



## Attainable Housing Strategies – Update Briefing

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### Description

The Montgomery County Council directed Montgomery Planning staff on March 4, 2021 to review and study housing options in the county. In order to explore these housing options, Montgomery Planning launched [Attainable Housing Strategies \(AHS\)](#), an initiative that the Planning Department is overseeing that will evaluate and potentially refine various proposals to spur the development of more diverse types of housing, including [Missing Middle Housing](#) in Montgomery County. In this briefing, planning staff will provide the Board with an overview of the AHS initiative and an update on the latest project status.

### Summary

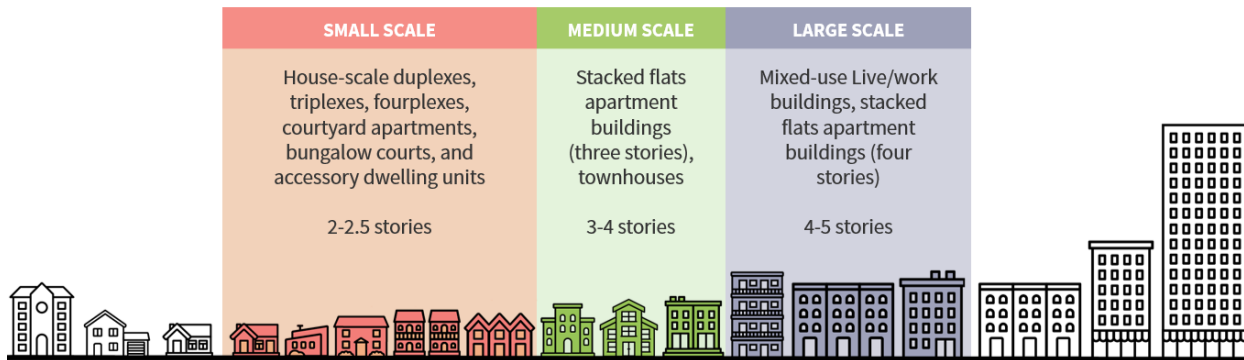
The Attainable Housing Strategies initiative aims to identify viable options for existing and new county residents to find homes at the right sizes, locations, and price points for their needs. Through this initiative we hope to expand homeownership opportunities for the county’s diverse populations. We are overseeing this initiative through a planning process that will consider various policy options to spur the development of more diverse types of housing, including Missing Middle Housing, in Montgomery County.

Attainable housing is unsubsidized market-rate housing that is appropriate and suitable for the households that live here. Implicit in this concept of attainability is the idea that a range of housing options (type, size, tenure, cost and location) exists in the local market for a range of household incomes and preferences. As noted in the recent [Montgomery County Housing Needs Assessment](#), Montgomery County residents have a wide range of housing needs, with size, transit access, price, and other factors playing a role. Yet almost half of the homes in Montgomery County right now are single-family houses—great for many residents, but not attainable or even desirable for everyone. Our county hasn’t been able to keep up with diversifying housing demand, and rising prices may drive some residents away entirely.

It also helps Montgomery County grow its housing supply even where space is a concern—a critical consideration as we anticipate population growth in the coming decades. Building Attainable Housing will require us to reassess the county’s longstanding pattern of exclusively single-family neighborhoods and our ability to densify our corridors. This will include reviewing existing single-family zone standards, including the usable area, size, setbacks, height, density, and parking requirements, as well as the process for development review and approval. We will also be looking at creating guidance on how to incorporate more housing types into master plans, and potential methods to encourage more housing types to be built in Montgomery County.

## Definition and Scale

### Attainable Housing Strategies Spectrum for a Range of Housing Types and Scales



Attainable Housing is a broader umbrella term we are using that includes both house-scale Missing Middle, as well as a denser, larger-scale housing product that we envision helping to densify our transit corridors.

The crux of what we are considering relates to scale. In the graphic above, you can see three housing scales: small, medium, and large. On either end of the attainable housing spectrum, you find structures that are similar to those just beyond the spectrum. For small scale, these include traditional “missing middle” types, which are house-scale and include housing products like duplexes and other structures that are similar in scale to the single-family homes to the left. Likewise, on the right, the large scale looks very similar to some structures that are outside the Attainable Housing spectrum. The difference being that those outside the spectrum are large four-story townhouses, whereas the those classified as large-scale attainable housing types, are stacked flats, with two-or-three units in each column.

Locationally, these scales fit in different neighborhood contexts in Montgomery County. The small-scale housing typologies that are envisioned as house-scale, are ideal for the interior of single-family neighborhoods at heights of 2-2.5 stories. The medium- to large-scale housing typologies are envisioned to help us densify our transit corridors, at 3-5 stories in height.

### Countywide Housing/Missing Middle Initiatives

The Attainable Housing Strategies initiative is part of an ongoing, extensive, multi-year effort by the county and Planning Department to address the housing supply crisis in Montgomery County. This includes several studies listed below, as well as master plans, bills and zoning text amendments that were targeted in their evaluation and application to specific housing elements.

Attainable Housing Strategies also represents the county’s first opportunity to implement elements of Thrive Montgomery 2050. In April, the Planning Board approved its draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050, the county’s most comprehensive update to our general plan in more than 50 years. It establishes the county’s vision for our future. Thrive Montgomery 2050 aims to ensure that exclusively single-family zoning is not a barrier to development in many of our single-family neighborhoods. Thrive includes policies and actions that support the production of different types of housing, including in existing single-family zones.

- **Countywide Housing Initiatives**
  - Housing Studies
    - [Rental Housing Study \(2017\)](#)
    - [Housing for Older Adults Study \(2018\)](#)
    - [Missing Middle Housing Study \(2018\)](#)
    - [Housing Needs Assessment \(2020\)](#)
    - [Preservation of Affordable Housing Study \(2020\)](#)
    - [Residential Development Capacity Analysis \(2021\)](#)
  - MPDU Update (2018)
  - Accessory Dwelling Unit ZTA 19-01 (2019)
  - COG Housing Targets (2019)
  - [Growth and Infrastructure Policy \(2020\)](#)
  - WMATA PILOT Program (2020)
  - HOC Production Fund (2021)
  - [Thrive Montgomery 2050 \(2021\)](#)
  
- **Countywide Missing Middle Initiatives**
  - [Missing Middle Housing Study \(2018\)](#)
  - Master Plans
    - [Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan \(2018\)](#)
    - [Forest Glen Montgomery Hills Sector Plan \(2019\)](#)
    - [Silver Spring Downtown & Adjacent Communities \(ongoing\)](#)
      - [Mini Missing Middle Market Study for Silver Spring \(2021\)](#)
  - [Thrive Montgomery 2050 \(2021\)](#)
  - [Councilmember Jawando's ZTA 20-07 \(2020\)](#)
  - [Councilmember Riemer's Draft ZTA \(not introduced\)](#)

## Equity

At the root of the AHS initiative is an effort to make our communities more equitable and more inclusive by countering the historical discriminatory aspects of zoning. Zoning determines what can be built where and by limiting housing options, we have limited who has access to different neighborhoods, which has led to neighborhoods that are homogeneous racially, ethnically, and economically.

Discriminatory lending practices and restrictive covenants have also led to deep disparities in wealth and homeownership. And making homeownership more attainable – with more equitable, mixed-income neighborhoods – is one way that we can work to reverse these historical inequities.

Given the entrenched development patterns in suburban counties like Montgomery County, this is not an easy task. It requires us to reassess the county's longstanding development pattern of exclusively single-family neighborhoods.

## Engagement

The Attainable Housing Strategies initiative has planned its major milestones and activities around gathering feedback from the community and other stakeholders with the goal of reaching as many members of the community as possible. An important part of guiding public education on the topic, building awareness, and garnering support involves developing community engagement tools. Staff is

using several tools with the aim of reaching the largest audience possible with special attention paid to coordinating with other ongoing initiatives to remove redundancy and to create a coordinated, comprehensive messaging about Attainable Housing.

- **Project Webpage:** A [project website](#) was created to provide transparency, accessibility and information to users wanting to engage with content on AHS. The webpage includes easy ways to contact staff, submit feedback and request meetings. It also includes links to presentations and recordings of community engagement and advisory team meetings.
- **Housing Equity Advisory Team (HEAT):** As part of the AHS initiative, a group of external stakeholders has been convened to assess various aspects of AHS. The HEAT consists of stakeholders that approach this issue from different perspectives. It includes developers (both for-profit and non-profit), a realtor, civic activists, housing advocates, an economist and someone from the banking industry. While the HEAT will not be asked to come to a consensus or to make recommendations to the Planning Board, the members are helping form staff's recommendations by providing an understanding of their different perspectives and knowledge about housing policy. The HEAT has met three times at this point, with one final meeting scheduled for May 19.
- **Public Meetings:** Planning staff has hosted two of three virtual public meetings held over Microsoft Teams to share the project scope and completed project milestones, conduct small group discussions in breakout rooms, and answer questions from community members. Through these meetings, planning staff also hopes to understand the community's vision for incorporating more Attainable Housing throughout the county. The last community meeting is scheduled for June 2.
- **Stakeholder Conversations:** Planning staff has held other targeted stakeholder meetings with a presentation and Q&A. Targeted stakeholder meetings include the Montgomery County Civic Federation, Edgemoor Community Association, NAIOP, Bethesda IAC, and Montgomery County Mayors.
- **Office Hours:** Staff has held two of three recurring virtual "office hours," offering community members personalized opportunities to meet with planning staff to provide their feedback and ask their questions about the AHS initiative. The final office hours session will be held on June 3.
- **Housing eLetter:** As part of AHS, a housing eLetter was created to help share project updates and milestones.
- **Educational Materials:** Staff from the Communications Division are currently finalizing a four-pager brochure that helps clarify key terms and content. The materials will be translated into Spanish.
- **Social media campaign:** Similar to the "Housing Day" hosted last year on Twitter for Thrive Montgomery 2050, there will be a planned social campaign related to the initiative on June 14 to raise awareness and garner feedback on staff recommendations.

- **#MyMoCoHome:** The [#MyMoCoHome](#) campaign is crowdsourcing stories from people throughout Montgomery County about their search for and struggles with finding appropriately sized and priced housing for themselves and their families. #MyMoCoHome stories will be used to inform the Attainable Housing Strategies initiative. We have lots of data and planning best practices, but we want to better understand the human element of Montgomery County residents as many struggle with finding appropriate housing in an expensive market like Montgomery County.



### Project Timeline

Major Events	
<b>24-Mar</b>	HEAT Meeting #1
<b>29-Mar</b>	Community Meeting #1
<b>9-Apr</b>	Virtual Office Hours
<b>14-Apr</b>	HEAT Meeting #2
<b>21-Apr</b>	Community Meeting #2
<b>27-Apr</b>	Virtual Office Hours
<b>28-Apr</b>	HEAT Meeting #3
<b>13-May</b>	Planning Board Update Briefing
<b>19-May</b>	HEAT Meeting #4
<b>2-Jun</b>	Community Meeting #3
<b>3-Jun</b>	Virtual Office Hours
<b>14-Jun</b>	Social Media Day (rescheduled from May 3)
<b>24-Jun</b>	Planning Board Public Hearing and Work Session
<b>1-Jul</b>	Planning Board Work Session #2 (if nec.)
<b>8-Jul</b>	Transmit Recommendations to Council

### Attachments

- 1.) Letter from the County Council



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL**  
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

Casey Anderson, Chair  
Montgomery County Planning Board  
Gwen Wright, Director  
Montgomery County Planning Department  
2425 Reedie Drive, 14th Floor  
Wheaton, MD 20902

March 4, 2021

Dear Chair Anderson and Director Wright:

On behalf of the Council, we write to request that the Planning Board consider zoning reforms that would allow greater opportunities for Missing Middle housing in Montgomery County, provide opportunity for public input, and transmit to us a Zoning Text Amendment with your recommendations. This process was suggested by PHED Chair Riemer in the attached memo to colleagues and a majority of Councilmembers have agreed. Councilmember Riemer attached a draft ZTA and fact sheet for your consideration, and we hope you will consider the concepts in ZTA 20-07, introduced by Councilmember Jawando.

If we can receive your recommendations shortly after we receive the Thrive 2050 plan, we could hear from the community and complete our work by the end of the year.

We look forward to engaging in this important discussion.

Regards,

Handwritten signature of Tom Hucker in black ink.

Tom Hucker  
Council President

Handwritten signature of Hans Riemer in black ink.

Hans Riemer  
Chair  
Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee