displacement needs to have the same level of detail as other recommendations. The direction PHED has suggested for Thrive has been away from prescriptive recommendations, in lieu of more directional policy guidelines; however, the PHED Draft provides specific recommendations to provide more affordable units such as the creation of land trusts and the County’s affordable housing programs to create new units. There are no comparable anti-displacement recommendations. Instead, the draft provides only broader goals against displacement, such as “develop targeted strategies” and “refine regulatory tools.” (PHED Draft page 65.) Page 69 of the Draft goes so far as to recommend preservation of naturally occurring affordable units to avoid displacement, but the recommendation on page 65 suggests only “avoiding a net loss of market-rate and income-restricted affordable housing stock.” There is no additional guidance on how to achieve that goal. Without effective preservation, the Study predicts that the county will lose between 7,000 and 11,000 housing of 25,900 existing units by 2030. As part of preservation, **the county should specifically discourage teardowns in this draft, or alternatively set a goal to maintain the number of affordable units with reconstruction.**

2. **Lack of rental guidance – The draft is silent as to what can be done for our rental community.** Over 54% of the 2040 forecasted population is predicted to be multi-family renters. (PHED Draft page 63.) A recommendation should be added to adopt policies for Rent Stabilization. This tool of land use planning was recommended in the Affordable Housing Preservation Study, p. 16, and identified as a need in the Planning Board Thrive Public Hearing Draft Goal 5.5, to maintain mixed income communities and minimizing displacement. Based on the PHED Committee’s direction to provide more general guidance, suggested language may be:

Evaluate methods to maintain affordability in rental housing throughout the County including rent stabilization.

3. **Missing tools for production of units - The draft needs to re-evaluate County affordable housing programs to better align our policies and procedures with future population projections.** - As stated in Thrive, a significant portion of the future population of the County is projected to earn less than \$50,000 a year in 2045. (PHED Draft page 64.) Increasing the numbers of affordable units required is consistent with the Public Hearing Draft Goal 5.3 and the Planning Board’s 2020 Housing Needs Assessment. In addition, the Council of Governments (COG) Housing Goals define the County’s need for at least 25% and as much as 50% of new units made affordable at lower income; these goals cannot depend on public subsidy alone.

The PHED Draft does not establish a goal of increasing units through County policies and procedures. While the draft recommends increasing “the number of income-restricted affordable



housing units, especially for low-income households” (PHED Draft page 64), it does not suggest that the County’s affordable housing programs could be leveraged to achieve that goal.

A new recommendation should be added to page 64 and placed under the heading “Encourage the production of more housing to better match supply with demand.” This change will include how County policies can be used to address future housing needs.

Re-evaluate incentives and programs like the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) program and consider other affordable housing programs, tools, and incentives to determine how to better align County housing programs with future housing needs.



## THE OFFICE OF AGRICULTURE

Marc Elrich  
*County Executive*

Jeremy V. Criss  
*Director*

September 28, 2022

Gabe Albornoz, President  
Hans Riemer, Chair,  
Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee (PHED)  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Thrive Montgomery 2050 PHED Draft--The PHED Recommendations

Dear President Albornoz, Chair Riemer, and Councilmembers,

On behalf of the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture (OAG), please accept this letter with our thoughts on the PHED Committee's recommendations for the PHED Draft - Thrive Montgomery 2050.

The Agricultural Reserve was created in 1981 to establish a preferred area for farming as the primary use. The OAG does not believe the PHED's recommendation to "manage it to maintain a rural pattern of development for the benefit of the entire county" (PHED draft, p. 22) is consistent with, and will fulfill the legislative spirit and intent of the Master Plan that established the Agricultural Reserve to protect farmland and agriculture. Rather, the PHED draft should recommend, "Preserve farmland and rural open space in the Agricultural Reserve." It should also either remove references to "outdoor recreation" (pgs. 18, 23) and "tourism" (p. 23) or add language to make clear that land set aside for farms and rural open space will not be turned into playing fields or tourist attractions that displace farms and open space with development, and that recreation refers to passive recreational activities, like walking, hiking, picnicking, birdwatching, cross-country skiing, or nature photography.

The new General Plan should recognize the economic significance of the Agricultural Reserve as well as its role to help address the impacts of climate change and its contributions to the food and water supplies. The new General Plan should provide policy and program recommendations that reinforce the importance of the Reserve and provide critical support for the success of farming and agricultural operations in Montgomery County. The County's scenic vistas of working farms, pick-your-own fruit farms, wineries, breweries, bike routes, and water resources need your continued support.

President Albornoz, Chair Riemer, and Councilmembers

September 28, 2022

Page 2

We ask that you do not support the PHED Committee's recommendations on the Thrive Montgomery 2050 that pertain to the Agricultural Reserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeremy V. Criss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeremy V. Criss, Director



Marc Elrich  
*County Executive*

Christopher R. Conklin  
*Director*

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

M E M O R A N D U M

September 28, 2022

TO: Meredith Wellington, Land Use Planning Policy Analyst  
Office of the County Executive

FROM: Timothy Cupples, Acting Deputy Director for Transportation Policy  
Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: DOT Comments on Thrive 2050

Attached for your consideration are MCDOT's comment on Thrive 2050. Our comments are organized by relevant headings contained within the plan.

**Develop a safe, comfortable and appealing network for walking, biking, and rolling.**

Consider adding the two additional bullets below, the first reasserting points made elsewhere in the Thrive 2050, and the second providing more precise and measurable definitions for how to apply Complete Communities within a transportation lens:


- Focus growth and density near transit stations. (Ec, Eq, Env)
- Achieve and locally define Complete Communities through locally established goals that vary three metrics: target destinations, travel modes, and travel times. (Ec)

Consider moving the second and third bullets of this section to the section entitled "Adapt policies to reflect the economic and environmental cost of driving alone", as both of these bullets deal more with roads and driving than walking, biking, and rolling.

Office of the Director

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101 Monroe Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Rockville, MD 20850 · 240-777-7170 · 240-777-7178 Fax  
[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcdot](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcdot)

[montgomerycountymd.gov/311](http://montgomerycountymd.gov/311)  301-251-4850 TTY

In the fifth bullet, consider adding references to micromobility at two points such that it reads:

- Prioritize the provision of safe, comfortable, and attractive sidewalks, bikeways, roadway crossings, micromobility infrastructure and services, and other improvements to support walking, bicycling, micromobility, and transit usage in capital budgets, development approvals and mandatory referrals. (Env)

### **Build a world-class transit system.**

Consider changing the section header to instead read: “**Build a frequent, fast, convenient, and reliable transit system.**” This provides more precise and measurable direction as to what is intended.

Consider adding a new bullet between the second and third bullets reading:

- Improve upon and achieve greater parity with travel times and travel costs of transit services as compared to automotive travel. (Eq)

Consider adding three additional bullets to the end of this section reading:

- In rural areas with sufficient density and along freeways and major highways consider Park & Rides, microtransit, micromobility, and bikeways to connect large geographic areas into the transit network by centralizing the transit-sheds into points more easily served by trunk lines. (Eq, Env)
- Evaluate service needs associated with transit services in functional and area master plans, including but not limited to depots, substantial layover areas, zero-emission bus infrastructure and charging/power requirements, Park & Ride and similar facilities, and road design. (Eq, Env)
- Increase or otherwise support efforts to increase Amtrak and MARC access, services, and utilization, including additional trains, off-peak service, and bidirectional service. (Ec, Eq, Env)

**Adapt policies to reflect the economic and environmental costs of driving alone.**

Consider amending the section header with an item on safety such that it reads: “**Adapt policies to reflect safety impacts and the economic and environmental costs of driving alone.**”

Consider adding a new bullet at the start of this list which adopts similar phrasing from the section on walking, biking, and rolling:

- Incorporate complete streets design principles with the goal of eliminating all transportation-related roadway fatalities and severe injuries. (Env)

As noted previously, consider moving to here two bullets from the first section reading:

- Stop proposing new 4+ lane roads in master plans. (Env)
- Give a lower priority to construction of new 4+ lane roads, grade-separated interchanges, or major road widenings. (Env)

Consider amending the first bullet with a reference to micromobility and equity considerations:

- Employ pricing mechanisms, such as congestion pricing or the collection and allocation of tolls to support walking, rolling, bicycling, micromobility, and transit, while also considering impacts to populations vulnerable to such pricing mechanisms (Eq, Env)

Consider substantially expanding upon the second bullet as follows:

- Manage parking efficiently by charging market rates and reducing the supply of public and private parking. Utilize Parking Lot Districts as a means of managing the supply of parking, particularly in consolidating and constraining private parking, and in furthering efforts to create environments that support walking, rolling, bicycling, micromobility, and transit, in a manner that facilitates economic development, market rate and affordable housing, parks and green space, and supports users dependent on motor vehicles such as people who must use a vehicle for mobility or employment. (Ec, Eq, Env)

Consider modifying the third bullet to better reflect goals elsewhere in Thrive where the goal appears to be not to necessarily increase the number of motor vehicles, but to increase the share of electric vehicles among them. Our suggested edits would read as follows:

- Encourage increasing the share of non-polluting vehicles by requiring appropriate transportation, charging, and power infrastructure, as well as upgrading government fleets. (Env)

Consider adding two additional bullets at the end of this section to address emerging issues in transportation associated with vehicle design:

- Monitor and advocate for regulations regarding Connected and Automated Vehicles to ensure that they are implemented in a manner as to serve the public interest, particularly concerning safety, operational, equity, and environmental impacts. (Eq, Env)
- Monitor and advocate for regulations regarding motor vehicle design, particularly in the context of vehicle design relating to collisions with pedestrians, bicyclists, and other vulnerable users, as well as impacts on the design of transportation facilities. (Eq, Env)

### **Additional Sections**

Consider adding an additional section titled “**Evaluate freight needs and opportunities**” between the “Driving Alone” and “Communications Networks” sections with the following items:

- Evaluate how to best utilize, access, and improve existing freight rail infrastructure. (Ec)
- Evaluate transportation access of local business and industry to ports and markets to improve the ability for the County to economically import and competitively export goods and services. (Ec)
- Evaluate freight distribution networks serving the County, particularly with attention to truck routes, warehousing and distribution centers, how to best utilize Urban Consolidation Centers and micro-distribution hubs, and how freight needs relate to road design. (Ec, Env)

Consider adding an additional section titled “**Develop vision and policies associated with air travel**” between the “Driving Alone” and “Communications Networks” sections with the following items:

- Develop a vision and supporting policies for public, public-use, and private airports, airfields, and heliports in the County, focused on improving safety, operations, access, and environmental impacts. (Ec, Env)
- Develop a vision and supporting policies for the use of unmanned aerial vehicles focused on improving safety, operations, privacy, and environmental impacts. (Ec, Env)

### **Develop and extend advanced communications networks.**

No comments on this section.

**Additional Edits**

Consider reformatting the bullets instead as numbered items to ease in using and referencing items contained in the Plan.

A Fiscal Impact Statement and an Economic Impact Statement will be provided by the Office of Management and Budget and the Finance Department at a later date.

THC:ab

cc: Chris Conklin  
Emil Wolanin  
Gary Erenrich  
Andrew Bossi





**DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES**

Marc Elrich  
*County Executive*

David Dise  
*Director*

**MEMORANDUM**

September 26, 2022

TO: Meredith Wellington, Land Use Planning Policy Analyst  
Office of the County Executive

FROM: Greg Ossont, Deputy Director *go*  
Department of General Services

SUBJECT: Thrive Montgomery 2050 – PHED Committee Draft

Thank you for the opportunity to review the October 2021 Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050.

Our comment relates to a statement on page 64 in the Housing For All chapter. Listed under the policy “Encourage the production of more housing to better match supply with demand” is the following action: “Prioritize use of public land for co-location of housing and other uses, particularly where government agencies design new facilities or dispose of real property. Consideration of increased opportunities for housing low and very-low income households should be included in the analysis of how best to leverage county assets.”

DGS regularly reviews assets to identify underutilized spaces for a variety of public needs. All county projects are required to examine the feasibility of affordable housing per Bill 37-12 – Housing – Capital Improvements Program – Affordable Housing Assessment, and child care facilities per Bill 38-12 – Capital Improvements Program – Child Care Assessment, as a potential for co-location. Individual sector plans typically dictate other public facilities. We look forward to continuing this work from the 2018 Colocation of Public Facilities study with partner agencies.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me directly if you have any questions.

cc: Kara Olsen Salazar, OPD



DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

Marc Elrich  
*County Executive*

Marcus G. Jones  
*Chief of Police*

M E M O R A N D U M

September 20, 2022

TO: Hans Riemer, Chair  
Planning, Housing & Economic Development Committee

FROM: Lauren Donato, Planning Manager  
Montgomery County Department of Police

SUBJECT: Montgomery County Department of Police Board Draft, Thrive Montgomery  
2050

MCPD has the following comments on the Planning Board draft:

**I. OVERVIEW**

**Development/Population Density**

There is a direct correlation of calls for police services and development/population density. Going with a more densely developed community which focuses more on public transportation and less on the automobile will result in MCPD making adjustments in how it configures its resources to provide an appropriate level of service. For example, police facilities may need to be more decentralized so that they are embedded within the community to foster better engagement with the citizens. However, staffing these police facilities with a smaller service area may create fiscal challenges.

**Access/Response Time**

Future development will need to take into account adequate access by police and other public safety services to ensure that we can respond quickly to emergencies, answer other calls for service, and be visible within the community. As access is considered, please ensure that the specific operational needs/limitations of our vehicles and equipment are taken into consideration.

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Office of the Chief of Police

Public Safety Headquarters - 100 Edison Park Drive Gaithersburg, Maryland 20878  
[www.montgomerycountymd.gov](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov) - [www.mymcpnews.com](http://www.mymcpnews.com) - [ChiefMCPD@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:ChiefMCPD@montgomerycountymd.gov)

[montgomerycountymd.gov/311](http://montgomerycountymd.gov/311)



301-251-4850 TTY

### **New Approaches/Technology for Delivering Police Services**

Policing is being redefined locally and nationally as we speak. As this change occurs, consideration should be given to how these changes will impact future service allocation/configuration/delivery.

## **II. SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON THE PLANNING BOARD DRAFT'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Compact Growth Chapter, p. 22:**

**“Concentrate growth in centers of activity along corridors through compact, infill development and redevelopment to maximize efficient use of land. “**

As growth opportunities arise and activity centers become more populated, the need for additional police stations or facilities may also arise. The availability of land may impact size and capability of a new station. Additionally, the location of available land may impact access for those using public transportation or conversely, impact parking options for individuals commuting into the area.

### **B. Design, Arts & Culture Chapter, p. 39:**

**“Design buildings, streets, and parking to prioritize the pedestrian scale and encourage walking and bicycling through smaller blocks, narrower streets, buffered bike lanes and sidewalks. Slow vehicle speeds and minimize surface parking while adequately accommodating automobiles.”**

The design of streets, bicycle lanes, and pedestrian areas may impact the ability, speed, and route in which emergency vehicles can travel through and respond to calls for service quickly and safely. Consideration should also be taken for the type of vehicle most likely used in those areas, i.e. electric police cruiser, motorcycle, bicycle, etc. Future vehicle design and capability may promote or limit certain types of emergency vehicles, as they tend to be larger and more equipped than standard passenger cars

**Comments of Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice  
On Consultants' Equity Analysis of Thrive Montgomery 2050**

**Tiffany Ward, Chief Equity Officer**

**September 20, 2022**

- The report properly centers Thrive 2050 within historic context that tells us how the County came to be and remains racially segregated.
- The historic context of how modern-day planning came to be is also essential, as it tells the reader that planning came to be essentially to prevent poor living conditions and for all, but especially the poor, who are disproportionately BIPOC in Montgomery County.
- The report rightly calls for the intentional inclusion of communities of color as a constituency that should be properly engaged and consulted in planning decisions, as their lived experiences are often over-looked and ignored in favor of the lived experiences of wealthy and politically connected constituents.
- NspireGreen's insistence on thoughtful and honest community engagement is a must to build trust and transparency with BIPOC communities and, it is consistent with the regulations for Bill 44-20 which requires departments to develop community engagement plans that center BIPOC communities when developing major plans and initiatives.
- The report's assertion that "communities that face historic challenges need special attention paid to community development and stabilization to ensure that existing networks ...are strengthened so that it is not harder for existing communities to survive" is exactly right. We must acknowledge the likelihood of displacement and gentrification for poor residents when new development is imminent. We must then be honest and intentional about mitigating the harm that will be done to those communities by such development. Enacting policies that protect affordable housing, commercial and community spaces should be considered with the input of existing community members and business owners.
- The call for community development to be a "two-way street" is wise. The county should think of innovative ways to integrate affordable housing into neighborhoods that are pre-dominantly white and already have access to green space, jobs, recreational space and retail that increase the quality of life for all people.
- Lastly, the call to look at how BIPOC and poor residents experience housing at the intersection of transportation, environmental impacts, economics, and safety is essential. We should challenge our assumptions about the best ways to work, live, travel and instead we should

partner with BIPOC communities to create a quality of life that is compatible with the lives they actually live and the lives they aspire to live.

- NspireGreen’s chapter on “Planning for racial equity and social justice” is very good and gives the county much to consider in making the planning process more equitable so that we might create a better quality of life for BIPOC residents.

**MEMORANDUM**

October 3, 2022

TO: County Council

FROM: Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst

SUBJECT: Thrive Montgomery 2050

PURPOSE: Correspondence on Thrive Montgomery 2050

The Council holds public input among its most important and valuable resources, considering all correspondence it receives. As of Friday September 30, 2022, the Council has received 405 items of correspondence comprising more than 1,500 pages since the Planning Board's submittal of Thrive Montgomery 2050<sup>1</sup>.

Much of the early correspondence was submitted as testimony for one of two public hearings. Other correspondence was directed at and provided during the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee's review.

The PHED Committee completed its review on October 25, 2021, incorporating its changes into a PHED Committee Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050. The public comments attached to the staff reports for October 4 contain specific suggested changes to the PHED Committee Draft. And while this represents a portion of the public input on the Plan, the entire body of correspondence submitted is reviewed and considered by the Council.

Correspondence received as of September 30, too many pages to attach here, is available on the Council's Thrive webpage,  
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2022/Thrive%20Correspondence.pdf>

In pulling the correspondence to post for this addendum, it did not remain sorted by date. Staff is looking to see if this can be corrected.

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<sup>1</sup> Submitted to Council on April 13, 2021.