

ATTACHMENT 4

4 April 2020

To Planning Board members and staff

From Pamela Lindstrom

cc. ACT officers and Excom members, Jane Lyons, Coalition for Smarter Growth

Proposed Vision in the new General Plan

Several weeks ago, at the meeting that ACT members had with Casey Anderson (during the last day of the previous epoch), he challenged me to write my version of a Vision for the General Plan. Here it is.

I have written a rather lengthy Vision section. The lengthy statement is justified for several reasons:

- the Vision for the future needs to be very different from the status quo, and from past Plans;
- the Vision needs to be visionary – to portray the County in the future;
- it ties together many of the Issues in your report which are intended to serve as chapters in the Plan.

I hope this Vision will inspire the Planning Board (and the Council) to draft an equally visionary Plan that will compel officials and community in the future to follow it.

Thanks for all your work, and for your attention.

Pam Lindstrom

A Portrait of Montgomery County in 2050: Livable, Sustainable, Prosperous, Affordable Environmentally, Economically and Socially Sustainable

"As one of 600,000 citizens [now a million] ...", the framers of the 1964 General Plan addressed each of them individually. They portrayed Wedges and Corridors in a mostly suburban County with dense development limited to transportation corridors, bounded and separated by rural, green agricultural Wedges.

Once again, we address the residents and businesses and employees individually: The Vision in 1964 was preserving the County as the ideal suburb. Now the Vision is preparing us for the demands of the future. While the Vision of the 1964 Plan has served us well for 50 years and retains its overall validity, our obligation to the future requires that we plan for a County that responds to the existential issues in 2050, beginning now in 2020.

Thus this Vision extends beyond the physical development of the County to social and equitable economic development, to protecting the global climate, and providing a good quality of life that's affordable to all residents. We will change from our 1964 Vision of the County as an ideal suburb, to an urban Vision. We envision Complete Communities

that connect more people and more diverse people, in their homes and on the street; reduced inequality, both for individuals and sectors of the County; affordable living for diverse households; sustainable, efficient and affordable transport. As the Vision of Vienna, our Vision is integrating all classes and income levels into the high quality of life of the County. It is a Vision and program for a better world, a Vision that includes all.

Boxes:

From the events with the officials from Vienna: Montgomery County Council member Hans Riemer: *We need to build much more transit oriented social housing, but spending money isn't enough – you need a Vision to build Smart Communities like Vienna.*

Vienna City Council member Kurt Stürzenbecher: *One of the reasons for Vienna's high livability rank is the mix of rich and poor in the social housing. We have strategies to bring the rich and poor together. Rich and poor are happy to live together in social housing. There are no bad districts. All districts have a mixture from rich and to poor (though the poor are not so poor as American poor).*

Joseph Cser, Wohnpartners director: *Red Vienna was never just a big housing program. It was about integrating all classes into the high quality of life of the City. Red Vienna programs covered education, work, health care, and more. It was a Vision and program for a better world, a better society that included all.*

Architecture professor Ronit Eisenbach's central question: *how do policies, culture, challenges, aspirations as a community get manifest in their housing?*

Most growth will occur in dense mixed use centers in the Urban Ring and the Metrorail/I270 Corridors. Some major road corridors are targeted for improvements in transit service, and thus for more urban growth.

The low density suburbs that characterize much of the County's land will retain their traditional suburban character. Their zoning will change to accommodate some increased density in the Missing Middle range, in select locations bordering major roads and urban centers. The suburbs will better connect with urban centers and public transport. Thus their residents can both enjoy the peace of their single family homes and gardens, and access neighborhood stores and services by foot or bicycle. Public transport will take them to vital downtowns including the center of Washington DC.

The Agriculture and Open Space Reserve will be preserved intact for the long term, with new access and new activities for urban residents, and new sources of revenue compatible with agriculture.

Forecast growth is our opportunity to address these issues: to shape the County's communities for a high quality of life using much less carbon. Growth can improve the urban form of neighborhoods with more public life and social capital. The need to invest in transportation facilities is our opportunity to change from reliance on individual motor vehicles to use of public transport, bicycling and walking.

In our Vision, new housing will improve affordability for all. High density subsidized housing initiated by the County will break down geographic and socioeconomic divides. Rich and poor will live side by side to the benefit of both. The new housing will provide a convenient less stressed workforce for businesses; provide both employees and customers to support a larger and more varied local retail. Many more people can combine high quality of life with doing their part to protect the global climate.

The General Plan Portrays the County as an Integrated System

Box:

Smart City Vienna has set itself the task of consistently and continuously modernizing the city in order to reduce energy consumption and emissions significantly without having to forego any aspects of consumption or mobility.

A city or a big urbanizing suburb is an integrated system. This Plan outlines Montgomery County's present system, followed by the system we envision for 2050, but this would become our Vision beginning now.

A system such as Montgomery County is full of feedback loops in which the state of one parameter is linked to the state of other parameters. Change in one parameter affects the change of other parameters, either positively or negatively.

Our System in 2020 Presently, the feedback loops are mostly negative: as the County grows, the state of major parameters gets worse. The Vision of substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is an improbable dream.

Planners face limits on their ability to locate substantially more of the populace and business in transit-served urban centers, limited by land availability and high prices.

High demand and limited capacity drive up the prices, and narrow the socioeconomic range of populace and businesses accommodated in transit served urban centers.

The transport system continues to depend on motor vehicles. Public transport is inadequate, too expensive (Metrorail) or too inefficient (buses). Fearing traffic congestion, officials are reluctant to shift transportation investments from road improvements to transit; or shift road capacity to bikeways and wide sidewalks.

The housing affordable to lower and even middle income people is not only insufficient, it is also concentrated in the eastern part of the County and in certain other pockets. Race and ethnicity are linked to income, unintentionally creating racial and ethnic segregation. Quality of education and schools is also linked to income in the district, thus passing along unequal quality of education, and segregation to future generation.

The County is becoming less livable, less prosperous, less affordable to many residents, less connected, less socially and environmentally sustainable. While an increasing number of people live and work in carbon sparing urban centers, the trend is insufficient to achieve significant reduction in emissions.

Housing and commercial construction have dropped. The market for growth is capped by the narrow range of the populace and business community for which County locations are affordable.

The development and construction industry is a major employer; its contraction ripples through many other businesses from lawyers to restaurants.

The Vision for 2050: A system in which the same critical parameters spiral upward via positive feedback. Though this Vision will sound so different from the problems of 2020, we don't have to achieve it or even see how to achieve it now, We just have to see the goal clearly, have faith, and turn the direction of change toward the outcome we envision.

The target can be called a Smart County, defined by parameters of economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and socioeconomic integration. Change in the right direction is ensured by three overall criteria:

- Radical resource preservation
- High and balanced standard of living for all
- Development and productive use of new concepts, technologies and methods.

Progress toward this Vision can only be reached through collaborative implementation, I.e., with understanding and agreement of the populace.

The Vision begins with Complete Communities, with many connections among the residents of our socially, economically and racially diverse populace. The communities will be centered by a mixed use urban center with multiple public places that bring together rich to poor residents, highly paid to below minimum wage workers; businesses and their owners, clerks and service workers. Residents can be employees of the retail or customers. They encounter each other in the halls of buildings and on the streets. Supermarkets, drug stores and other establishments of useful retail are also public places and great fonts of diversity. The useful retail draws customers from the neighborhood and, if a part of the transit backbone, from up and down the corridor.

Complete Streets are both public places, and part of the transport system. Complete Communities are accessible within by foot and bicycle, and elsewhere by public transport. Diverse people, rich and poor, black, white and brown, athletic and disabled, encounter each other on the streets and waiting for the bus.

Americans can learn from European social housing programs. Balanced mixed income housing expands the demand for the housing by increasing the share of households who can afford it. Increased demand spurs a complementary increase in supply, housing that benefits both those who need price concessions and those who can afford market prices.

More affordable housing reduces inequality – note that all these socialist countries, even the poorly governed and managed ones, have less social division, less extremes in income and wealth, and fewer aspects of poverty, though substantially lower GNP/Capita than the US. The diverse residents of social housing increase community connections with contacts between the social housing and market housing in the building, on the streets and shops, even waiting for the bus. Social housing residents are both customers, and employees and owners of small businesses.

The big social housing programs in Europe were never intended to just produce a lot of housing; they grow whole communities. They implement overall goals such as protecting the global climate. Montgomery County will reap the same benefits from taking a more active role in housing construction. More housing, and more of it affordable, will be produced. By controlling the location and form of new housing, the County implements the General Plan and area master plans.

Social housing in Vienna is developed by public-private partnerships: Municipal housing department, social housing developers (housing societies), private developers, builders, architects and other participants.

The same entities or equivalents exist in Montgomery County. This General Plan envisions major increases in production of social housing, thus increases in use of all the mechanisms needed:

- increased production by the Housing Opportunities Commission (the County's public housing agency), and other (and new) social housing developers,
- Increased Government subsidies, County, State and federal,
- novel sources of finance (already appearing in 2020): private foundations, "green" investment funds and others.
- Public/private partnerships between affordable housing providers and private developers which are already in 2020 increasing in frequency and scale. Major developers are designating foundations and other entities that provide more affordable share and lower profits.

Co-operation with affordable housing providers actually benefits private developers by smoothing out the booms and busts in this inherently unstable industry.

The Plan expects a healthy social housing industry to continue as more participants become more practiced in doing the parts of the development process that they do best. The Plan expects more public and private sources of funds. County taxes will rise to subsidize the housing, but private cost for rent and purchase will fall, mainly for lower and middle income residents, reducing inequality.

The County's role in initiating housing development has several implications: The County will control the location of development, giving the opportunity to break down the east-west divide and break up the pockets of poverty. Reducing high poverty places will reduce racial and social segregation. Upper income parents in the worse performing (high poverty) school districts will demand better performance. Research has shown that the presence of upper income students raises the performance of all students.

More diverse residents throughout the County will increase social capital, familiarizing the rich with both the rich cultures of minorities, and the problems they face.

Fulfilling a Vision of Complete Communities requires means of efficiently traveling among them. Fulfilling a Vision that protects the global climate requires that travel minimize release of greenhouse gases. To fulfill this dual Vision, we will shift most travel from private vehicles to public transport, bicycles and our own feet.

Increasing service can provide it all. Investing in more transit service will increase ridership as some change from driving to transit. Those riders will increase the system's revenue, thus funds for another set of service improvements, thus more riders and revenue, and on. Increased transit ridership, thus fewer cars remove an obstacle to growth in the urban centers. Urban location of business and households, and low emissions from transport better protect the Climate than either alone.

State and local taxes will rise to pay for facilities and subsidize housing, but services will increase, and the cost of housing will fall for those with low to moderate income. Cost of public transport will fall.

Sidewalks and bike lanes will accommodate more free local travel.

These changes in the distribution of costs and benefits will further reduce inequality.

The following should go into the section of the Plan on Transportation:

Shifting travel to sustainable modes requires investment in improvements to sustainable modes. Montgomery County can learn from Europe how to improve the efficiency of public transport and the experience of transit riders. Beyond increasing rail transit line service, stations, platforms, and trains can make riders feel their time and comfort are valued.

Riders can find stations easily, with highly visible, even artistic, distinctive street level signs and entrances. They enter without crowding or delay via spacious stairs, halls and escalators. Most riders will use passes, which are checked only occasionally, avoiding another source of delay. Fares are subsidized; both rich and poor benefit, reducing inequality. The encounters increase connectedness. Highly visible and convenient (glass walled) elevators encourage the disabled and parents with small children to ride. Small supermarkets, bakeries and drugstores in the station lobbies make shopping even easier without a car trip. Riders can learn to eat without littering!

Vehicles will stay up to date. International innovations in 2020 include trains with more and wider doors, without barriers between the cars, so passengers can spread out and avoid crowds; and better information signs.

Up to date buses will have level entrances for the handicapped and strollers, and good information signs. Bus stops will have electronic signs telling riders how long until the next bus arrives, and route maps, and schedules. Vehicles will range from full size double buses to minibuses that serve neighborhoods. Passes will include bus travel, and do not need to be produced before each ride.

Complete streets with wide sidewalks and bike lanes will accommodate the disabled who use motorized bicycles, wheelchairs and carts. Innovative bicycle powered vehicles will carry cargo and children.

And the ultimate limitation: Parking garages and surface parking lots hardly exist!