



MCPB

Item #

Date: 02/18/2021

Thrive Montgomery 2050 Worksession No. 8: Complete Communities: mix of uses and forms

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Completed: 2/11/2021

Introduction

The main topic of discussion for today's worksession and approval by the Planning Board is the draft of the Complete Communities chapter now called "Theme #2: Complete Communities: mix of uses and forms" (ATTACHMENT 1). It lays out the issues and existing conditions related to the current disconnected land use pattern based on separation of uses that has resulted, with a few exceptions, in places that lack the mixture of uses and elements needed to achieve a vibrant community, including a compact form with diverse housing types, commercial uses, transit, and a walkable public realm.

The revised chapter proposes the idea of Complete Communities as a departure from the automobile-oriented neighborhood and single use district planning of the last several decades. It relies on a mixture of uses and diversity of housing types to create a critical mass of housing, jobs, services and amenities with a compact form of development near transit. The revised chapter also includes a set of potential measures to monitor the progress towards achieving the Plan's goals of equity, economic resilience and sustainability through Complete Communities.

Staff will present a summary of major themes of the public hearing testimony about the Public Hearing Draft Plan's recommendations related to Complete Communities.

In addition, staff will present a revised draft of the Design, Arts and Culture chapter and the Compact Growth chapter with changes (redlined) to show how staff has incorporated the Planning Board's comments on these chapters (ATTACHMENT 2).

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 25 worksession— Section 3: How the ideas in this Plan can be implemented, now called "Conclusion" (ATTACHMENT 3).

Major themes of public testimony related to Complete Communities

The idea of Complete Communities and 15-minute living received comments that ranged from enthusiastic support for Complete Communities with 15-minute living to skepticism about the feasibility of these concepts in a mostly suburban county to full rejection of the idea. Those who fully supported the idea cited housing affordability; diversity of population and incomes; more walking, biking and rolling choices; more social connections and active lifestyles; and sustainability as the major benefits of Complete Communities. Those who questioned the feasibility of or rejected the idea of Complete Communities indicated that it was neither realistic nor practical for everyone to walk or bike everywhere. For them, even places that would become Complete Communities would still rely on cars for most of their daily trips.

As mentioned in the staff report for the previous worksessions, because of the inherent overlap between the topics of the Plan's chapters, there were many comments about Complete Communities that also touched upon the role of growth, equity, housing affordability, walkability, compact growth and urbanism.

Following are the major themes that emerged from the written and verbal testimonies related to Complete Communities and 15-minute living.

More definition of Complete Communities and 15-minute living

A majority of the comments on this chapter, including many who applauded the idea of diverse and walkable places with daily services and transit nearby, asked for more information about what a Complete Community would look like and, more specifically, how it would affect their neighborhoods. Several commenters noted that these ideas were ambiguous, with no standard definition or explanation of how Complete Communities would vary in urban, suburban and rural areas. There were questions about which services would be needed for a community to be considered complete and whether it was feasible to provide these services within walking or biking distance of every residence in the county, particularly in rural areas. They asked for data on how many of the county residents currently experience 15-minute living; how many could reasonably be expected to embrace 15-minute living; and what would it take to make that happen. Some commenters further noted that it is necessary to identify the critical elements of a Complete Community, as well as the metrics that will demonstrate when a community is considered complete.

Location of Complete Communities

Several commenters also requested additional details on the locations proposed for Complete Communities, and whether Complete Communities would be located throughout the county, providing access to 15-minute living for all county residents. Some commenters requested a map that identified the urban, suburban and rural communities envisioned to become Complete Communities. Some also requested clarification on whether Complete Communities would be located in the Agricultural Reserve. A few commenters requested clarification on how areas of the county that would not be within a Complete Community would have better access to services and amenities.

Relationship between economic health and Complete Communities

Many comments also focused on the relationship between Complete Communities and the county's economic health. Specifically, commenters inquired if jobs would be located within Complete Communities and questioned if Complete Communities could support viable commercial uses, small businesses and enough employment for residents to be able to reach them by walking or

biking. They also questioned the Plan's premise that producing more diverse and affordable housing in walkable Complete Communities would attract businesses bringing new jobs to the area.

Funding and implementation of Complete Communities

Several commenters questioned how Complete Communities will be implemented. They wondered how the county would be able to fund additional local schools, parks and recreation facilities, libraries, community centers and other services and infrastructure enhancements that would be needed to support Complete Communities, especially when transforming existing suburban developments into walkable Complete Communities. Some questioned the county's ability to generate enough revenue to fund the Plan's recommendations given the slow economic growth of the past few years and the challenges of recovering from the impacts of the pandemic for many years to come.

Complete Communities and equity

Some commenters who supported the idea of Complete Communities indicated that the diversity of existing communities and neighborhoods must be considered in the concept of Complete Communities. They believe that the Plan should emphasize that no community can be considered complete unless it is racially and economically diverse.

Attachments

ATTACHMENT 1 is the draft of Theme #2: Complete Communities: mix of uses and forms.

ATTACHMENT 2 is revised draft of Design, Arts and Culture chapter and the Compact Growth chapter with changes (redlined) to incorporate the Planning Board's comments on these chapters.

ATTACHMENT 3 is an outline of Section 3: How the ideas in this Plan can be implemented, now called "Conclusion", that will be discussed with the Planning Board on February 25, 2021.

ATTACHMENT 4 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](#)