




## Thrive Montgomery 2050 Worksession No. 6: Design, arts and culture: adding value and building community


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## Introduction

The main topic of discussion for today's worksession and approval by the Planning Board is the draft of the revised Design, Arts and Culture chapter now called Theme # 5— Design, arts and culture: adding value and building community (ATTACHMENT 1). It lays out the issues and existing conditions related to the disconnected land use pattern at a countywide scale (auto-oriented sprawl) down to the design of neighborhoods, urban design, site design, parking, buildings and how they connect to their context. Design approaches and standards that served us well when the county was primarily growing through greenfield development do not serve as effective solutions to the challenges of infill projects and constrained sites. The revised chapter describes the goals and policies Thrive Montgomery 2050 proposes to address these issues and the ways in which these policies will further the key objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050. And it includes a set of potential measures to monitor the progress towards achieving the Plan's goals of compact, sustainable and equitable growth through good design.

Staff will present a summary of major themes of the public hearing testimony about the Public Hearing Draft Plan's recommendations related to Design, Arts and Culture.

During this worksession, staff will also brief the Planning Board on coordination between Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the county's recently released draft Climate Action Plan (CAP).

In addition, the Staff seeks the Board's approval for the revised schedule of remaining worksessions included on page 3 of this memorandum.

In order to let the Planning Board and the public know what will be discussed at each worksession, staff publishes an outline of the revised chapter/theme two weeks in advance. Therefore, today's packet includes an outline of the main topic of discussion for the February 11 worksession— **Parks and recreation for an increasingly urban and diverse community: active and social** (ATTACHMENT 2).

## **Major themes of public testimony related to design**

Comments about design, arts and culture varied widely and covered every part of our built environment—buildings, streets, parks and open spaces, public facilities and infrastructure, as well as the arts and culture related institutions and activities in the county. They also talked about the role of design in achieving sustainable growth and addressing the challenges of climate change through compact, infill development as well as infrastructure improvements such as a safe and efficient transportation network.

### **Design means different things to different people**

Several commenters requested additional elements to the design-related goals. Some asked for more explicit design-based language (form-based code e.g.) while others wanted a more robust street planting program. Some focused on historic preservation while others were concerned with building resilience and the necessity for stronger net-zero goals. There were also comments that brought up the need to rethink public spaces to make them more suitable as gathering spaces and a focus of neighborhoods.

Some commenters thought that the Design should not be a separate chapter in the draft Plan as it is a function of the private sector, not the regulatory public sector, because they believed the good design was a matter of personal preference and aesthetics, and therefore not suitable for public intervention or oversight. Or, that it should be addressed in the local area master plans, not in the general plan.

A couple of commenters also raised the financial challenge arising from increased cost ascribed to design excellence given the fiscal issues facing the County. Some of these comments were based on a misunderstanding of the draft Plan's recommendations, such as "Make design excellence a priority, even when cost saving measures are considered." (Policy 8.2.1). They believed that the Plan was prioritizing design excellence over affordability and sustainability. The Plan, however, wanted to emphasize the importance of design excellence for all budgets, not just a few prestigious buildings or facilities.

### **Need for clear, context sensitive design guidance**

Commenters generally agreed that good design is an important objective. They supported the need for design strategies to reduce the impacts of denser development including stormwater runoff, loss of natural habitat, increased imperviousness and heat island effects, loss of forest and urban tree canopy, loss of existing affordable housing, and displacement of existing vulnerable communities. Many commenters, however, felt that without stronger guidelines and area-focused entities, like review panels or design guidelines tailored to the specific location and context, many places will not get the design elements advocated for in the draft Plan. Some commenters voiced concerns that the draft Plan was focusing more on downtowns and urban neighborhoods but not considering the design needs of the suburban and rural parts of the county.

### **The importance of arts and culture for a thriving county**

Most commenters supported the draft Plan's emphasis on the importance of arts and culture for a mature, diverse and growing county. A number of them asked that art and culture should be woven into all facets of living in Montgomery County and should be considered in the development approval process, tying provision of performance space, galleries, and community spaces to the regulatory process (as a benefit point in density calculation). Other examples included opportunities for movie or community-based theatre and arts programs, music venues, or other social gathering places at the neighborhood and countywide level.

Finally, a few commenters also mentioned the relationship between culture, arts, and the programming of space and their nexus with commerce and the economy. They thought it was critical for agencies and stakeholders to work together to leverage the arts and culture related assets and funds.

### **Schedule of the remaining worksessions:**

As discussed during the last worksession, staff has revised the schedule of the remaining worksessions. This was necessitated by the difficulty of producing staff reports and related material to meet the deadlines for the Monday worksessions in addition to the regular Thursday worksessions. The revised schedule eliminates the two Monday worksessions and adds a new worksession on Thursday, March 4. The Planning Board Draft Plan is still targeted for approval by the Board on April 8, 2021, to be transmitted to the County Executive and the County Council the following week.

Thursday, 2/11/21	Worksession 7 <b>1. Parks and recreation for an increasingly urban and diverse community: active and social.</b> <b>2. Final drafts (redlined) of the Introduction, Housing, and Transportation chapters.</b>
Thursday, 2/18/21	Worksession 8 <b>Complete communities: mix of uses and forms.</b>
Thursday, 2/25/21	Worksession 9 <b>Section 3: How the ideas in this Plan can be implemented.</b> Implementation chapter. Conclusion with indicators for the three major outcomes.
Thursday 3/4/21	Worksession 10 <b>Final drafts of the remaining chapters--Compact Growth, Design, Parks, Complete Communities, Appendices.</b> Actions list as a separate document. Anything else that needs to be brought back to the Board from previous worksessions.
Thursday, 4/8/21	<b>Planning Board to approve the Planning Board Draft Plan</b> for transmittal to the County Executive and County Council

## Attachments

**ATTACHMENT 1** is the draft of **Theme #5: Design, arts and culture: adding value and building community**.

**ATTACHMENT 2** is an outline of **Theme #6: Parks and recreation for an increasingly urban and diverse community: active and social**, that will be discussed with the Planning Board on February 11, 2021.

**ATTACHMENT 3** is an updated summary table of all testimony received by December 10, 2020 updated to include staff responses to the comments related to the topics being addressed during this worksession. As we proceed through subsequent worksessions, staff will add its responses to the public comments pertaining to the topic area of each worksession.

The transcript of the November 19, 2020 public hearing can be accessed [here](#).

All written testimonies submitted by December 10, 2020 can be accessed here: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#)