

Comments Received on Issues Report

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Comments on Thrive 2050

Thanks for allowing me the opportunity to comment on Thrive 2050.

About me:

Over the last fifteen years I have been heavily involved in my local neighborhood association, acting as volunteer, president of the board of my neighborhood civic group (Forest Estates Community Association), a volunteer at my children's schools and president of the local middle school PTSA. I have led two playground refurbishment committees, helping provide direction to the neighborhood and feedback to the parks department about neighborhood concerns and desires for new equipment. I have also served for nine years as a Montgomery Parks bluebird trail monitor at Wheaton Regional Park, helping to oversee five bluebird boxes and successfully fledge hundreds of young birds. Since January 2019 I have chaired the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Association's Safe Routes to School committee, which advocates for safe travels to school for all students in the county. I was also a very active participant in the Montgomery Hills/Forest Glen Sector plan that the planning department has recently submitted to the County Council for approval.

The comments below are my own, and do not represent any organization. That said, my experiences with the abovementioned organizations inform my perspective on the future of the county. In short, I have done a lot of stuff around here that has helped me learn about our environmental, economic and transportation infrastructure. I have some ideas about the future.

I have read the Thrive 2050 issues briefing and attended several events hosted by MNCPPC on the plan over the last year and below are my detailed reactions.

Thanks for your time and considerations.

Alison Gillespie
1826 Brisbane Court
Silver Spring, MD 20902

Complete Communities: Housing and Zoning Must Allow for Working *and* Aging in Place

Zoning must expand to include more housing options, including housing for a much wider variety of lifestyle and income levels. I was in my late twenties when I moved into this county and struggled to find housing that met my desire for walkable amenities and my budget. I was able to buy a home at the age of 31. Now, as I approach 50, I look around and see that housing options are even more limited for people than they were in the past. Your team has done a lot to assess this in their report.

Here's what is missing, though:

My own neighborhood is full of people who desire more commercial options within walking distance, which was demonstrated during our neighborhood's sector plan process. And now, as I look ahead to downsizing, I see that I will likely once again be faced with very limited options outside of the "single family home versus condo" paradigm. I do not want to leave Montgomery County, or my current

community but I also do not think I will want to stay in a large house once my children leave home as adults in a few short years.

Providing the “missing middle” option of housing would greatly enhance the chances that I would stay. If provided the opportunity to own a home with space for myself and a tenant, I would be much more likely to stay and able to provide safe, clean, reliable, high-quality housing for someone else.

Walkability is key to the “missing middle” housing market, as is well outlined in your documents.

Economically and socially, it seems apparent that many people in my age group (often referred to as Generation X), will not be able to afford retirements akin to those that have come before in the Baby Boomer generation. Our children pay more for college, we often entered the job market late and have struggled economically to get a foothold. Unlike our parents or even older siblings, we do not have lavish savings accounts that will allow us to stop working and live a leisurely life after 60. Many of us lack jobs with generous retirement packages or plans. Many have had to care for children while also attending to elderly parents whose own retirement accounts ran out.

Missing middle housing and walkability do go hand in hand, but as many Generation X workers age, they will likely stay in the workforce (particularly if they work for federal agencies). I believe here, more than many other communities in the U.S., we will need to prioritize transportation options and housing options that allow for aging in place but also *working* while aging.

This means that missing middle should not only be envisioned for the young who are entering the housing market for the first time but also for those who are looking to downsize and age in place gracefully and while remaining productive workers in full-time jobs well into their 70s. This means rethinking multi-family homes to include older couples, people with limited mobility, and the need for short commutes to well-paying jobs, not just urban centers with amenities for those with young children or those under 30. It also means understanding that commercial development will need to be more integrated into residential areas.

Senior housing in our future will likely need to be housing for working seniors, not just leisurely ones or infirmed ones. One story, walkable, safe, and near shopping will be key. Missing middle is going to have to incorporate SENIORS.

Agricultural Reserve – lack of identity is a lost economic opportunity

I consider myself a staunch environmentalist and support the idea of preserving agriculture and open space in Montgomery County. That said, I have never understood the role the Agricultural Reserve plays in my own life here. I do not believe I am alone in this. In my own anecdotal experience, many people do not even know the Ag Reserve exists, and those that do often struggle to explain its purpose when asked.

Part of the reason for this lack of understanding is likely the disconnectedness of the Ag Reserve from other parts of the county.

I do trust that the Reserve is important, and I do trust that it fits a larger plan for the county. I do *not* question its value.

I very much suspect that programs that would encourage economic connections between the Ag Reserve and the rest of the county would be good. The county should try to highlight the need for the land to remain in agricultural use, and perhaps promote economic partnerships between those that farm in the reserve and residents throughout the county. Prioritizing local farming at Montgomery County's farmer's markets, and advertising campaigns that allow local farmers to advertise their products to local residents and two possible ideas.

But in the same way we seek to encourage business and commerce we may need to encourage local agriculture and support it more actively and tie its worth to land conservation and protection of agriculture as a viable way of life in the county. As it stands, I do not think the average person living in White Oak, Bethesda or Silver Spring feels any sense of pride or connection to the reserve. That is a lost opportunity.

If we truly believe in the value of the Ag Reserve we may need to encourage its success through promotional campaigns and economic incentives for consumers who want to buy local. Buying local is as much a trend as walkability and connectedness.

I think one of the key aspects missing in this equation is someone to facilitate communications and economically important relationships between the reserve, those who work it, and the rest of the county. Having someone at planning who plays this role would serve us well in the coming decades.

Frankly, there's a cultural disconnect between those who currently work to protect the Ag Reserve as advocates and those who live in the rest of the county and are struggling to afford housing. This is not a given and having a friendly, neutral FARMING specific person to connect with at planning would be good for both the farming community AND the non-farming community. Presentations, public programming and "buy local MoCo" campaigns would be positive. Agricultural Reserve advocates who are angry and refuse to even engage in any discussion of development in ANY part of the county (even urban parts) are not helping and are actually do more harm than good to the goal of preserving open space, in my opinion. And currently those are the voices dominating the discussions about agriculture in this county. Planning can plan a positive role in overcoming this, one that would help farming families. When it comes to agriculture, we can act as "one Montgomery" instead of "us versus them."

I can speak more to this if needed: but my neighborhood has had to put in many many hours of personal volunteer time trying to host a farmer at our local park for a Farmer's Market each Saturday. People in my neighborhood are really proud of having that market in our local park (General Getty). But it would be much easier for us to host this market if we could work with planning to identify local farmers that want to sell. Again, I can provide more details on this if needed.

Bottom line: The days of thinking that all development is evil are coming to an end as Baby Boomers with overly idealized views of nature exit the scene. We must anticipate the ways we can grow our economy in positive ways in the future while still preserving open space and farming and valuable rural land. There are many younger residents who want to live in an urban area but would be happy to support rural open space if they knew of its value to their own lives. We should make the most of this.

Higher Ed is Missing from MoCo, One of the Most Educated Counties in the U.S.

Despite a having a highly educated citizenry, our county lacks a four-year college.

The Universities of Shady Grove are a novel and inventive way to meet higher ed needs, and certainly Montgomery College is doing a very good job at meeting a need for some forms of post-high school education. But it seems as if the county would greatly benefit from having a public university here, complete with dormitories and a way to earn a full-fledged bachelor's degree.

Would it make sense to diversify our economy by encouraging a new college or university to establish itself here? Or by opening another University of Maryland campus similar to the campus of UMBC? Is that even possible? Does the eastern part of the county have the space, for example, and could the infrastructure be augmented to support a college or university?

These are questions worth exploring.

No Space for Large Events, Performances or Otherwise

Strangely, our county lacks a space that is adequate for holding large events. This means that every high school in the county struggles to find a place to host graduations. Same is true for the fire and police academies. We also lack a large performance space for concerts or other entertainment.

Currently, students from our high schools and academies must travel to either UMBC in Baltimore County or to downtown D.C. to use the space at DAR Constitution Hall. All these venues are expensive. It seems odd that we are allowing that money to leave our county. It also means that we are continuing to increase the need for people to spend long periods of time travelling, often in cars, to big events when it would be better to have people do these events locally. It would make sense to put a large venue in a place that is transit-oriented, if possible, to help meet our climate change goals.

Perhaps if we had an institution of higher learning (as noted above) we would get such a space built.

Disconnect between MCPS, MNCPPC

As a volunteer with local and county level PTA organizations, I have always been dismayed by the great disconnect between MCPS and the planning department. Planning seems to try to bridge the gap, but MCPS continues to make decisions without any consideration into what impact they may be having on land use, transportation, and housing.

One ready example: MCPS continues to insist on a cookie cutter approach to school size. We need to acknowledge that there's more to making a school perform well than making it have many acres of ball fields, room for 700+ students and a bus loop. Some urban neighborhoods desperately need more classrooms, and smaller schools in former office buildings may be a great solution. MCPS' unwillingness to even discuss these possibilities is infuriating to me as a parent.

I am also increasingly dismayed, as a park lover and advocate, by the tense and odd relationship between MCPS and the playing fields for school use.

As we move into the future, I hope that MCPS will be tamed somewhat, and made to fold itself into the county's planning decision matrix instead of acting in opposition to it. It would make sense to have schools obey planning and not have planning bear the brunt of bad and ill-informed land use on the part of the school system.

Telecommuting, Technology... why are we not measuring?

Telecommuting is an often unacknowledged and powerful force for good in Montgomery County. A large percentage of our workforce is employed by the federal government, and the government has a very good telecommuting program.

This should be encouraged ACTIVELY by planning and should figure into the future heavily. I believe that telecommuting will only increase as a trend, since so many employers find it saves them money on real estate and helps retain qualified, talented workers.

There needs to be more in this plan that explores the negative and positive impacts of telecommuting. We need to understand the ways that we can attract employers and retain highly skilled workers by using this tool. Can we give tax breaks? Can we help companies find strategic ways to use telecommuting to save costs? Are there ways that we can improve horrible commuting time on crowded roads like I-270 by encouraging more telecommuting in the private sector? Do we need to advocate for telecommuting on behalf of federal employees? I would like to see all of these questions explored in Thrive 2050.

Comments on Thrive Montgomery 2050 draft Issues Briefing Report

January 16, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Issues December 2019 draft Briefing Report. I am supportive of the three primary outcomes of equitable communities, economic health and environmental resilience. I also agree with the 8 primary focus areas.

However, I am very concerned about the short shrift given to climate change, which is mentioned only very briefly (less than one page) under Healthy and Sustainable Environment. In fact, climate change is likely to make it significantly more difficult to reach all of the primary outcomes and will have major impacts in all of the primary focus areas.

Montgomery County is in a declared climate emergency as recognized by the County Council in 2017. In fact, the world is in a climate emergency, as documented by the 2019 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The consequences of the climate emergency will affect all people and ecological communities with disproportionate impacts on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations. To avoid the worst impacts of climate change, all planning and decisionmaking must be made through a climate change lens. This means to do everything possible to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change – through rapid phaseout of fossil fuels, scale up of energy efficiency and conservation actions, and protection of natural ecosystems and agricultural land for carbon sequestration and removal of carbon from the atmosphere.

There is a real sense of urgency that must drive all actions proposed in Thrive Montgomery 2050.

Montgomery County is developing a climate action plan that will chart the pathway to meeting the county's goals of 80% reduction of greenhouse gases by 2027 and zero emissions no later than 2035. I am a member of one of the working groups established by the county government to advise on how to meet these ambitious goals.

It would be utter folly for Montgomery Planning to carry out its Thrive Montgomery 2050 planning in isolation from what the County government is developing. For example, 41% of the county's sector-based carbon emissions are from transportation. The climate change planning process includes a working group on transportation, which is developing robust and practical recommendations on how to electrify transportation and rapidly phase out fossil fuels, while boosting emission-free mass transit and other alternatives to automobiles. If the Planning Board develops plans that are not in line with the climate action plan, those plans will be irrelevant and will not resolve the climate emergency.

There are many other examples.

I strongly urge that Thrive Montgomery 2050 be developed in concert with the county government's climate planning process (and vice versa). I also strongly urge that the next version of the Issues Briefing report be completely re-written in the context of the climate emergency.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

David

David E. Blockstein, Ph.D. (Ecology)

7016 Sycamore Ave.

Takoma Park, MD 20912

DavidDebraHome@gmail.com

January 15, 2020

Montgomery County Planning Department
8787 Georgia Ave
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Montgomery County Planning Department:

Thank you for your dedication and hard work on the Thrive 2050 plan thus far. The resulting issues report is thorough, asks many of the right questions, and properly acknowledges the interconnectedness of traditionally siloed planning subjects. The following details our comments on each of the eight identified issue areas.

Complete Communities: We are excited about the focus on “complete communities.” This is a powerful idea that sets the foundation for more sustainable, equitable neighborhoods within every land use context in Montgomery County. Question #4 references neighborhood retail, but truly complete communities will require much more, including the strategic placement of public amenities.

When defining complete communities, please take into consideration access to healthy food, high-frequency transit, affordable housing, health care, quality schools, green space, and other public amenities, in addition to neighborhood retail. Routes to these goods and services should be safe for all modes of travel, especially walking, rolling, and biking.

Connectedness: A major aspect of connectedness is the freedom and safety of movement in our transportation network, which relates to unequal access to opportunities. The original “On Corridors and Wedges” plan connected communities to DC, but not to each other — a contributing factor to the east-west socioeconomic divide that persists to this day. None of the questions in this issue area reflect the importance of the transportation network in creating connectedness.

Diverse Economies: It is important for our economic drivers to be resilient not only from diversity, but also from flexibility. As the nature of work changes, office space has and will continue to change, which will require flexible buildings located in adaptable built environment contexts. The era of the suburban office park is coming to an end. We also echo the importance of allowing flexible spaces and considering protections for the viability of starting and continuing small businesses.

Safe and Efficient Travel: This issue rightly focuses on safety, efficiency, and equity, but leaves out sustainability. Transportation is Montgomery’s largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, and our transportation planning for the next 30 years should reflect the urgency of the climate crisis. Given that urgency, another issue to tackle is the length of time it takes to build electric vehicle, bus rapid transit, bicycle, and other major sustainable transportation infrastructure. How can the county speed up that process?

Affordability: In addition to the questions listed, we would also ask, what within the current set of tools are we not using to full potential to meet affordability gaps? Also, how can the county help meet the needs of low-income populations whose housing needs are not fulfilled by the market? Are the most vulnerable residents equipped with the knowledge and rights to remain housing secure? Where is the

proper place for affordable housing to be built, and how do we get it there? And finally, how do we ensure that the county does not become a place with a very high bar of entry, not only for artists and entrepreneurs, but for everyone?

Healthy and Sustainable Environment: A healthy and sustainable environment is one that is left to itself as much as possible, which is why the Agricultural Reserve was created, directing growth instead to more appropriate places closer to job centers. How and where will the county direct growth in the future? This may also be a topic for the “Diverse and Adaptable Growth” issue.

We would like to see a more explicit discussion of the building sector and promoting green buildings, both new and retrofit, and how green space plays into more urban environments. Retrofitting buildings will also raise major equity concerns. Buildings must adapt in a sustainable way that does not increase costs so as to price out current residential and commercial tenants.

Diverse and Adaptable Growth: We echo the need to re-examine the viability of the current adequate public facilities ordinance to set policies that address the current experience of growth — infill and redevelopment, rather than greenfield development of the 1980s when it was created.

Culture and Design: Embracing cultural activities requires inclusivity in placemaking — ensuring that everyone, from all backgrounds and incomes, has access to dining, arts, and entertainment spaces. The public role in this should not be overlooked. Public libraries, community centers, and other spaces are vital to a strong, inclusive cultural environment.

Moving forward with Thrive 2050, we hope that the draft goals and policies will also be paired with an overarching vision for the county in 2050 that defines the public interest. Defining the public interest and laying out the goals and policies as supporting that public interest will give the county the authority it needs to pursue bold, progressive change.

Finally, we appreciate that the community engagement for Thrive 2050 has prioritized going to the community where it is, rather than expecting community members to come to you. In the next phase of community engagement, we encourage you to conduct outreach at high schools and Montgomery College, if it hasn't been done thus far. The world in 2050 will belong to today's young people, and it's critical that their voices are a major focus when developing Thrive 2050.

Sincerely,

Jane Lyons
Maryland Advocacy Manager
Coalition for Smarter Growth



Darnestown Community Input Regarding the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan

January 16, 2020

On behalf of the Darnestown community, the Darnestown Civic Association (DCA) wants to commend the Planning Board for developing an innovative Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan where we have a shared vision that allows our community to keep what we love while taking the actions needed to thrive over the next 30+ years. We understand, per the Plan, the result of Thrive Montgomery 2050 will be a living and breathing plan that guides decision making and helps secure resources to ensure Montgomery County is a place where everyone can be successful, have opportunities and enjoy a high quality of life in a beautiful and resilient environment.

The DCA is dedicated to promote and protect what our residents love about Darnestown. We understand the Planning Board shares our same values of growing in a way that will retain and enhance what we cherish as a rural community while addressing challenges such as housing affordability, environmental degradation, traffic congestion, and social injustice. We also understand that this Plan will have long-term impacts on the development growth and transportation infrastructure in and around Darnestown.

We value and appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with the Planning Department and provide our evaluation of and input to the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan for incorporation into an Issues Report that will be published and presented to the Planning Board. We agree with many of the issues as outlined in the report. Nevertheless, it does appear that much of the focus of the Plan is relative to urban areas of the County. While urban areas are important for consideration, we are concerned and want to verify that the Board is also considering and respects rural areas of the County including Darnestown. Darnestown values our rural residential culture, our Village, our abundant open space and low density, and our position as a transition area adjoining the Agricultural Reserve. We respectfully recommend the Board embrace our rural culture, as it is core to the character of our community, and explicitly adopt a rural residential approach to areas of the County including Darnestown. We hope to see these values in the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan.

We want to thank you for continuing to include our community in the Plan's ongoing collaborative development and look forward to engaging as an active partner throughout this process.

Sincerely,

Scott H. Mostrom
President, Darnestown Civic Association
301-760-6444
president@darnestowncivic.org

Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Issues Briefing

Dated 12/12/19

Comments by Ken Bawer, 1/16/2020

NOTE: My thanks to the folks in MNCPPC for all the work they have done. I am sure that some of my comments are too specific for the Issues Report, so please consider them as input to future, more detailed plans/potential solutions.

- Context and Background section
 - “...anticipated growth of more than 200,000 people....” How was this arrived at – what assumptions were made? (I learned at Steve Findley’s presentation to WMCCA that it comes from MWCOG). Focus should be on sustainability, not growth. For example, what is our ideal target population in 2050 that will provide the desired quality of life (open space, greenhouse gases, traffic, school capacity, etc.)? Given finite resources (both natural and economic), maybe a statement should be made that, for example, “...given our finite resources, our target population growth by 2050 is “x” people.” If we don’t put a target stake in the ground, we are like a leaf being blown by the wind with no control over our own destiny.
- Complete Communities section
 - Lack of walkable nodes... section
 - Rename to “Lack of walkable/bikeable” nodes
 - Replace “non-vehicular” with “non-motorized vehicular”.
 - Question 2. Rephrase as, “Should we transform ALL of our existing neighborhoods...?”
 - Question 4. Add, “... and to allow closer access by walking and non-motorized vehicles.”
- Connectedness section
- Diverse Economies section
 - Competitiveness section
 - Emphasis should not be on job growth, but rather sustainability. Fairfax County emphasized job growth (to “broaden the tax base”) and look what happened. The only ones who benefitted were large land owners and builders, not the average citizen.
- Small businesses and entrepreneurship section
 - “Currently, Montgomery County is a difficult environment for small businesses from a zoning and regulatory standpoint.” This may be true according to the Chamber of Commerce, but environmentally-aware citizens would say that Mo

Co “is a reasonable environment” in that we need strong, common sense regulations to keep businesses from trashing our environment.

- Jobs/housing balance section
 - Adding more jobs and housing will DECREASE traffic congestion? Even if people live on top of a metro station or near where they work, they will still drive to stores, etc. We need to break the old paradigm of thinking that adding more people/jobs/housing units will solve our problems. Again, sustainability should be the goal.
- Save and Efficient Travel section
 - A legacy of car-oriented land use section
 - Please add a statement such as, “The late Ron Kirby, former head of COG’s Transportation Planning Board (TPB), taught us that we can’t road-build our way out of our traffic problems. The only solution is mass transit and the encouragement of non-vehicular movement of people.”
 - Need sidewalks along all county and state roads (except Rustic Roads)
 - Challenges for transit network section
 - Re. the “jobs-housing mismatch that reinforces travel by car....” IDEA: encourage people to move closer to their jobs by government subsidies for moving expenses, based on need, for folks who wish to avoid long commutes by moving closer to their job. Not only would this reduce demand for new road construction, but it would also take cars off the road. My guess is that this would be less expensive than building/widening roads. I do assume that housing costs increase the closer-in you move. That is one of the trade-offs that someone has to make: a longer commute with a bigger house vs. a shorter commute with a smaller house or apartment/townhouse. The reason we have suburban sprawl was (and is) the lure of less expensive/larger houses coupled with relatively cheap (arguably government subsidized) gasoline and roads. I understand that solving congestion is not a simple problem and that there are many variables in the equation. Just to throw out one variable: what if gas was taxed the way it should be (as in Europe), say phasing in a tax of \$1 or more per gallon just for sake of argument? Lots of possible repercussions: people buying smaller cars, moving closer-in, switching to transit, moving to Virginia (not a bad thing to my way of thinking), etc.
 - Suggestion: a fleet of low-emission (electric?) vans/mini-busses that operate in residential neighborhoods to take people to their closest bus stop and/or to their closest major shopping center? Some neighborhoods are a mile or more from a bus stop. We need to encourage people to leave their cars at home. For the money that was spent on the ICC we could have funded free bus service for all eternity.

- Major corridors act as barriers section
 - Include mentioning barriers to animal movement. The need for wildlife crossings is critical to ensuring healthy genetic diversity of animal populations by avoiding inbreeding. Consider adding wildlife under- and over-passes as a requirement for all new road projects. For example, see: <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/banffs-famed-wildlife-overpasses-turn-20-world-looks-canada-conservation-inspiration>
- Affordability
 - Housing affordability section
 - Given that housing affordability is driven, in part, by demand, should the County take steps to decrease the demand? I don't know how to (or if we should) do this, but demand is one of the 3 major factors driving housing affordability. It is at least worth having the discussion.
- Healthy and Sustainable Environment
 - Health section
 - The use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers (especially 2-cycle) and lawn mowers that create dust storms, emit huge volumes of combustion products, and harmful noise levels needs to be addressed (banned?). This has already been done in some California jurisdictions. See, for example [https://www.smgov.net/Departments/OSE/Categories/Landscape/LeafBlower Ban.aspx](https://www.smgov.net/Departments/OSE/Categories/Landscape/LeafBlowerBan.aspx)
 - Address high noise levels due illegal (?) FAA rerouting of planes to/from National Airport
 - Light pollution – require all light sources have downward-directed shields. It would be nice to see the Milky Way.
 - Re. air quality: my understanding is that the definitions for air quality alert codes in the Washington Metropolitan Area were changed, and my suspicion is that this was done to "hide" the real state of air quality to avoid EPA sanctions.

It used to be that a Code Red day was declared if any ONE of the monitoring stations in the greater DC area went over the trigger level. That was changed so that now the AVERAGE of ALL monitoring stations must be over the trigger level to declare a Code Red day. This new methodology has meant that we almost never have Code Red days anymore, even though our air quality is still arguably terrible on certain days. To my way of thinking, folks have a right to know if there is a health threat from a high reading at ANY monitoring station. Loudon Co air might be great on a given day while the air quality in Montgomery Co might be horrible on the same day - when the results are averaged,

residents get the message that all is fine.

Seems to me that this was a move on the part of someone (WMA COG?) to improve our air quality on paper to avoid threatened EPA actions.

- Environmental concerns

- We have protections on the books, such as conservation easements, but developers/homeowners are routinely given waivers by the Planning Board – this must be stopped.
- Increase protection for natural areas/parkland. For example, much wider stream buffer requirements. Encroachment by homeowners into parkland is an issue (e.g. Muddy Branch SVP).
- Need to encourage native tree planting
- Extension of public sewer lines is the “entry-level drug” for increased development density, increased impervious surfaces, more stormwater runoff, and lower water quality. The Water and Sewer Plan is broken and must be fixed to address this creeping menace – it is death by a thousand cuts as sewer lines are gradually extended into low density areas.
- The practice of revolving door employment (e.g. from DEP to WSSC) should be outlawed. Folks that promote the agenda of WSSC, for example, should not be able to work for WSSC when they leave the County.
- Need new regulations to require the control of stormwater (from a 6 inch rain vs. the current 1 or 2 (?) inches, for example) on private and public property. No piping of roof run-off to a street, for example - already exists for new houses but needs to cover existing houses.
- Need coordination between executive agencies (DOT, DEP, DGS), MNCPPC, and WSSC to streamline stormwater BMP efforts, improve communications, and find ways for departments to work together proactively to address stormwater challenges. Plan for Green Streets at design stage for all county projects, including street re-build/refurbishment projects
- Degradation of stream channels must not be addressed via the highly destructive and discredited practice of in-stream “restorations”. Stormwater must be controlled outside of natural areas via, e.g., Green Streets, RainScape, etc. projects.
- Non-native invasive plant control is integral to maintaining the health of natural areas
- Need to change county code to allow naturalized lawns
- Need returnable bottle bill. The Northeast has done this for decades. We need to stand up to the retailer stores who have pushed back on this forever.

- Mandate that retailers can only sell products in packaging that can be recycled by the County
- Planning Board: prohibit anyone who might have a financial conflict of interest from serving on the Board (e.g., developers).
- Climate change
 - Given the susceptibility of the Blue Plains sewage treatment plant, it is that much more important for the county to encourage the long-term sustainability of septic system use.
 - Need to encourage installation of solar panels (Mo Co could lobby at the state/federal level for rebate program)
 - Purchase more park land (for passive use, not athletic fields) as carbon sinks. Purchase and demolish homes along streams to expand stream buffers.
- Water and sewer
 - The last revision of the Ten-Year Water and Sewer Plan was a joke in terms of making changes which would better protect our streams and drinking water (happy to talk about this). Need to require regular septic pumping, inspections, and education by the County
 - Request that more septic system research be funded at the state and federal level
 - Need a law that prevents County employees who work on issues such as this from going to work for private employers who stand to benefit – big conflict of interest
 - Mandate Drinking Water Special Protection Areas to better protect our two drinking water sources plus Seneca Lake.
 - No mention of converting Travilah Quarry to an emergency reservoir
 - Talk about conservation measures that should be enacted to conserve water (higher water charges above the “standard” per day usage – to discourage lawn watering, for example).
 - County-wide education program about need to conserve water
 - Allow grey-water systems and composting toilets
 - WSSC sewage overflows:
 - 1) Allowing overflows under 5,000 gal to be reported only quarterly or annually is unreasonably lax. A spill of that size would potentially have disastrous health affects for people and pets in a small stream. ANY overflow where sewage has reached surface water of any category (not just the ones listed) should have to be reported "immediately". Plus, any spill where raw sewage enters any surface water is a risk to public health - this

is a giant loophole where someone can do a paper and pencil justification for claiming there is no risk to public health ("It was only X gallons which would be diluted by Y factor, etc."). If you dump 1 gallon of raw sewage where a child is playing in the water, that is a public health risk.

2) Unless I missed something, the public notification requirement is woefully inadequate. The average person does not regularly check the health department websites listed (at least I don't). The requirement for notifications "WITHIN A REASONABLE TIME" is open to abuse - it should be something like "within one hour of the event "discovery". A requirement should be added to notify all local news outlets within one hour of the "discovery" of the overflow (especially radio stations - so that the information can be immediately broadcast). Plus, local governments should be required to send health notifications to subscribers of their emergency alert service (For example, see - <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OEMHS/AlertMontgomery/index.html>). Sewage overflow reports should be reported as seriously and routinely as air quality alerts.

3) Another enhancement should be a requirement for more public transparency in overflow reporting. Currently, one can go to the WSSC (Washington Suburban Sanitation Commission) web site (<https://www.wsscwater.com/customer-service/emergency-sewerwater-problems/sanitary-sewer-overflow-reports.html>) and see reports of individual overflows. However, it is next to impossible (without spending hours pouring over the data) to see the total overflows by individual county or watershed. That level of detail is absolutely available - I requested and received a spreadsheet from WSSC that can be easily sorted by the above. One can also easily determine the cumulative volume of overflows. The Notification bill should require that this level of detail be posted (as a downloadable spreadsheet) on sewage authority web sites.

- Diverse and Adaptable Growth
 - The Agricultural Reserve
 - Must be protected from development at all costs
 - Prohibit light industry such as distilleries and solar facilities
 - Prohibit by law any incursion by an outer (second) Potomac River Crossing

- Issue: how to prevent Poolesville from becoming another Bethesda in 100 years? Although growth is limited by water wells now, what is to prevent a straw into the Potomac River?
- Growth management
 - We need to consider stream water quality as part of criteria to allow more development via the SSP.

Email from Elaine Bullington received on 1/6/20

Please add to the Thrive Montgomery 2050 top issues under "Affordability": the need to make Montgomery County affordable for the working middle class and seniors. People spend their lives working and building relationships, homes, and communities in the County at great personal expense. They contribute tens to hundreds of thousands+ of tax dollars to the County over their years as a resident to find they cannot, or can just barely, make ends meet when they are older. Many can never "retire" or are forced to move if they do "retire". Begin by reassessing the high county income and property tax rates, which are currently unreasonable. This very crucial economic issue is far more important than the notion of "fighting climate change" on a local level.

Thank you,
Elaine Bullington

Email from J Anderson received 1/6/20

Hi,

My name is Jeff Anderson, I work for the US Government, and I have participated in thrive 2050 events at least twice. In thinking about the three main areas of scope:

- The Future of Food: [January 14, 2020](#)
- Multimodal Transportation and a Healthy Economy: [February 11, 2020](#)
- Housing for All: [March 3, 2020](#)

I think you should consider including under the housing for all component, the ability to have housing that allows people to retire in place.

I'll be retiring in 17 to 18 years and I'm concerned housing costs and property taxes will make it quite improbable that I can afford to stay in my current home and retire in place: that I'll likely need to relocate to somewhere outside Montgomery County where housing is more affordable on a fixed income.

I believe this is an issue that should be worked into the thrive 2050 plan. I'm certain there must be several, if not many, MC residents in the same situation.

Very respectfully,
Jeffrey Anderson
2009 Erskine Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20902-1423
240-994-5853 (c)

Email from Molly Hauck received 1/15/20

Very good plan.

1. Focus on reducing climate change. Reducing driving. This would include opposing attempts to wide the Beltway and 270 and stopping Lexus Lanes. Install BRT and a train/tram on 270..

2. Enforce the new pesticides ban and try to get the park dept. to stop using pesticides. When I go to Brookside Garden I don't want pesticides underfoot and to have to breathe them.

Molly Hauck
3900 Decatur Ave.
Kensington 20895-1531

Email from Pia Lolster received 1/16/20

Goals I would like to see under the different issues

8713. Housing for all ages. New development should include ground-one-level dwellings for seniors as well as family-oriented dwellings, including common green space/playground for children's recreation and where older people can walk and sit outside. Encouraging all generations to share space.

2. Connectedness. Need to improve bus system!! Major arteries should have buses that run along them every ten minutes that connect to metro stops. I would be willing to walk 5-10 blocks to a bus stop if I know there will be a bus within a reasonable timeframe (and not have to wait a half hour to get onto one if I just missed one, especially because development are unpredictable).

3. Safe and efficient travel. Need to improve sidewalk connectivity and have trees and along sidewalks. More awareness about pedestrian safety/priority among drivers. More crosswalks with lights along major roads and w/out lights in smaller roads.

6. Healthy and Sust Environment

Goal: Map and identify all county ecosystems with important conservation/watershed value and establish zero loss for those systems. Establish a zero forest loss policy for the county. Establish a network of stream valley/watershed parks.

Provide producers in the agricultural reserve with resources to move their properties into sustainable practices, including organic production, carbon drawdown systems (regenerative agriculture), reforestation of portions of land that aren't being used for development purposes and give them the resources/knowledge to establish wildlife-friendly habitats on their properties.

Trees, trees, trees. Both need to increase along neighborhood streets and in clusters along development sites. Large developments should minimize individual lot properties and increase the size of communal land that provides environmental and recreation services. Encourage neighborhoods to 'adopt a piece of land' and help homeowners manage it for the benefit of the human and wildlife communities.

Pia Lolster-Izquierdo
8713 Hempstead Ave
Bethesda MD 20817

Email from Diane Cameron received on 1/16/20

Dear Director Wright and Planning Staff,

I'm writing as a resident of Montgomery County, to comment on this aspect of the Thrive 2050 Issues memo: the importance of our Parks in connecting people with nature.

My comment is that the issues document, and the focus of Thrive 2050 overall, must emphasize the crucial role of our world-class Montgomery Parks system in providing access to nature and natural areas: tree groves, forests, wetlands, streams, floodplains and meadows. **The Issues Memo at present doesn't do justice to the role of our Parks in providing access to natural areas.**

Access to nature/ natural areas, includes the benefit of healthy recreation, but it also includes benefits beyond the health dimension.

In asking that you highlight the role of our Parks in providing access to nature, this ask is based on the clear and strong popular mandate that has been repeatedly expressed by Montgomery County residents in public surveys for at least the past twenty years. This was recently reported in the 2017 Parks,

Recreation and Open Space plan (PROS Plan), Appendix 11. Page A11-12 delineates the *Plan for Future Generations*, the *Priority Rankings*, and the *Opportunities for Nature Recreation*:

https://www.montgomeryparks.org/uploads/2018/06/508-2017.PROS-APPENDIX.ONLY_.pdf

PLAN FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Montgomery County has historically emphasized the need to manage land toward natural resources protection and conservation, and the community has historically been supportive and encouraging of such efforts. The 2005 Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan shows this historic emphasis. The recent community outreach as part of the Community Needs Assessment has shown that this ethic or preservation of these resource for future generations is still evident, even with the changing demographics. Recommendations include:

- Development of program and service amenities that balance activity with the natural environment, such as nature playgrounds
- Connecting current open spaces together using sustainable trails, and use of interpretive signs to show natural open space as a critical piece of the parks system
- Land preservation and acquisition strategies based on the development of natural, cultural, or light adventure amenities balanced with land strategies for traditional sports, such as sport fields and courts

Key themes for tactics from the Community Needs Assessment supporting this strategic priority include:

PRIORITY RANKINGS

Priority rankings identified using the quantitative and qualitative input from all of the community needs input methods included:

- An emphasis on natural trails, natural space and wildlife habitat, and gardens, indicating that the community values the opportunity to preserve enjoy these amenities
- Nature Parks over traditional sports parks

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATURE RECREATION

- Contemplative and active educational and adventure elements
- Connections to natural trails and other natural/cultural amenities, including dog parks and playgrounds
- Preservation of current open space, greenspace and existing urban parks

As an example of the large, unfulfilled need for more nature-parks and access to nature expressed by county residents: between 71,000 and 75,000 County households participating in the 2017 PROS survey reported that their need for natural surface trails, natural areas & wildlife habitats, and public gardens, is either unmet or only partially met. These are the top 3 unmet or partially-met needs reported. (Question 10-3, page A11-78). In question 16, a majority – 52% - reported that they and their household do not use an athletic field.

The current Issues Memo, in the “Healthy and Sustainable Environment” section has this sentence:

“Opportunities to eat well and be active are constrained by quality and design of neighborhoods and the services and opportunities available – including access to parks that offer opportunities for active recreation.”

At least up until now, the term “active recreation” has been countered with the term “passive recreation,” with the “active” term referring to sports and other activities in “the built environment” – sports facilities like playing fields; tennis and basketball courts, and so on, while the “passive” term, somewhat pejoratively referred to hiking, cycling, bird-watching, and other activities in the natural areas of our parks. It seemed that the key difference between these terms hinged on whether an activity required the building of a

sports facility – not whether an activity involves people being literally active, such as via walking, running, cycling or otherwise traversing (and communing with nature in) parkland.

* As the PROS plan surveys including the ones summarized in the 2017 PROS report show, Montgomery residents not only enjoy nature-based activities in our parks, they also request more nature trails, and nature park land acquisitions in order to better-serve County residents.

* Again as the PROS survey reflects: we must continue to fund nature park acquisitions. In urban and dense suburban areas, residents have been turned down in recent years from their requests for Legacy Open Space acquisitions of small yet crucial woodlands and wetlands. A more-robust funding of LOS and other nature park acquisition funds and programs would enable many more urban and suburban neighborhoods to protect and preserve the now-vanishing natural areas, and to connect them up for use in trails, wildlife corridors, and climate crisis adaptation and carbon sequestration areas.

* Rather than continue the false dichotomy of “active vs. passive recreation,” I ask that the Thrive 2050 documents highlight, and integrally reflect, the consistent results of the PROS surveys. These surveys show that the need for, and popular demand for nature-based activities and use of park trails is stronger than for any other activity type, and has remained strong over time, becoming more crucial as we become more urban.

* I ask that the scope of issues in Thrive 2050 be expanded to include a broad, explicit section on “The role of the Montgomery Parks system in providing access to natural areas.”

This section will describe the many benefits of providing County residents with access to woods, groves, wetlands, meadows, and other natural areas. These benefits include physical and mental health improvement to individuals. They also include flood reduction; urban heat island reduction; inspiration to artists; and economic benefits from companies who want to locate in counties where their employees and customers can be close to natural areas.

Thanks for considering my comments on the need for Thrive 2050 to highlight the crucial role of Montgomery Parks’ natural areas to the future of our County.

Diane M. Cameron

Kensington, Maryland

Email from Anne Amber received 1/16/20

Dear Planners:

Having recently had the good fortune to participate in a discussion of *Thrive 2050* with three M-NCPPC planners and a roomful of interested residents, I offer these comments.

First, I want to recognize the enormous amount of thought and effort that have gone into this 18-page document. It is comprehensive and farsighted.

In considering the 8 issue areas, I returned to the **General Plan Refinement of the Goals & Objectives for Montgomery County (1993)**, undertaken because of the large increase in population and developed land since the Plan Update in 1969. Not having looked at this document for perhaps a decade, I was

struck by how far sighted it actually was, and how, had it been more aggressively followed with respect to transportation, we would have been farther ahead in addressing both movement of people and reducing our contribution to climate change. The context of *the current* update is not just arriving at build-out, but being in a **climate emergency**. **This requires us to view EVERY issue through this lens: does the action increase or decrease greenhouse gas production? Does it help or worsen the known effects of climate warming, such as super heavy rainfall and drought? Does it enable all people in the community to cope with what we know is coming?**

Returning to **transportation**: On page 61 of the 1993 plan the author notes a conceptual change from *accommodating travel demand (in POVs)*, i.e., building more and wider highways, to *making alternatives available*—ones that are price- and time-competitive with drive-alone travel, well-connected, with convenient transfers among the component parts. Yet we seem on the verge of additional lanes of concrete on the beltway and I-270, while the Corridor Cities Transitway, long counted on for transit to serve explosive development from King Farm to Life Sciences to Clarksburg, remains unbuilt. (KUDOS to the Planning Board for rejecting the beltway widening plan.) The BRT NETWORK proposed by then Councilmember Marc Elrich a decade ago also remains unbuilt, with only a few segments even approved.

In the *Thrive 2050* section on **Safe and Efficient Travel**, much progress is noted toward development around transit stations and creating bike and pedestrian ways, while acknowledging the underlying problem of housing dispersed out of the range of transit and far from jobs.

- **The incentives must be shifted toward transit use.** It needs to be faster than driving and not terribly expensive. In urban areas, **it must have a dedicated lane**, even at the expense of a general lane. And the BRT needs to actually BE a **network**. A couple of north/south routes do not constitute a network. All major roads should carry BRT. In the urban ring and corridors, **the aim should be to have everyone within a quarter mile of rapid, frequent transit services that connect in a network.**
- Those who choose to live far from transit services must simply accept the inconvenience. **No new highways, such as M83, should pave over our remaining wooded land to accommodate them.** In the case of Clarksburg, however, residents of this planned transit-oriented community should as soon as at all possible be provided the rapid transit to Shady Grove on which development so far upcounty was predicated.
- All-day MARC service should be part of the plan.
- E-scooters and e-bikes need their own lane, apart from pedestrians. Bikes and walkers are separated in many cities in Europe, which allows the bikes to go quite rapidly.
- Responding to the noted fact that our major roadways are barriers, unsafe for pedestrians, the solution is to narrow them by providing a dedicated BRT (or better yet, a tram) lane, with trees separating pedestrians and bikes from traffic.

Healthy and Sustainable Environment: This could reasonably be promoted to FIRST on the issue list, given its overriding importance. I suggest finding and reinstating that Green Infrastructure Plan that took so many hours of labor some years ago. It is desperately needed for the health of our people and our wildlife, especially now that the ICC has eliminated the green cross-county corridor that used to link our stream valley parks.

- **Healthy eating** is also a requirement for healthy people. An aim of planning needs to be to encourage grocery stores with fresh vegetables within a quarter mile of everyone in the developed county. I did not see that covered in the plan.

- **No artificial turf** should be approved for installation on athletic fields in parks or schools, or as part of a development design. Even if one ignores the toxic off-gassing, it's impossible to deny that it gets dangerously hot and must be disposed of and renewed about every 8 years or less, depending on wear. Fields are not currently recycled, given their composite nature and lack of capable facilities. So these (on average) 42,778 lbs of plastic and 422,400 lbs of infill are typically dumped...somewhere--and go on to pollute our waterways.
- Buildings should be required to be at least **net zero, and moving toward creating more energy than they use.**
- Buildings must be required to be **safe for birds**, given the huge number of bird collisions with tall glass buildings. Birds are threatened in so many ways, we can at least eliminate this one.

If we are to create a community that is climate emergency appropriate, welcoming, economically vibrant and diverse, with a decent living space for everyone, **the public realm will need a larger role: public plazas, with groves of trees and benches, within walking distance, and affordable housing.** (I believe you had a presentation by the Viennese planners on how they achieved affordable housing on a large scale, called social housing.) Use of public/private partnerships, an idea which sounds nice on paper but results both in loss of control over process and outcome and loss of public ownership, should be minimized or rejected altogether.

Finally, in the next iteration, I would suggest starting with a **vision statement describing what we would like the county to look like in 2050.** You have certainly *created* a vision through all these overlapping issue areas, but drawing a word picture of it would be a good place to start in order to get public buy-in for the plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to be a part of the process.

Sincerely,
Anne Ambler
12505 Kuhl Road
Silver Spring, MD 20902

Email from Steven Kraft received on 1/18/20

Hi Thrive 2050!

Having read through the top issues, I believe Thrive 2050 is on the right path. My top issues are density and mass transit to reduce our land usage and carbon footprint to fight climate change, and eliminate sprawl.

So far, the plans for Thrive 2050 match up with that vision. I would stress that designated areas of green space such as the Agricultural Reserve and Parks need protection. With that said, we can focus development around "core" areas with accessible mass transit near metro stations. This can further be achieved by passing re-zoning laws to eliminate legacy "redlining" zones and upzoning single family zones to include missing middle housing.

With all that said, overall the county seems to be on the right track with this plan, and Thrive 2050 has my full support!

-Steven Kraft, ACT and Sierra Club volunteer

Dear Planning Board and Staff:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the staff recommendations on the Thrive 2050 issues report dated 12.12.19. We applaud the direction and attention to key elements needed to advance the framework for the Thrive 2050 plan. MCA offers these comments/suggestions:

Connectedness - Unequal access to opportunities - Page 7

- **Provide for equitable access to critical utilities including broadband**

Healthy and Sustainable Environment - Climate Change - Page 15

Recommended **edit**:

- Meeting the challenges of climate change and reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions will require a **strengthened** commitment to conserving and **enhancing** natural areas and other green open space, and limiting development footprint and impervious cover as key strategies to protect water quality and handle increasing stormwater.

Water/Sewer - Page 15

Suggested addition to questions:

4.How do we ensure the long-term viability of well (groundwater aquifer) and septic systems serving rural communities and businesses outside the WSSC water/sewer envelope?

The Agricultural Reserve - Page 16

- Recommended **edit**: The Agricultural **and Open Space** Reserve
As we face species loss globally and locally, it should not be underestimated how important native habitat (forest/grassland/meadow/stream/river) in the Reserve is to native species preservation.
- We would suggest some reference to the importance of the Reserve in connecting and educating residents to the natural world. In addition, the absence of reference to the importance of historic preservation (Countywide) and opportunities for public involvement through tourism/education is striking. Perhaps this could be referenced in the last section on culture and art?

We look forward to working with staff and stakeholders as the plan advances and, again, thank the staff for their diligence to providing a comprehensive and equitable framework within which we can craft a plan that will support a diverse and thriving county.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Taylor", enclosed within a large, loopy circular flourish.

Caroline Taylor
Executive Director

Cc: MCA Board



Transit Alternatives to Mid-County Highway Extended

Gwen Wright, Director, Montgomery County Planning Department
Khalid Afzal, Special Projects Coordinator
Caroline McCarthy, Chief, Research & Special Projects

January 16, 2020

Dear Gwen, Khalid and Caroline,

The TAME Coalition appreciates your work on the Thrive 2050 General Plan update and revision. Especially, we appreciate your openness in meeting with the public, including Khalid's meeting with us on September 30, 2019 to discuss transportation issues. In that meeting, we requested that Thrive 2050 signal a shift away from highways and toward transit, and that this shift include the elimination of the proposed M83 highway from the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways.

Today, we comment on the "Safe and Efficient Travel" section in the Issues Memo dated 12/12/19:

*The "Safe and Efficient Travel" section well-describes some of the equity problems of the car-centric legacy of county highways and roadways, including that communities are divided by unsafe roads, and lower-income people lack access to efficient transit and walkable neighborhoods.

* Please name other equity problems with the car-centric transportation system: the difficulties of young adults, and disabled people, in getting around the county when they don't drive cars. For instance, in the 355 corridor area of Gaithersburg and Germantown, the population is on average younger and lower-income than the County as a whole – making car-centric highways such as M-83 a further barrier, not an aid to mobility.

* This transportation section needs to bring our County's climate commitments to bear on decisions about the role of transportation within Montgomery's General Plan. It must point out that highways are climate disasters: they use petroleum products and carbon-emitting concrete in their construction; they destroy forests needed to lessen floods and heatwaves; and they increase reliance on vehicles that will emit carbon for decades to come. Highway projects take up funds sorely needed for climate-friendly transit.

* Given the social-economic equity and climate commitments that Montgomery has rightly adopted, we ask that the scope of transportation issues in Thrive 2050 explicitly state that all proposed new highways and highway expansions, including the proposed M-83, will be dropped from County plans, including the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways, and that instead, we will invest fully in transit and walkable communities.

Sincerely,

Diane Cameron
Margaret Schoap
TAME Coalition

Comments submitted from the Board of Directors of the Maryland Native Plant Society

The Maryland Native Plant Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization incorporated in Maryland in 1992 and active in Montgomery County.

The Maryland Native Plant Society's mission is to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Maryland's native plants and their habitats.

Protect and expand natural areas on publicly owned land in the county.

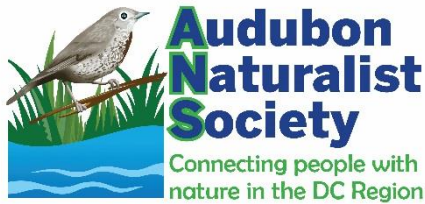
Justification:

- Protects Montgomery County's heritage, including rare and endangered plants.
- Encourages a thriving ecosystem for people, plants and animals.
- Contributes to residents' health and welfare.
- Alleviates storm water damage and protects drinking water.

Recommended Actions:

- Increase efforts to reduce invasive plants that destroy habitat.
- Encourage replanting of native plants, especially trees, where appropriate.
- Ensure continued allocation of funds for maintenance following invasive removal, restoration and/or replanting.
- Address the continued over-abundance of white-tailed deer that hinder forest regeneration.
- Increase connecting land corridors and connect with other counties where feasible.
- Discourage development in natural areas or that impacts natural areas.
- Increase the number of conservation areas where recreation, with the exception of foot travel, is prohibited.
- Address the increasing threat of invasive insects and pathogens that are harming ecosystems.

The Maryland Botanical Work Group/Department of Natural Resources published a report in 2014 for the state "Concerning the Preservation of Maryland's Botanical Heritage." This document is an excellent report addressing many of the issues we raise in more detail: https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/011514_BHWG_Report.pdf



January 16th, 2020

Written Comments for Thrive Montgomery 2050 – New County General Master Plan Draft Issues Report¹

Submitted by Denisse Guitarra

Maryland Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS)

Dear Montgomery County Planning Department,

For 122 years, Audubon Naturalist Society has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. We thank Montgomery County's Planning Department for working to revise and create a new, comprehensive county General Master Plan. ANS sees this Plan revision as an opportunity to shape the future of the County in an era of climate change where people live in diverse, equitable, affordable, safe, transit-oriented communities and can get around without driving. In our vision, the County's natural areas are preserved and enhanced, with more parkland in and around our denser communities. With trees to cool the urban areas and clean streams flowing freely through communities, everyone should have equal access to nature, jobs, and services.

We commend the Planning Department's commitment to making Montgomery County a better place where all residents can *live, work, play and thrive for the next 30 years*. We agree with the core pillars of environment, equity, and economic health that are the heart of the new General Master Plan. Basing policy recommendations on those foundational pillars will provide a solid, fair and strong foundation for the County to grow in the next years.

¹ Thrive Montgomery 2050 – Issue Briefing December 12, 2019 Report. Available from: <https://montgomeryplanningboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Staff-Memo-for-12-12-PB-issues-briefing-FINAL.pdf>

Woodend Sanctuary | 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815 | 301-652-9188

Rust Sanctuary | 802 Childrens Center Road, Leesburg, Virginia 20175 | 703-669-0000

anshome.org

We thank Montgomery Planning Department for the opportunity to comment on the *Draft Issues Briefing Report*. We seek and recommend the continued protection of our green spaces and emphasize the implementation of sustainable, equitable, transit-oriented early design planning which enhances quality of life and lowers upfront costs. We also seek to focus all planning, policy and design decisions to have the environment in mind in order to build more equitable, resilient communities with adaptable infrastructure that mitigate the worst effects of climate change.

Complete Communities

ANS supports the planning of more walkable, bikeable and affordable transit-oriented communities. We believe that implementing sound land use which seeks to decrease urban sprawl and instead focuses on increasing transit options for residents will reduce greenhouse gases and increase peoples' health and well-being. The following are our recommendations:

- **The Plan should provide a calculation of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and their greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) conversion per resident to and from work to produce an analysis of both quality of life and environmental protection².**
- **We support increasing the diversity of housing options to continue to counter sprawl. Instead of or alongside introducing more retail spaces on single family neighborhoods, the Plan should increase the number of public parks and green spaces for people to connect with one another.**
- **The Plan should incorporate wildlife habitat and nature corridors to ensure that communities are "complete and green"³.**

Connectedness

When people feel connected to the place they live in, they are more willing to protect it and engage in it. Through ANS' 2019 project *What Lives in Long Branch? ¿Que Vive en Long Branch?*⁴ we learned firsthand

² Cort and Tu (2016). Green Place Certification. Coalition for Smarter Growth. Available from:

<https://www.smartergrowth.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/GreenPlace-report-PUBLIC.pdf>

³ Harnik and Welle (2009) Complete Communities – Green Space and Affordable Housing. Available from:

<https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe-complete-communities-article.pdf>

⁴ ANS Blog Summary of *What Lives in Long Branch? ¿Que Vive en Long Branch?* Available from:

<http://conservationblog.anshome.org/blog/what-lives-in-long-branch-que-vive-en-long-branch/>

that immigrant residents from different countries and speaking different languages when given an opportunity to engage in nature based-family oriented activities, bonded over their local creek and park, and built a stronger relationship to their natural environment, each other and their community. Hence, increasing the number of opportunities and venues for such relationships to occur at parks, towns squares or at joint community action events such as a stream or park clean up can empower residents and increase their interconnectedness. The following are our recommendations:

- **The Plan should incorporate natural areas and environmental connectedness into the Connectedness concept, both to help connect people to place, and people to one another.**
- **The Plan should ensure that more resources are allocated to increase community engagement opportunities, in multiple languages and learning styles, as part of the community connectedness programs through the county.**

Diverse Economies

While we agree that a diverse economy is important for the County, new jobs should be not only diverse, but also equitable and inclusive. Job opportunities could be more interspersed throughout the county to allow all county residents to live and work nearby helping to reduce vehicle miles traveled and GHG. Redevelopment should be carefully monitored to incentivize small businesses to stay and grown in the county. The following are our recommendations:

- **The Plan should include zoning code policy changes to increase the number of mixed-use commercial sectors and housing opportunities for all people around the county for the creation of diverse economies.**
- **The Plan should incentivize the creation of more green, sustainable jobs and business to place a priority on the climate crisis and build green economy in the county.**
- **The Plan should incorporate feedback mechanisms between business and higher education institutions to keep and hire locally trained professionals.**

Safe and Efficient Travel

In the era of climate change, transit-first transportation alternatives that reduce greenhouse gases and focus on mobilizing people instead of cars should be a top priority. With the state dangerously moving

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anshome.org

ahead with the Beltway (I-495) and I-270 expansion, Montgomery County needs to lead the way in increasing transit alternatives for its county residents. While Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the county have started to increase,⁵ the county needs to seek an increase in efficiency in all modes of transportation by making buses, trains, metro all more reliable, efficient, safe, frequent and able to reach more destinations. Investing, planning, and advocating for more transit solutions to traffic congestion now will save both people and the environment from more detrimental health and climate effects. The following are our recommendations:

- **Planners and local transportation agencies should work together to solve the “last mile” problems by implementing and increasing the access to micro-mobility alternatives such as electric scooters, bikes, and more transit orientated development near major transportation centers⁶.**
- **Planners and local transportation agencies should work together to find traffic congestion solutions, conduct “road diets,” increase the number of dedicated bike and bus lanes, implement more stormwater management practices on new and aging transportation infrastructure, and make roads safe for all users.**
- **The Plan should include the installation of pedestrian HAWK signal (High-Intensity Activated crosswalk)⁷ or overpasses on current at current high use and wide roads and all crosswalks.**
- **The Plan should include an analysis of the barriers new transportation infrastructure poses to wildlife connectivity alongside pedestrian and human connectivity.**

Affordability

As a locally focused environmental organization with a long history of advocacy in Montgomery County, we believe affordability, especially affordable housing, has deep intersections with conservation. When people cannot afford to live close to transit and work, they move farther out into sprawl developments and commute by car. Therefore, increasing the number and the diversity of housing options should be at the core of the general plan’s recommendations. Furthermore, the county should seek a way to work with developers to find a more equitable balance between the need for mixed-income housing and the

⁵ FLASH – Montgomery County BRT. Available from: <https://www.ridetheflash.com/>

⁶ CB Insights (2019). The Micromobility Revolution: How Bikes and Scooters Are Shaking Up Urban Transport Worldwide. Available from: <https://www.cbinsights.com/research/report/micromobility-revolution/>

⁷ HAWK Signal. DDOT. Available from: <https://ddot.dc.gov/page/hawk-signal>

exorbitant rise in development costs. New development or redevelopment should not come at a cost of displacement, community connections lost, or wildlife and waterway degradation. The following are our recommendations:

- **Housing affordability should be a priority and people at all levels of income should have good quality, environmentally sound options to live and get around via multi-transit options.**
- **More programs should be created for new homeowners to be informed about their environmental options, such as installing solar panels or electric water heaters, in the process of home acquisition.**

Healthy and Sustainable Environment

Health, the environment, and climate change are interrelated and inspiring topics. It is critically important to protect our existing extraordinary stream valley parks, our creeks, and the Agricultural Reserve. These places hold numerous natural benefits and services such as carbon sequestration, air purification, natural habitat, community connection, mental health benefits, and ecological functions. These are all factors that county residents could never gain back if they were destroyed due to new development. The following are our recommendations:

- **Planning and Parks continues to protect, preserve and maintain our 37,000 acres⁸ of parks and stream valley parks which serve as natural buffers to mitigate climate change impacts locally in our county for both people and wildlife alike.**
- **Increase housing and commercial development near already existing high-density development or near major transit centers to help the county protect these valuable and irreplaceable places while reducing greenhouse gases.**
- **Include more green spaces and accessibility to parks for all county residents but especially for lower income communities, especially on the eastern part of the county.**
- **Implement bird safe building⁹ regulations, which prevent bird collisions, serve as wildlife habitats, and are conscious of bird spring and fall migration patterns.¹⁰**

⁸ Montgomery Parks (2019) Available from: <https://www.montgomeryparks.org/about/parks/>

⁹ American Bird Conservancy (2020). Bird Safe Buildings. Available from: <https://abcbirds.org/program/glass-collisions/bird-friendly-design/>

¹⁰ Stephens et al. (2016) consistent response of bird populations to climate change on two continents. science, 352(6281), 84-87. available from: <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/352/6281/84>

- **Prioritize implementation and execution of the county and statewide Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) to continue to protect and preserve the water quality of our waterways.**
- **Conduct an environmentally-friendly siting analysis for good locations for clean energy sources in the county.**
- **Work with MCPS, local higher institutions, nonprofits and local government agencies to continue to educate our county residents about climate change and seek ways to find local solutions together.**
- **Increase the number of native trees, plants and soil diversity as natural tools to help reduce urban heat island effects, increase carbon sequestration, and increase people and wildlife's health and wellbeing.**

Diverse and Adaptive Growth

Montgomery County has expanded beyond the 1964's Wedges and Corridors Master Plan. We thank the Planning Board for considering the importance of many more diverse corridors that have sprung up around the county in the new Plan. In the face of a changing environment, we must adapt our county to become resilient in order to mitigate the effects of climate change. In particular, as we grow, it is critically important to protect existing conserved areas and one of the unique jewels of the Washington, DC region, the Agricultural Reserve. The following are our recommendations:

- **Plan ahead for upgrades to the aging and new utility and services infrastructure and especially rely on studies and models which predict the effects of climate change on these structures.**
- **Continue to preserve our county's Agricultural Reserve and seek new and innovative mechanisms such as educational agritourism, incentives for "rewilding" and regenerative silviculture and agriculture, and as a local food security source as part of its future preservation¹¹. Tools that have been used to create and maintain the Ag Reserve, such as AR, R, and RC zoning; the Building Lot Termination (BLT) Program; and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), must be included in the new Plan and their continued importance made clear.**

¹¹ Montgomery Planning (2019) Agritourism-Study. Available from: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Agritourism-Study-and-Appendices.pdf>

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- The solar energy proposal on the Ag Reserve should be carefully revised so as to not impact wildlife, waterways and the people who live and work there.
- Emphasize the preservation and protection of wildlife corridors across the county.

Culture and Design

Residents coming from so many different parts of the state, country and world have created Montgomery County a unique place to work and live. Montgomery Planning could use this talent, power and expertise to create a locally based of the new General Master Plan made up of this new-found diversity treasure. The following are our recommendations:

- Consider incorporating art in all design and use these designs as an opportunity to teach about environmental protection or to connect people to their communities and local environment ¹².
- Use Montgomery County's both existing and new rich diversity to expand small local business and create venues of locally inspired art and design.
- Work with developers and communities to require art as part of the design.

Overall, ANS believes the County's new general plan is on track of being as equitable, sustainable, diverse and inclusive and our hope is that we along with the broader community will continued to be invited to be part of revising the Plan. Below is a summarized list of ANS's priority recommendations:

- We support and recommend that planners work with local authorities, developers and communities to increase the amount of affordable, equitable, sustainable and transit-oriented housing and communities with access to green spaces that reduce GHG, mitigate climate change and create resilient communities.
- We recommend the protection and preservation of our extensive park system, our Agricultural Reserve, our stream valley parks, and wildlife corridors; and that we create more energy efficient, and wildlife friendly buildings and habitats that are not only net zero but net positive buildings.

¹² Jensen (2014) The Art of Extension: Connecting with The Arts to Build Stronger Communities. Available from: <https://imaginingamerica.org/2014/05/12/the-art-of-extension-connecting-with-the-arts-to-build-stronger-communities/>

- **We recommend zoning code policy changes to increase the number of mixed-use commercial sectors and housing opportunities based on vehicle miles traveled and GHG analyses.**
- **We recommend the implementation of early and strategic planning design which includes the use of GHG and cost reducing sustainable technologies that results in ecological designs that benefit both people and wildlife alike.**

On behalf of ANS and our 28,000 members and supporters, we thank Montgomery Planning for reading our comments and suggestions. We look forward to working and collaborating in this important and crucial redesign of the New General Master Plan.

Sincerely,

Denisse Guitarra

ANS Maryland Conservation Advocate

Woodend Sanctuary | 8940 Jones Mill Road, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815 | 301-652-9188
Rust Sanctuary | 802 Childrens Center Road, Leesburg, Virginia 20175 | 703-669-0000

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