

## When providing for the environment is like ordering the “dressing on the side”

Some people believe that the Thrive 2050 Plan ensures an environmentally vibrant and green Montgomery County over the next 30 years. They believe this, despite the fact that ***no chapter of the Thrive 2050 Plan is specifically dedicated to green infrastructure, nature-based solutions, or natural restoration as an essential component of growth in the future of our County.***



Some will point to a section on public parks. As noted in our Open Letter, we agree that improving and strengthening our public park system is important, however **parks alone cannot be expected to function as green infrastructure for the bulk of the County – particularly in dense down-County areas.**

Some will point to the "Actions and List of Resources" document, **which is a document separate from the Thrive 2050 Plan that will not be reviewed or approved by the County Council.** It lists a random parade of possible actions for implementing the Plan. These “actions” are not requirements and have no timelines associated with each item. The listed action items reveal a stunning lack of accountability, timelines, prioritization, or measurable outcomes. They also do not prioritize green infrastructure and nature-based solutions. See below for some examples of how the devil is in the details.

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*The entire structure of the Thrive 2050 Plan leaves nature and green infrastructure as the “dressing on the side” for a big order of density and development.*

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Below are examples of “action items” that, despite initial appearances, **do not prioritize** green infrastructure and nature-based solutions in every community:

1. Action Item: Identify areas vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change and **develop strategies to mitigate these effects.** Prioritize areas with historically disadvantaged and vulnerable populations most likely to be affected by climate change.

This item refers to the effects of climate change on disadvantaged communities, but where does it speak about nature-based solutions or expanding green infrastructure? When nature

has been sidelined in Thrive 2050 Plan, how can one assume that nature-based solutions will be the first response?

2. Action Item: Develop urban environmental guidelines to incorporate **green features in growth areas** that will mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change; provide cleaner air and water; add shading and cooling features; and improve human health.

What are “green features”? Do the planners and implementers interpret the term “green features” as expanding nature, promoting urban forests, and restoring degraded streams? If so, why didn’t they refer to forests, nature, or green infrastructure?

3. Action Item: Establish **appropriate** forest and non-forest canopy goals and strategies to protect plant and wildlife diversity and human health **while accommodating and complementing land use policies such as redevelopment and infill in areas identified as appropriate for growth.**

What are “appropriate” goals and strategies to protect biodiversity when balanced against land use policies that are a core priority of, and central to, the Thrive 2050 Plan?

4. Action Item: **Link** stream valleys, natural lands, parks, open spaces, and tree-lined boulevards throughout the county with a comprehensive network of **natural and hard surface trails for physical activity** as well as to connect habitats.

This item focuses on linkages and trailways – whether hard surface or natural – where the clear priority is physical activity. Does this requirement protect, restore, and expand forests, stream valleys, and other nature-based solutions to environmental problems? Maybe it will, maybe it won’t; however, this County has a history of prioritizing the creation of hardscaped trails over the protection of forests – sometimes, even to the detriment of forests. So, the jury is out.