

Council President Gabe Albornoz and Councilmembers  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue  
Rockville, MD 20850

September 30, 2022

Dear Council President Albornoz and Councilmembers,

We the undersigned, are 36 organizations and 209 individuals who share concern that the proposed update and remake of the County's General Plan, *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, is fundamentally flawed in both process and substance. **Our request is that you pause Thrive – and allow the Council to produce a product that the residents of Montgomery County deserve.**

The County Council did not produce the Thrive document, nor did it direct this process for these past two years. From its inception at the Planning Board, the process for developing this important plan has disenfranchised many residents and civic groups throughout the county, who initially participated and questioned the approach taken by the Planning Board. This top-down process overlooked affected communities, including residents from low-income neighborhoods in urban and rural areas. These are compelling reasons for the County Council to pause this process, so that a better general plan can be developed for the County.

We see the Thrive document as one that has been rushed through, and during a pandemic when public participation was adversely affected. An example is how developing the Thrive document was not community-based so that racial equity and social justice (RESJ) would be well served. We recommend that a detailed RESJ evaluation take place, allowing for perspective on who will benefit - and who in the community might be disadvantaged by the Thrive proposal.

## **Housing**

The housing crisis in Montgomery County is predicted to worsen under the current Thrive proposals, possibly leading to increased rents for moderate-income and low-income households. One-half of all new households since 2010 in Montgomery County make below \$50,000 annually. In order to not be rent-burdened, these households need affordable rent. The current Thrive 2050 is predicted to increase rents, based on the Thrive-style upzoning in the *Downtown Silver Spring plan area, Missing Middle Housing Market Study*.

Social action groups have called on the Council to enact sorely needed rent stabilization. This should take place before Thrive 2050 is approved. If the Council moves forward to approve Thrive this Fall, land prices and rents will rise higher (e.g. upon expiration of existing leases and the sale of upzoned parcels) and will increase the burden on moderate- and low-income households, partially negating the benefits of any rent stabilization.

Despite Thrive's statements on preserving naturally occurring affordable housing, the document's blanket push for upzoning and higher density will likely override this vision and result in displacement and loss of affordable housing. This is a prime example of the glaring contradictions in the current draft.

## **Threats to Land Access for Low-Income Communities - and Farmers in the Ag Reserve**

Thrive's promotion of widespread urbanization and upzoning of residential areas and many suburban and rural Activity Centers, is predicted to result in land price and rent increases; this is a huge problem. In this current draft, Thrive presents a threat to land access for many low-income communities. Small business owners often require land, commercial, and/or industrial space, in order to establish and grow their businesses. Urban farmers and nursery owners need access to affordable land in suburban and urban areas in order to start up market gardens and greenhouses. In our Ag Reserve, new farmers need access to affordable farmland, in order to establish and grow productive farms – yet Thrive promotes tourism and recreation facilities in the Ag Reserve – a move that would further escalate land prices and drive farmers off the land.

If Montgomery County wants to attract a diversity of people to live and work here now and in the future, then it's essential that we provide ample, diverse natural areas, gardens, farms and green spaces in each part of the County – in addition to providing an adequate supply of affordable housing units. This means we must maintain the affordability and accessibility of these natural and agricultural lands for groups and individuals who most need them and who are seeking to steward them.

Here are a few, selected additional reasons why the Council must pause Thrive 2050:

### **Climate Change**

As we face an unprecedented global climate crisis, it's important that Thrive take a far broader view of climate change impacts, and that it present a detailed set of policies for mitigation and adaptation.

The county is just now beginning a badly needed flood study. We should wait for that study to be completed before updating a plan that will guide land use decisions for the next 30 or so years. This might allow us to determine what water infrastructure might be needed to support the plan and the fiscal impact of providing that infrastructure. We cannot burden water ratepayers with water infrastructure costs. While canvassing for her County Council run, Natali Fani-Gonzalez found that flooding and sewer backups are a tremendous issue in Wheaton, Veirs Mill and Twinbrook. We can expect this to be a major issue for the incoming Council.

Climate assessment must precede decision-making that will be based on Thrive 2050. Another of Thrive's huge gaps related to climate assessment: protecting our drinking water supplies from climate and pollution threats is crucial to providing a healthy and safe future for all residents – yet there is zero mention in Thrive of any drinking water and other water resources – including the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers and the Piedmont Sole Source Aquifer.

So, Thrive should also be subjected to a climate assessment and water resource assessment, and not be grandfathered in (the new climate assessment bill doesn't go into effect until next spring).

### **Rural Areas and Forests**

Maintaining rural areas including the Agricultural Reserve and low-density Residential Wedge with farms, forests and open space, protects clean drinking water supply and is fundamental to the Montgomery County climate response. As written, Thrive threatens the Montgomery County rural land

use pattern, particularly from its “Limited Growth” proposal, with increased groundwater and stream pollution predicted for the rural areas subject to Thrive’s growth policies.

### **Historic Preservation**

Historic Preservation is another consideration that must be reviewed for a better draft of Thrive 2050. This includes not only buildings but also entire landscapes that are key to our quality of life which includes an ability to connect and reckon with our past. Yet Thrive’s proposed urbanization and upzoning / densification and growth policies will harm historic preservation efforts.

### **Community Discussions on Land Use Planning**

We need to create space and time for new community conversations leading to different housing and transportation visions, models and policies. With Thrive being pushed forward through a top-down process, there is no time for useful community explorations of alternative housing and transportation policies. By pausing Thrive, the Council can create the opportunity for these conversations to occur. We need support for grassroots resident-based comprehensive and neighborhood visions, plans and policies - instead of dictates from on high that will benefit deep-pocket speculators and developers at the expense of moderate- and low-income people.

### **We request:**

- that you pause Thrive so that the Council and the community can work on poverty alleviation, equity and affordability – in concert with climate resilience strategies,
- extend the Thrive 2050 schedule, so that the incoming County Council members can participate in development of Thrive 2050, and
- hold a series of public hearings, with separate hearings devoted to each proposed chapter, including but not limited to the expected new chapters on Racial Equity and Social Justice, and on Environmental Protection and the Agricultural Reserve.

We view this matter as urgent. We ask to receive your considered response by October 7th, 2022.

**The 36 groups and 209 individual signatories are listed on the four pages below.**

**Signed – 36 Organizations**

Biodiversity for a Livable Planet	North Hills of Sligo Creek Civic Association
Cedar Lane Environmental Justice Ministry	Passion to Seed Gardening
CHEER	People Committee (COC)
Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights	Plenty Magazine – Thunder Mountain Publishing
Climate Action Coffee Food Forest Team	Progressive Democrats of America, Maryland Chapter
Conservation Montgomery	Progressive Neighbors
Daybreak Farm	Seneca Creek Watershed Partners
Educational Sustainability Mobilization Inc.	Silver Spring Historical Society
Fairbrooke Farm	Sugarloaf Citizens Association
Friends of Sligo Creek	Sugarloaf Regional Trails
Friends of Ten Mile Creek and Little Seneca Reservoir	TAME Coalition (Transit Alternatives to Mid- County Highway Extended)
Heritage Montgomery	The Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition
Maryland Poor People’s Campaign	The Germantown Historical Society
Montgomery Clear Vistas	Tiewyan Textiles
Montgomery Countryside Alliance	Town of Barnesville
Montgomery County Civic Federation	The Germantown Historical Society
Montgomery County Green Party	West Montgomery County Citizens Association (WMCCA)
Montgomery Preservation Inc.	Wildlife Aid Brigade

**Signed – 209 Residents**

	Martha Bruder
	Joan Bull
Carol Agayoff	Diane M. Cameron
Michele Albornoz	Eric Cathcart
Charles Alexander	Christine Chalk
Susan D. Alexander	Anne Cinque
Anne Ambler	Joan Clement
Karoline Anders	Lisa Cline
Chester W. Anderson	Carolyn Conlan
Sheri Arnell	Sarah Convissor
Darrick Bailey	Diana Conway
Michelle Bailey	Jesse F Copsey
Joyce Bailey	G. Countryman-Mills
Norman Bailey	Sylvia Craig
Ginny Barnes	Victoria Cram
Kenneth Bawer	Sharon Cranford
Sarah Beardmore	Sandra Crowe
Megan Benton	Janet Davies
Carole Bergmann	Nelia Anne Davies
Constance Bevitt	Colleen Davies
Marieke Bier	Dan Dean
Adam Blankinship	Carole Dell
Philip Bogdonoff	Donald Dell
Alan S. Bowser	Michael Delp
James P. Brown	Michael Delp
Barbara Brown	Peggy Dennis
Daniel Thomas Brown	Tom Devine
Marney Bruce	John A. Douglas

Farnaz Edwards	Susan Helm
Karen D. Elrich	De Herman
Marilyn Emery	Mike Hersh
Cynthia Gill Erville	Barbara E. Hoover
John Fay	Joseph P Horgan
John Fedota	Bryan Hunter
Steve Findlay	Lauren Jackson
Theodora Fine	Robert C. Janku
Lorna Phillips Forde	Zena Carmel Jessup
David Forman	Suzanne Johnson
Prudence Foster	Theresa A. Jones
George French	Robert G. Joyce
Shelley Fudge	Suzi Williams Kaplan
Prasad L Gadde	Isaac Kaplan
Kit Gage	Sarah A. Kaplan
Sarah Gagne	Stan M. Kaplan
Ronald Galloway	Hokuma Karimova
Gina Gaspin	Theodore Kingsley
Randall Gibson	Kay Klingman
Paula Glendinning	Jerome Joseph Klobukowski
Robert N Goldberg	Melanie Kurimchak
Josh Goldman	Steven Kurimchak
Ellen Gordon	Krista Kurth
Lauren Greenberger	Stacy Larrabure
Jeffrey Matthew Greene	Sanfred Larson
Jennifer S. Haddon	Susanne Lee
Sandra Heiler	Catherine Cadem Lemp
Peggy O. Heller	Joe Libertelli

Joseph C. Long	Leo F Niederer
Katherine Longbrake	Linda Nishioka
Catherine A. Lowry	Anna M. Olsson
Lillian Luksenburg	Diann K Onsted
Tina Lunson	Patricia Oseroff
Caren Madsen	John Parrish
Sarna Marcus	Donald Pelles
Karen-Marie Mason	Jane Perini
Jerry A. McCoy	Linda Piccinino
Donna McDowell	Vanesa Pinto
Patty McGrath	Irene Polansky
Eileen McGuckian	Sue Present
Lee McNair	Mary Beth Preuss
Stephen Melkisthian	Anna R. Pritchard
Karen Metchis	James F. Putman
Wib Middleton	Mary V Reardon
Eneshal Miller	Richard Renner
Craig Miller	Brian Richmond
Eneshal Miller	Traci Richmond
Jamil Miller	Sarah Rogers
Dolores Milmoie	Abigail Rome
Peter Miovic	Mary Rooker
Christine Morgan	Jamie Rosenthal
Karen Murphy	Samuel Rosenthal
Kim Musheno	Laren Rusin
Jamal M Najjab	Jovan Sanders
Joyce Elizabeth Nalewajk	Leslie Saville
Edna Nemeth	Tom Sawanobori

Donna L C Sawyer	Sylvia Tognetti
Theodora Scarato	Laura Van Etten
Margaret Schoap	Jacquelyn Vok
William Schrumpp	Jerilyn Weaver
Charles Shore	Linda Weiss
Margie Shultz	Julia Wight
Patrick A. Sidwell	Robert Wilbur
Arthur E Slesinger	Elizabeth Wilbur
Ann Smith	Janet Willen
Janene M. Smith	Brenda Willett
Janice Smith	Nicole Williams
Kathleen Smith	Michele Wolin
Susan Cooke Soderberg	Kit Wood
Tanyaradzwa Spandhla	Naomi Yount
Jeremy and Roseanna Stanton	James Zwiebel
Bette, Steve, Magdalena and Sophia Steckler	
Roberta G (rg) Steinman	
Marcie Stickle	
Robert Alex Stubblefield	
Pamela Lynn Stuckey	
Caroline Taylor	
Jane Thompson	
Bev Thoms	
Richard Thoms	
Mary Elizabeth Thornhill	
Elizabeth Thornton	
Susan J. Tipton	
Leanne Tobias	