

OUTLINE

Design, Arts & Culture: adding value and building community

Introductory paragraph

- Design is a consideration for all scales, from the architecture of a single building to the layout of an entire region. Thrive Montgomery 2050 considers design at various scales in different chapters.
 - Compact Growth chapter outlines our county wide approach towards directing future development.
 - Complete Communities chapter describes the desired layout of a neighborhood or a district.
 - This chapter drills further down in scale to discuss ideas related to the urban design of blocks and individual sites, architecture of public and private buildings, landscape design of plazas and public spaces and elements of street design. Together these shape our immediate built environment that influences our daily decisions and impacts our quality of life.
- Design serves two equally important purposes: functional and aesthetic.
 - Functional aspects of design dictate how structures are built and how they connect to the sidewalks, streets and spaces around them to facilitate movement, interaction, activity, etc.
 - Aesthetic aspects of design, along with arts & cultural uses, influence how streets, buildings and spaces look and feel and incorporate elements of local history and traditions to create beauty and a “sense of place.”
- Aspects of arts and culture sector reach into almost every corner of life and are one of the most visible indicators of the social values and diversity of a place.

PART 1: What is the problem / existing conditions that fall short?

- The Wedges and Corridors Plan envisioned a variety of living environments and encouraged “imaginative urban design” to avoid sterile suburban sprawl but the plan was a product of its time. Design approaches aimed at serving a range of functional objectives and aesthetic aspirations soon succumbed to emphasizing the convenience of driving and rigid separation of land uses.
 - In accommodating cars:
 - The thoughtful arrangement and design of buildings was subverted by parking, with buildings placed in the middle of large asphalt lots, or entrances and front doors obscured by driveways and garages.
 - Buildings lacked connections to streets and public spaces and were typically set back from streets rather than engaging with them.
 - Parking took up large portions of developable areas on sites, limiting space for public use, sidewalks, greenery etc.

- Streets were widened, pushing buildings further apart, which discouraged walking by making it less convenient and by eliminating a sense of enclosure and intimacy that makes pedestrians feel comfortable.
 - Elements of street design such as lighting and signage were grossly enlarged to make them legible for motorists, which put them out of scale at the ground level, making the public realm dull.
 - Public spaces were minimized or rendered useless due to competing demands with parking, stormwater management, utilities etc.
 - Buildings designed to accommodate separate single uses, while less expensive when considered in isolation, led to:
 - Structures that are inflexible for adaptive reuse, making it difficult and expensive to respond to changes in lifestyle and preferences.
 - Evident in the simultaneous problems the county faces in high levels of office vacancy and a severe shortage of multifamily housing.
 - Makes it harder to adapt buildings to remain productive amid shifts caused by technology, social change, and market preferences such as online shopping, teleworking etc.
 - Malls, office parks, and other large, single-use buildings are difficult to repurpose.
 - Shrinks the usable life span of structures, making development less sustainable.
 - Development that is overly formulaic and cookie cutter.
 - Buildings and sites lack elements that celebrate the history and culture of local communities.
- Zoning’s narrow focus on use and density makes the form and orientation of buildings to each other and to the public realm a subsidiary consideration, even though the details of site design and architecture strongly influence people’s daily decisions regarding how they travel, recreate and socialize and shapes their perception of the quality and potential of a place.
- 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.
 - Sprawling designs of buildings and parking lead to underbuilt sites that resist retrofitting and are poorly suited to repositioning, infill, and redevelopment, reducing the utility of public investment in infrastructure, parks, transit etc.
 - Typical facility design standards for public buildings, especially for schools, are too large to fit effectively on most available sites, limiting the location of new public facilities.
 - The lack of “adequately-sized” sites along with a growing student population leads to a trend towards tear-down and rebuilding of schools with more and more student capacity on existing sites.

- Over time puts more students farther from schools, leading to less walking and bicycling to schools by students.
 - Leads to longer bus rides and pick-up and drop-off trips for parents as well as longer commutes for teachers and staff.
- Our building stock is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, with residential and commercial buildings together emitting more than half of all greenhouse gas in the county.
- While our population has grown significantly diverse since the adoption of the 1964 Wedges and Corridors Plan, the county's diversity is not fully represented in its public spaces, arts and cultural institutions and opportunities to build a shared sense of community are missed.
 - While the county makes numerous direct and indirect investments in its arts and culture sector, they are not made in a strategic and holistic manner.
 - County artists and arts organizations cite the lack of affordable living, working, and sales spaces as a key challenge to their sustainability.
 - The public art field at large has been expanding to embrace a wider range of approaches, including civic and placemaking practices, but the county's public art programs are lagging in their ability to deliver such projects.
 - Cultural programming of private and public spaces is narrowly focused and inequitably distributed.

PART 2: Therefore, Thrive Montgomery 2050 proposes the following policies and actions.

- Use design-based tools to create attractive places with lasting value that encourage social interaction and reinforce a sense of place.
 - Use form-based codes, design guidelines, and other regulatory tools to ensure future developments across the county achieve the following essential principles through massing, architecture, landscape and street design:
 - Ensure that all architecture and landscape designs physically define streets and public spaces as places of shared use that engage the pedestrian and are configured to encourage social interaction.
 - Link individual architectural projects seamlessly to their surroundings irrespective of style. Civic buildings and public gathering places must be treated as important sites whose design reinforces community identity and a culture of inclusion and democracy.
 - Design buildings, streets and parking to prioritize the pedestrian scale and encourage walking and bicycling through smaller blocks, narrower streets, buffered bike lanes and sidewalks, lowest possible auto speeds and minimal surface parking, while adequately accommodating automobiles.
 - Accommodate new development with a context sensitive approach to architecture and landscape design that acknowledges neighboring structures, local climate and topography.
 - Physically integrate government and private institutions and campuses into their surrounding neighborhoods such that they welcome the general

public and support local economic development by facilitating movement and interaction of people and transfer of ideas and innovation.

- Preserve, renew and reuse existing and historic buildings, districts, and landscapes to affirm the continuity and evolution of communities, while celebrating local culture and identity.
- Create clear design standards related to the form, site layout, architecture and parking needs for “missing middle” housing types such as tiny houses, cottages, duplexes, multiplexes, and small apartment buildings; shared housing, co-housing and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) along corridors and in complete communities. Amend land use, design and zoning regulations, including the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, to remove regulatory barriers and facilitate their development.
- Promote design strategies and retrofits to make new and existing buildings more sustainable and resilient to disruption and change.
 - Encourage state-of-the-practice sustainability features such as net-zero/carbon positive buildings, biophilic design and on-site energy generation for new public buildings and large private developments on sites across the county.
 - Promote cost-effective infill and adaptive reuse design strategies to retrofit single-use commercial sites such as retail strips, malls and office parks into mixed use developments.
 - Encourage the reuse of historic buildings and existing structures through incentives to affirm the continued evolution of communities, maintain building diversity, preserve naturally occurring affordable space and retain embodied energy of structures.
 - Create new standards for public facilities that better align with infill and redevelopment strategies and acknowledge the county’s limited land supply and ambitious climate action goals.
 - Implement policies that ensure all new buildings and parking structures are adaptable to changing technologies, market preferences and able to mitigate effects of climate change over time.
- Support the arts and cultural institutions to celebrate our diversity, strengthen pride of place and make the county more attractive and interesting.
 - Create a broadly inclusive Cultural Plan that establishes a refreshed vision, sets goals, criteria, and priorities for the county’s support of the arts and culture sector and addresses the processes by which the county’s resources are allocated.
 - Improve access for artists and arts organizations to affordable living, administrative, working, and presentation spaces with a focus on economic, geographical, and cultural equity in their allocation.
 - Promote public art, cultural spaces, and cultural hubs along corridors and in complete communities.
 - Eliminate regulatory barriers to live-work spaces, home studios, galleries, and other small-scale art-making and creative businesses.
 - Enable all residents to experience public art daily by incorporating it into the design of buildings, streets, infrastructure and public spaces.

- Use new public facilities to demonstrate principles of architecture as civic art and broader cultural representation.
- Encourage private property owners, non-profit organizations, and county agencies to maximize use of public spaces through artistic and cultural programming, activation, placemaking, and updates to operating procedures. Maintain an annual calendar of events varying in scale, time and location that equitably celebrate our cultural diversity.
- Partner with agencies to strengthen data collection about county investments and better align arts-and-culture related policies with Thrive Montgomery 2050's strategic goals of social equity and economic competitiveness.

PART 3: The rationale for how these policies and actions will further the key objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050.

- Design-based tools will create attractive buildings, streets and public spaces that better meet market demand and retain greater economic value over time, making the county economically more competitive.
 - Places designed with the pedestrian in mind are more walkable and encourage more human interaction, a dynamic increasingly desired by companies across sectors to locate their offices since such places facilitate exchange of ideas and drive innovation.
 - An emphasis on designing attractive streets will better meet market demand for walkable neighborhoods and attract more workers to live in the county.
 - Well-designed places become destinations for commercial and social activity or residential communities of choice and exert a spin-off effect, increasing the value of surrounding properties and encouraging neighboring property owners to make similar improvements to match and take advantage of adjacencies.
- Providing affordable living, administrative, working, and presentation spaces for artists equitably throughout the county will showcase our diversity and help attract and retain cultural uses and arts related businesses and make them more significant economic contributors
 - Montgomery County's arts and culture sector is considerable in its scope; taken as a whole, it would be the sixth-largest employer in the county. However, access to resources for arts and cultural organizations are inequitably distributed.
 - Emerging and stabilizing arts organizations that support underserved communities often lack the funding and operational resources of their well-established counterparts.
 - While providing affordable spaces for artists and makers in areas of intensive activity typically requires subsidies, when strategically done, it can have an outsized positive effect in the long run by making such locations centers of social activity and attracting businesses and investment.
 - County statistics indicate that public funding towards arts and cultural uses provides a robust return on investment.

- In 2018, county funding towards arts and cultural uses generated over \$18 million in local and state revenue and it was estimated that annual local spending by arts-and-culture events audiences exceeded \$75 million.
 - Research shows that highly skilled workers with creative or knowledge intensive occupations are particularly sensitive to ‘quality of place’, a key component of which is an open and tolerant attitude toward different peoples, cultures, and lifestyles.
- Sustainable design strategies for new construction and retrofits will enhance the county’s environmental performance.
 - Promoting sustainability features in all new public and private buildings will help reduce the ecological footprint of new growth.
 - While the county has strong environmental standards for new construction, many existing buildings are outdated and underperform when it comes to energy consumption, dragging down our overall environmental performance.
 - Encouraging adaptive reuse of existing buildings and incentivizing cost-effective retrofits of single-use sites into mixed use developments will lower their future energy use and greenhouse gas emissions while retaining the embodied energy of existing structures.
 - More compact site standards for public facilities along with state-of-the-practice sustainability features will help achieve the county’s ambitious climate action goals by creating high performing facilities and setting aspirational standards for all new construction.
- A focus on form and adaptability, rather than use and density will provide more flexibility to respond to changing market conditions and adapt to disruptions caused by technology and climate change.
 - Designing buildings and parking to be adaptable over time will ensure their continued utility and prevent scrape-and-replace development practices.
- Public art, cultural uses and programming that showcase the county’s commitment to celebrating its diversity will create public spaces that are inclusive and encourage social interaction.
 - The Wedges & Corridors Plan lacked a focus on attracting and celebrating diversity as a central value.
 - Maximizing artistic and cultural programming in our public spaces and maintaining an annual calendar of events varying in scale, time and location will equitably celebrate our cultural diversity.
 - Promoting public art, cultural spaces, and cultural hubs along corridors and in complete communities will make these welcoming for people from different backgrounds and encourage civic dialogue and exchange.
 - Practitioners from the arts and cultural fields will provide creative tools that can share untold stories, encourage empathy, and empower creative and civic voices, fostering civic dialogue and connectedness.

- Form based design codes will serve as predictable guides for change, address community concerns over accommodating growth and illustrate hard-to-define concepts such as “character” and “compatibility.” A shift away from these kinds of vague standards will help make regulatory decisions more equitable by applying more objective criteria in evaluating development proposals and their relationship to their surroundings, i.e., clear standards governing acceptable form as opposed to amorphous claims about the “incompatibility” of different housing types.

PART 4: How will we know we are making progress?

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

- Public use space per capita
- Pedestrian traffic in downtowns and suburban activity centers
- Visitation and time spent in select urban, suburban and rural gathering places
- Number and spatial distribution of public art installations: temporary and permanent
- Number and spatial distribution of publicly funded community events such as festivals, street fairs, sporting tournaments etc.
- Number, use type, and square footage of businesses classified as cultural categories by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)
- Average rent, total square footage and spatial distribution of available art/creative/maker-space
- County budget allocated to arts and cultural agencies and programming and local spending by patrons of arts and cultural events
- Retention and growth of arts & culture related businesses
- Number and spatial distribution of cultural heritage and historic designations
- Number of buildings with performance-based energy certification
- Number of adaptively reused, retrofitted, and repositioned structures and structures designed with flexibility in future uses and/or adaptability in mind