




OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich  
*County Executive*

**MEMORANDUM**

June 10, 2021

TO: Tom Hucker, Council President

FROM: Marc Elrich, County Executive 

SUBJECT: County Executive's Comments on Thrive Montgomery 2050 amendment to the General Plan

Pursuant to Sec. 33A-7 of the Montgomery County Code, here are my comments on Thrive Montgomery 2050 amendment to the General Plan.<sup>1</sup>

**I. INTRODUCTION— Montgomery County residents are confused and inadequately informed about Thrive Montgomery 2050 and know little, if anything, about the Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative’s complicated rezoning proposals that will make sweeping changes to their neighborhoods. I request that the Council separate the two projects and ask the Planning Board to stop work on elaborate rezoning proposals that would implement Thrive Montgomery before the plan has even been approved.**

The Executive objected to the county’s moving forward with Thrive Montgomery 2050 during an historic pandemic that overwhelmed government and residents with unceasing concerns about working and schooling while confined to home and experiencing economic hardship, business dislocations, and potential illness, and even death. These have not been circumstances in which our residents have had time to consider the first revision of the General Plan in 28 years, one that will shape the county’s future development over the next 30 years.

Similarly, residents certainly are not able to understand and participate simultaneously in esoteric, elaborate rezoning proposals through an expedited, opaque Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative (AHSI) with an insider’s group called the Housing Equity Advisory Team (HEAT), as described in detail below. The rezoning proposals are moving ahead even though the Thrive Montgomery 2050 principles that would justify these proposals have not yet been enacted or even considered by the County Council. In

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<sup>1</sup> I am also attaching OMB’s request, pursuant to Sec. 33A-7, for an Extension of Time for filing the Financial Impact Statement, as well as updating the Council president that the Executive branch will submit further technical comments from county agencies, prior to the Council’s work sessions.

the meantime, hundreds of thousands of county homeowners have absolutely no idea what AHSI is, or what is about to happen to their properties in the next few months.

AHSI has already developed complex proposals to rezone large swaths of the entire county with different densities and housing types, and different rules for certain housing types for different locations. The new zoning proposals were presented for the first time on May 18 to HEAT.<sup>2</sup>

The Planning Department held four meetings with HEAT, and three meetings with the Community. HEAT's fourteen members<sup>3</sup> were selected by the Planning Department to advise Planning on the AHSI. It appears that there was no public process or criteria for the selection. The names of the members are available in the meeting videos and in the PowerPoint for the new zoning proposal. There are no biographies, although the Planning Department and the members have mentioned generally HEAT members' occupations.<sup>4</sup> Videos of the meetings are posted online, and as of Meeting #3, the general public could "attend" the meeting by sending a request to Planning beforehand. Participation was limited to sending in questions. Planning has also included the Chat discussions in most of the videos. Planning posted its written presentations, including the zoning proposal, with the video of the meeting.

The virtual Community meetings were accessed by signing up. Residents were able to speak directly to the Planning Staff and to each other. Planning didn't share its rezoning proposals directly with the community until the June 2<sup>nd</sup> Community meeting.<sup>5</sup> There were, and are, virtual "Office Hours" where residents can ask questions.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, attendance at, and viewing of these virtual meetings has not been robust.

The process allowed the HEAT members to have direct access to Planning Staff for the drafting of the zoning proposals and were asked their opinions on important decisions that were part of the Thrive review - for example, whether the new zoning rules would extend a half-mile or one mile from transit. It is

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<sup>2</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/HEAT-Meeting-4.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The members of HEAT are Dave Ager, Liz Brent, Karen Cordry, Amanda Farber, David Flanagan, Tracy Grisez, Ryan Hardy, Bill Kirwin, Gerrit Knapp, Cary Lamari, Jane Lyons, Damon Orobona, Sarah Reddinger, and Xiaochen Zhang.

<sup>4</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/housing/attainable-housing-strategies-initiative/housing-equity-advisory-team/>

Here's how the Planning department described HEAT:

As part of the [Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative](#), we created an external advisory team called the Housing Equity Advisory Team, or HEAT. The HEAT consists of county stakeholders that approach this issue from different perspectives. It includes developers (both for-profit and non-profit), a realtor, civic activists, housing activists, an economist and someone from the banking industry.

<sup>5</sup> By then the proposals had already had some revisions, according to HEAT members.

<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that Planning staff has worked very hard to reach as many members of the community as possible. In fact, they are continuing to engage in community outreach through meetings and social media. The problem is that the outreach for AHSI only started at the beginning of March. During this time, communities were focused on understanding Thrive with the goal of participating at the County Council's Public Hearings on June 17 and 29. Residents have also been dealing with the unrolling of the vaccinations and the ever-changing school policies with regard to reopening this spring. As a result, AHSI has been under the radar.

important to note that some HEAT members are developers and real estate professionals who may benefit from the changes in the zoning.

In the meantime, there were different community participants at each of the sessions, and they did not receive the zonings proposals until more than two weeks after HEAT members had received them. Thus the process favored developers and supporters of the rezoning who successfully impacted the legislative recommendations. Despite their best efforts, Planning Staff was unable to achieve the broad community outreach that is necessary to allow informed input from a broad group of community stakeholders. The Planning Staff recommendations will be presented to the Planning Board in two weeks—and while Planning Staff continues to pursue other kinds of public outreach, the AHSI has so far accommodated insiders over the general public at a crucial point in the process.

**I request that the Council separate the two projects and ask the Planning Board to stop work on proposals that would implement Thrive Montgomery before the plan has even been approved.**

Once the General Plan is enacted after receiving a full vetting that a thirty-year plan deserves, the AHSI can be considered along with other strategies necessary to move the county forward. The parallel courses of the General Plan and the AHSI are not only confusing but suggest a predetermined outcome before the public has even been able to offer testimony about the Thrive plan. The situation is compounded by the tight and overlapping time frames for review of these two major land use proposals, with the Planning Board's review of the Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative sandwiched between the Council's two public hearing dates on Thrive.

**II. THRIVE MONTGOMERY SHOULD ADDRESS THE COUNTY'S DYSFUNCTIONAL SYSTEM FOR DEVELOPMENT REVIEW.**

The General Plan, until now referred to as the Wedges and Corridors Plan, is an important document that has guided the county's physical development since 1964.<sup>7</sup> Its goal is to frame the county's built future and to embrace new, achievable concepts—bold ideas—that will better serve the county and the people who live here. These ideas may take a long time to reach fruition, but it is important that they be included: food for thought for our future.

Two bold ideas that came out of Wedges and Corridors and its amendments are the MPDU program—that originated in Montgomery County—and the Agricultural Reserve, which was an idea long before it became a reality. While both the 1964 General Plan and the 1969 Amendment<sup>8</sup> supported the preservation of farmland, the Agricultural Reserve was not created until 1980.<sup>9</sup>

**Thrive Montgomery should continue the tradition of bold, forward-looking ideas by including a recommendation for the county to study merging all functions of the development approval and permitting process under one agency.**

The current system for development review is dysfunctional. The Executive Advisory Group's report, "An Economic Roadmap to Recovery and Long-Term Success", states, "The combination of a unique structure for real estate projects including an independent planning function and a separate County

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<sup>7</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/master-plan-list/general-plans/wedges-corridors-general-plan-1964/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/master-plan-list/general-plans/updated-general-plan-1969/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PreservationAgricultureRuralOpenSpaceFunctionalMasterPlan1980ocr300.pdf>

permitting process has created inefficiencies and frustrations.”<sup>10</sup> Thrive should recommend that this “unique structure” be re-examined. It is off-putting to developers considering working in the County and to residents who must become mired in the complexities in order to have a voice. Fixing the approval and permitting process is essential. A more normative approval and permitting system will attract more developers, enhance competition, and lead to better community participation.

Thrive does not address these issues. Instead, it recommends adding workarounds to avoid the system entirely. **Planning’s proposal for by-right infill development relies on cookie cutter Pattern books to be used in every circumstance in every part of the county with no community input. It is a clumsy idea for a county of our size and maturity, seemingly intended to circumvent a development approval system badly in need of change.** We should find a better way, by adding reform of the development system to our policy goals for the next 30 years.

### **III. THE GENERAL PLAN MUST INCLUDE SUBSTANTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE, AND EQUITY THAT WILL BUILD ON THE COUNTY’S SUCCESSES AND ADDRESS ITS CHALLENGES.**

The Planning Board draft focuses too much on national and international planning trends for Missing Middle Housing (MMH) and 15-minute living which is for cities. While it has been adopted by the Mayor of Paris, it isn’t suitable for a county encompassing 507 square miles. In fact, it glosses over the most pressing land use needs of Montgomery County over the next 30 years.<sup>11</sup> The draft presents many salient facts about the county—the lack of job growth over the last 10 years, the lack of diversity in some parts of the county, and the real harms from climate change that have already begun. But instead of recommending a comprehensive, fine-grained plan with a range of land use options, the Planning Board advocates MMH and Complete Communities as a one-size-fits-all plan for 32 activity centers and 11 corridors throughout the county.

Unfortunately, the county will not solve its economic development, environmental resilience, and Equity issues simply by rezoning most of the county’s residential zones—we tried that by rezoning our commercial areas with CR zones, with little success. Retrofitting with infill housing is very complex. Infill development must address not only the needs of new residents but also the needs of the existing community, environmental impacts, and potential displacement and gentrification. These complex planning issues are best done through small, context-sensitive plans, not through county-wide form based zoning with Pattern books. Washington, D.C.--with many of the same concerns—is beginning to use Small Area Planning (SAP) to achieve its goals.<sup>12</sup> We should, too.

**A. Economic Development: The 1964 Wedges and Corridors Plan states that “Already urbanized areas should be encouraged to develop to their fullest capacity.”<sup>8</sup> The county should affirm this recommendation and prioritize economic development that will bring jobs to our large urban centers like White Flint and Silver Spring.**

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OPI/Resources/Files/2020/EAG\\_Roadmap\\_11-2020.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OPI/Resources/Files/2020/EAG_Roadmap_11-2020.pdf), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> The draft glosses over the county’s land use needs in two ways: 1) the narrative is much broader than the recommendations; and 2) even where there are recommendations, many of them are vague and generic, almost an aside to the main topic of urbanizing the county through Complete Communities.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/local-opinions/mary-cheh-gentrification-dc-comprehensive-plan/2021/03/11/c0f1d58a-802f-11eb-ac37-4383f7709abe\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/local-opinions/mary-cheh-gentrification-dc-comprehensive-plan/2021/03/11/c0f1d58a-802f-11eb-ac37-4383f7709abe_story.html)

These urban centers are the county's economic engine. The county's first priority must be to bring jobs that will lead to the completion and revitalization of our large centers where we have high-quality transit. Thrive's recommendations to spread our limited CIP funds over 32 centers of activity and 11 corridors is contrary to what should be the #1 priority.

That's why I have proposed, and this Council has supported, a pandemic center in White Flint. And this is just a start. Recent reports by the Planning Department confirm this, raising red flags about White Flint<sup>13</sup> and Silver Spring.<sup>14</sup>

**1. Low levels of job growth in Montgomery County are presenting the principal challenge to housing projects moving forward in White Flint.**

The Planning Department's excellent study, *Advancing the Pike District*, paints a picture of what needs to happen in White Flint. It has staging capacity under the White Flint Sector Plan and there are large undeveloped parcels that could develop quickly if market conditions change. The report, however, makes clear that one of the principal reasons that White Flint development is stalled is the lack of job growth that has depressed the formation of new households. "Developers interviewed cited the low levels of job growth, the resulting slow pace of household formation and reduced demand for new apartments in the Pike District, as the principal challenges limiting their ability to advance new projects." p. 11

**2. Silver Spring Downtown, not the Adjacent Communities, needs the county's full attention.**

In preparation for the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Master Plan, Planning Staff with the help of the consultant Partners for Economic Solutions (PES) prepared a market study for the downtown Silver Spring retail and office market. The findings of the study are attention-grabbing:

- a. Office: "Currently, 18 percent of office space in downtown Silver Spring is vacant, sharply up since Discovery Communication's decision to relocate...." At the average pace of absorption between 2010 and 2020, even though 2018 was a very good year, it would take 53 years for office vacancy to decline to 9%.
- b. Retail: "PES estimates that 11% of retail space is vacant and that at the average pace of a absorption from 2017 to 2019 it could take 7 to 8 years for vacancy to fall to a healthier 5 per cent level."

The consultants recommended that the County provide incentives, an active recruitment of tenants, and a focused marketing and management plan. They also predicted that some offices would be converted to residences.

These concerns must be addressed as soon as possible, while also pressing forward with White Oak, Wheaton, and the redevelopment of office parks. Bethesda, too, must have the resources to stay competitive. We must focus on job growth in our large centers with high quality transit and not disperse employment throughout the county.

**B. Environmental Resilience— The absence of *direct* recommendations related to environmental resilience is glaring. A new chapter, drawing on the substantive staff**

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<sup>13</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/communities/midcounty/white-flint/advancing-the-pike-district/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Development-Trends-Report\\_FINAL\\_HR.pdf](https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Development-Trends-Report_FINAL_HR.pdf)

**recommendations in the *Healthy and Sustainable Solutions* chapter in the Public Hearing Draft, along with DEP recommendations, should be included in the General Plan.**

- 1. While environmental issues such as energy efficient buildings, modern/enhanced stormwater management and others are mentioned throughout the draft, they are mostly *implied* as opposed to being *explicit*. Similarly, most of the environmental recommendations are *indirect* and flow from the thrust of the draft - “urbanism,” compact development, infill, complete communities. The Planning Board draft appears to assume that urbanism by itself is sufficient to address our environmental challenges. It is not.**

There may be significant environmental benefits associated with urbanism, such as shorter and fewer vehicle trips, although achieving this result may be more difficult in a large county, as opposed to a city. However, the plan must include actions that are restorative and regenerative as opposed to simply doing less harm by “minimizing the negative externalities associated with the development of land and intensification of its uses...”<sup>15</sup>

The General Plan should include substantive and *direct* actions to require state-of-the-art energy efficiency in new buildings, and modern/enhanced stormwater management--**including recommendations to address the repeated concentration of stormwater management waivers in certain areas of the county.**

The plan should also include substantive and *direct* actions that increase green space, forested area, and tree canopy; support regenerative agriculture; enhance pollination and biodiversity; facilitate distributed energy; battery storage and grid modernization; and better facilitate composting/food waste recovery and other circular economy solutions.

- 2. Montgomery County is already experiencing the impacts from climate change. These will only get worse. The General Plan should include specific recommendations related to enhancing resilience.**

There should be explicit actions to address supply chain and utility service disruptions such as the creation of resilience hubs, innovative food security strategies such as more widespread community gardens and “edible forests” and import-substitution strategies to build greater economic self-sufficiency.

- 3. The county must reaffirm its unconditional support for the Agricultural Reserve and reject the Planning Board’s attempts to weaken the Reserve by no longer supporting farming as the preferred use in the Reserve.**

The Planning Board draft recommends that the county “...manage the areas designated within the footprint [of the Reserve] for a rural pattern of development for the benefit of the entire county.” The draft retreats from the support of farming as the preferred use in the Reserve, instead supporting the economic viability of farming and policies to “facilitate a broad range of outdoor recreation and tourism...” p. 20

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<sup>15</sup> Planning Board draft, p. 132.

The General Plan must reaffirm the county's commitment to the Agricultural Reserve, and to the 1980 Preservation of Agriculture and Rural Open Space, Functional Master Plan as it did in the 1993 General Plan Refinement.<sup>16</sup>

**C. Equity—The Planning Board should have paused the Plan when it learned through its own housing study for the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Master Plan that the MMH housing it was proposing was not affordable to Equity groups in the very locations where racial and income diversity were desired. The high cost and high profits of the new housing<sup>17</sup> raise the specter of displacement and gentrification in Wheaton, Silver Spring, and other communities. Thrive must include safeguards against these unintended consequences, as well as many more housing strategies that right now are no more than a line on a page in the Planning Board draft. At a minimum, these strategies should be given equal weight with market rate housing. Finally, new housing should be located near high-quality transit, with the first priority being housing for those with the greatest need.**

- 1. The Planning Board errs by focusing on the housing type as the Equity solution, rather than the housing cost.**

The Planning Board's type is unmoored from the price—the affordability--of the housing type. This is because the Planning Board draft's recommendations for MMH were made before the Planning Board had any sense of the relative cost of the new housing types, or their feasibility. But now we do.

**The Planning Department's Silver Spring Missing Middle Housing Study found that no MMH types were feasible in downtown Silver Spring except for dense and moderate townhouses that cost \$715,000 and \$855,000, respectively. Similarly, an EYA-built 1500sf triplex on an R-60 lot in the Town of Chevy Chase, would, according to EYA, cost \$875,000!<sup>18</sup>**

Contrast this to the Planning Board draft's graph of median incomes—Blacks and African Americans and Hispanics have a median income ranging from \$72,000-\$76,000.<sup>19</sup> That income is enough to purchase a home costing \$300,000. Clearly, the county must do more than MMH/Attainable Housing in order to assure Equity in housing.

- 2. The Planning Department was supposed to define Attainable Housing through the AHSI, but so far there is no clear definition. This definition is essential, as is an understanding of the levels of income that will be needed to purchase new market rate housing.**

Right now, there is a complete disconnect between the asserted objective and the reality of who could purchase the new housing.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/GeneralPlanRefinement1993ocr.pdf>, p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> See EYA presentation cited in footnote 19.

<sup>18</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FMao-BHI69m21Xla502LgiNWigHYcDhS/view>

<sup>19</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Thrive-Planning-Board-Draft-web.pdf>, p. 14.

3. **Here are multiple, interlocking strategies to make the necessary connections between objectives and costs, and achieve Equity in housing, defined as “the integration of neighborhoods by race and income,”<sup>20</sup> with priority for those with the greatest need:**
  - a. **Preserve Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH)** as a stated goal for all Plans, as discussed in the Planning Board Preservation of Affordable Housing Study of 2020<sup>21</sup> and the Planning Board Thrive Public Hearing Draft of October 2020.<sup>22</sup> Without effective preservation, the Study predicts that the county will lose between 7,000 and 11,000 housing of 25,900 existing units by 2030. As part of preservation, **the county should discourage teardowns.**
  - b. **Establish a Policy of No Net Loss of market and restricted affordable housing in any redevelopment — ensuring equal numbers and sizes of affordable units, rather than the Planning Board draft language of “refine regulatory tools and financial incentives...without erecting disincentives for the construction of additional units.”<sup>23</sup>**
    - i. In order to minimize displacement of people of color and lower income households, the General Plan must state a clear policy objective, as was included in the Public Hearing Draft as part of Goal 5.5.
    - ii. Examples of workable approaches include the Halpine View property in the Veirs Mill Corridor Master Plan<sup>24</sup> and Fairfax County’s endorsement of a Preservation and No Net Loss Program in April 2021 for inclusion in its Consolidated Plan.
  - c. **Adopt policies for Rent Stabilization.** This tool of land use planning was recommended in the Affordable Housing Preservation Study, p. 16, and identified as a need in the Planning Board Thrive Public Hearing Draft Goal 5.5, as a way to maintain mixed income communities and minimizing displacement.
  - d. **Modify the MPDU policy to increase the numbers and level of affordability of units.** Increasing the numbers of MPDUs required is consistent with the Public Hearing Draft Goal 5.3 and the Planning Board’s 2020 Housing Needs Assessment. In addition, the Council of Governments (COG) Housing Goals define the County’s need for at least 25% and as much as 50% of new units made affordable at lower income; these goals cannot depend on public subsidy alone. The Planning Board Draft language does not establish a goal of increasing MPDUs, recommending only that the county “calibrate the applicability of the MPDU program ... to provide .... units appropriate for income levels ranging from deeply affordable to workforce.” This is not enough.
  - e. **Revise and strengthen the Planning Board draft’s statement with respect to housing dedicated to special needs populations across all communities, including people**

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.

<sup>21</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/200914-Montgomery-County-Preservation-Study.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Public-Hearing-Draft-Plan-Thrive-Montgomery-2050-final-10-5.pdf>

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<sup>24</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Veirs-Mill-Corridor-Master-Plan-Approved-and-Adopted-WEB.pdf>, p. 101



**transitioning from homelessness, those with disabilities, and the elderly.** The draft states the goal of integrating these populations into attainable housing; the goal must be to integrate these populations into suitable housing of any kind, including housing for limited incomes.

- f. **Use SAP—Small Area Planning**—in our mature communities near transit to assure that we minimize the unintended consequences of new development—displacement and gentrification caused by loss of affordable housing.
- g. **Identify suitable tracts of land for development throughout the county**, as was done in the Centers and Boulevards Study, 2006.<sup>25</sup> Identifying larger parcels—3 to 5 acres—would allow excellent planned development with economies of scale.

**IV. Transportation-- The Public Hearing draft's Goal 7.1 recommended that growth be focused on infill development and redevelopment concentrated around rail and BRT, but the Planning Board removed the transit underpinning. The General Plan should return to the Public Hearing draft's recommendation.**

**A. The Planning Board's recommendation to designate communities with limited public transit for urbanization with MMH is a new form of sprawl.**

The Public Hearing draft recommended that Complete Communities with infill development be located around rail and BRT in Goal 7.1. The Planning Board, however, removed the transit element.<sup>26</sup> The current draft recommends MMH and Complete Communities in 32 centers of activity and 11 corridors dispersed throughout the county, including some centers served by only infrequent bus service.<sup>27</sup> By adding remote centers with inadequate transit located in areas not designated for intense growth,<sup>28</sup> the Planning Board encourages more driving with more Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMTs). The General Plan should return to the recommendation for transit in the Public Hearing draft.

**B. The Planning Board draft needs to establish a narrative to explain how the county will transition in the next 30 years from its current level of auto use to biking, rolling, and walking either as independent trips or as a means of getting to transit.**

In these uncertain times, the Transportation chapter envisions that Montgomery County will be able to add infrastructure for biking, rolling, and walking that will encourage the use of transit, thus allowing a reduction of the current number of car lanes and the narrowing of the streets in our centers of activity to increase walkability. I welcome that outcome, but the draft plan simply jumps from the present to the Plan's desired outcome, without explaining interim steps. That needs to be done.

**C. I support the Planning Board draft's recommendation that no more highways be built and would add the recommendation to remove M-83 from the Master Plan of Highways.**

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<sup>25</sup> [http://montgomeryplanning.org/strategic\\_planning/centers/Framework\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://montgomeryplanning.org/strategic_planning/centers/Framework_Report_Final.pdf) Executive Staff has not been able to find a copy of the final report, or the list of properties that the report identified.

<sup>26</sup> Comments of Chair Casey Anderson at meeting with Montgomery for All members on March 25, 2021.

Montgomery for All is an organization that supports Thrive, created by Jane Lyons of Coalition for Smarter Growth.

<sup>27</sup> See the list of centers on page 31 of the Planning Board draft.

<sup>28</sup> See the Growth Areas in the schematic map on p. 31 of the Planning Board draft.

**V. Parks—This new chapter<sup>29</sup> recommends that urban parks receive priority without analyzing how this recommendation squares with the 2017 Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan.<sup>30</sup> The General Plan should contain a recommendation that the Planning Board shall develop criteria for balancing the competing park needs in the urban areas and surrounding neighborhoods.**

- A. The Planning Board draft should be revised to include a broader discussion and understanding of general park needs, not just urban parks. That discussion should include a recommendation that Parks establish and follow objective criteria for park selection.**

The Planning Board draft has no discussion of the 2017 PROs Plan and relies on the 2018 Energizing Public Spaces Functional Master Plan (EPS) as the policy basis for its recommendations. The PROS plan establishes a hierarchy of park needs based on resident surveys. In 2017 “residents ranked trails, natural space, wildlife habitat, and nature recreation as the top three (sic) priorities for parks, across a variety of demographic segments.”<sup>31</sup> This, and other PROS findings, need to be rationalized with the Planning Board’s recommendation to prioritize urban parks.

The need for objective criteria for park selection is highlighted by the Planning Board’s recent approval of a dog park in the heavily used Norwood Park. The Board approved the dog park without any analysis of the impact of the dog park on the existing uses: the toddler playground, free play area, and permitted ballfields, even though under Park standards the dog park was too close to the surrounding homes.

- B. The General Plan must clearly convey that the existence and careful stewardship of park land is in no way a substitute for county-wide policies that foster sustainability and environmental resilience throughout the entire county.**

The removal of the chapter on the environment and its recommendations, and then the addition of a long discussion of Parks’ dedication to Environmental Stewardship in the new Parks chapter is confusing.<sup>32</sup> The Parks chapter should be clarified to show that the county understands that its environmental responsibilities go far beyond taking good care of its parks. This is particularly important, because in the 1964 and 1969 Wedges and Corridors plans, before the federal government passed landmark environmental legislation, “environment“ was a general word that included conservation, natural resources, and many other concepts.<sup>33</sup> In the 1993 Refinement, the General Plan sets out a new definition of the environment grounded in the federal legislation, and an increased understanding of the environmental context in which land use decisions are made.<sup>34</sup>

- C. Finally, the Planning Board draft should delete its suggestion that “conservation-oriented parks” would be improved if there were better access in the park for bicyclists, walkers and transit users.<sup>35</sup>**

Conservation parks are for the preservation of nature, and access to a conservation park is achieved with natural trails for hiking. It is contrary to principles of conservation to open these parks potentially to bike

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<sup>29</sup> The Public Hearing draft did not have a chapter on Parks.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.montgomeryparks.org/uploads/2018/06/508-2017.PROS-COMplete.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> PROS Plan, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Planning Board draft, pgs. 115, 122, 1124

<sup>33</sup> [https://montgomeryplanning.org/community/general\\_plans/wedges\\_corridors/part1-3.pdf](https://montgomeryplanning.org/community/general_plans/wedges_corridors/part1-3.pdf), p. 44

<sup>34</sup> <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/master-plan-list/general-plans/general-plan-refinement-goals-and-objectives-1993/> pgs. 66-68

<sup>35</sup> Planning Board draft, p. 115.

trails and pedestrian paths, and as routes for transit users. That is the function of urban parks, like the Western Grove Urban Park, with its hard surface, impervious path that encourages walking to the Friendship Heights Metro.

**VI. The AHSP's zoning proposal must contain clear parameters to assure context sensitive planning, the active participation of the community, and sound planning principles.**

**A. Zoning changes in the R-40, 60, 90, and 200 residential zones may be done only through the master plan process, and any rezoning must be recommended in an approved and adopted master plan.**

**B. Where proposed zoning changes raise issues of gentrification, loss of NOAH, and/or environmental degradation, the master plan process shall include Small Area Planning (SAP).**

**C. Require Site Plan for infill development in both the single-family neighborhoods and the denser development in the corridors.**

**D. Retain compatibility standards.** The concept of compatibility is a foundation of our zoning code, part of the DNA of county planning, and must be retained. Form based zoning may work well for large projects on open land where the planner has control of the relationships between all of units. It is not a substitute for compatibility for infill projects in established neighborhoods, or dense projects along our corridors.

CC: Marlene Michaelson, Executive Director, County Council  
Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst  
Casey Anderson, Planning Board Chair  
Natali Fani-Gonzalez, Planning Board Member  
Gerald Cichy, Planning Board Member  
Tina Patterson, Planning Board Member  
Partap Verma, Planning Board Member  
Gwen Wright, Director of Planning

Attachments: Extension Request



OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET


*Marc Elrich*  
County Executive

*Jennifer Bryant*  
Director

**M E M O R A N D U M**

June 09, 2021

TO: Tom Hucker, President, County Council

FROM: Jennifer Bryant, Director, Office of Management and Budget 

SUBJECT: Extension Request: Fiscal Impact Statement for Thrive Montgomery 2050  
Planning Board Draft, April 2021

As required by Section 33A-7 of the County Code, we are informing you that transmittal of the Fiscal Impact Statement for the above referenced General Plan, Thrive Montgomery 2050, will be delayed because additional time is needed to coordinate with the affected departments, collect information, and complete our analysis. We will transmit the statement no later than Friday, June 25, 2021.

JB:ps

cc: Claire Iseli, Special Assistant to the County Executive  
Debbie Spielberg, Special Assistant to the County Executive  
Dale Tibbitts, Special Assistant to the County Executive  
Dominic Butchko, Office of the County Executive  
Barry Hudson, Director, Public Information Office  
Meredith Wellington, Office of the County Executive  
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