



Artist: Lyla Cho (Age 12)

Appendix E: Resilience Ambassador Survey Results

Summary of the Resilience Ambassador Survey

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Prepared by Montgomery County CEX interns
Marcy Delos, Regina Fink, Julia McMurry & Tenzin Yangkey

The summary below was prepared following a quantitative and qualitative analysis of survey results. Information included below is meant to convey a summary overview of what survey respondents wanted to preserve, what they thought needed changing, and what solutions they wanted to see implemented. This is not an exhaustive account of our findings. The points bolded below represent ideas that were brought up repeatedly (not unique to one person or group) and which intersect with areas covered in the County's Climate Action Plan (CAP).

Imagining a future Montgomery County

Respondents were asked to imagine what kind of Montgomery County they want to see in their lifetime, and what their future would look like for them. Themes:

- **A county that is equitable, diverse, and inclusive**, with reduced segregation in our schools and neighborhoods; an end to racial profiling and racism; free of judgment where everyone feels accepted, welcomed, and heard; that supports mental health and provides meaningful opportunities to people with disabilities.
- **A county that enables people to live to their full potential**, can learn, work and have fun here; with local shops and markets; more resources for people who are systemically underserved; high-quality schools that provide a good education and where resources are distributed evenly; more well-paid job opportunities.
- **A safe, clean, healthy, affordable, and accessible place to live.** A peaceful county with less crime and violence; clean air; less carbon emissions; less waste and pollution. A county that provides more safe bus stops; faster buses; good public transportation; more accessible transportation throughout the county; safer walking, sidewalks, and crosswalks; fewer crashes, fewer total cars but more electric vehicles. Affordable housing and living; rental assistance for those in need; less poverty and homelessness.
- **A place to live that offers a sense of community**; that we feel pride to live in; where people help each other and care about each other; with County government helping those in need; a community that is well cared for; a community with a sense of humanity, respect, and joy; where people are making a better place for the next generation.
- **A county that provides a sense of place and places to have fun.** Respondents are looking for more opportunities for people to connect with each other; good recreational attractions and services; more fun things to do; more community events, festivals, and celebrations; new and renovated buildings and town centers; a place that knows its roots and keeps doors open to visitors.

A Sense of Community

- **Racial and ethnic diversity of the county is a point of pride** for many respondents. For others, this diversity is segregated to specific enclaves (particularly schools and neighborhoods, as well as broader areas/towns) that remain majority white/of higher income. Respondents highlighted **the need to protect their communities' diversity**, whether from gentrification or other forces. Many hoped to see the County become even more diverse in the future. Many **encouraged more celebration of the County's diversity** in the form of festivals, community gatherings, and other events. Some suggested this celebration could combat racism and empower immigrant communities.
- Residents **valued social service programs and the support that community members show for each other**. Residents highlighted appreciation for free public resources and services for low-income communities, including in response to the pandemic. Residents celebrated the commitment to helping each other, volunteering, and uniting in the face of adversity.
- Respondents voiced **worry about housing affordability/access and homelessness**. There were also worries about housing discrimination, as well as mixed feelings related to amount of housing development (excess or insufficient). Residents often described communities struggling to pay rent and rent increases (including during COVID). Solutions included rent control, rent assistance programs for low-income people and seniors, and increasing affordable housing. Residents were also concerned about the **challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness**. Solutions: providing homeless people with opportunities like jobs, essential resources, and support for mental health.
- While valuing the County's diversity, **residents were concerned about neighborhood segregation**. Concerns included dramatic economic disparities between different areas, how poverty/economic disempowerment cause crime, low racial diversity within neighborhoods and racial disparities in who has access to low-/high- income or poorly/well-resourced neighborhoods (with white communities benefiting, in contrast to Black and Latinx communities). While there was some appreciation expressed about living physically close to essential services, there was also worry about not being able to find nearby jobs or transportation to access distant jobs, high rent/parking prices near essential amenities (grocery stores, healthcare, public transit), and broader concern about high cost of living. Solutions: increasing affordable housing to create a more diverse neighborhoods and avoiding gentrification.

Civic Engagement and Community Leadership

- Respondents were happy to see civic engagement efforts like helping youth register to vote, but across the board **people wanted more from the County**.
- First, **more transparent communication and promotion concerning future events**. Many were unaware of events like town halls or concerned that their communities were unaware.
- Second, **more types of outreach and support for residents to raise their voices**. Many shared concerns about equity and access. Some populations do not have the time,

resources, or language access to engage unless the county takes active steps to support them. Some suggested a “suggestion-box” style website, others wanted more surveys, still others suggested regular newsletters and emails (perhaps targeted to specific communities). Wraparound supports for town halls and meetings could also help.

- Third, the **County must take resident concerns seriously and make good faith attempts to act on them**. Some respondents felt stereotyped or shut-down when sharing their concerns with officials, and many were frustrated at perceived inaction even when they had raised issues repeatedly. There was also concerns with the relative **lack of representation of BIPOC at high levels of government and other positions of power**. There are trust issues between communities and county officials.
- Finally, the County should **improve access to voting and elevate marginalized voices** through public art projects (like murals) and billboards.

Health and Pollution

- Respondents concerns’ about health and wellbeing spanned from **unaffordable and inaccessible healthcare to the lack of health care-related information/awareness raising programs**. Residents want access to mental health and drug use therapy to destigmatize these issues and build a supportive community. Residents experiencing chronic illness and disabilities in particular find the health care system challenging to navigate. Residents are concerned about food justice, including poor neighborhoods’ unequal access to healthy foods and schools lacking healthy options.
- Respondents also mentioned **concerns about pollution from cars**, especially because of increased use during the pandemic. Solutions offered: subsidizing Electric Vehicles in the county and reducing traffic flow.
- With heightened risk from COVID, some of the community members **avored strict COVID guidelines and enforcement**. Respondents were concerned about heightened COVID exposure or impacts (to their communities, families, or themselves) considering health insurance inaccessibility, low-income status, chronic illness or recovery from other conditions, elderly age, frontline essential jobs, and systemic racism.
- **Other concerns: inaccessibility of COVID testing, treatment and resources** deeply concerned the residents. With regards to environmental health, residents worried about air pollution and the need to keep neighborhoods clean.

Extreme Weather, Heating & Cooling

- **Affordability and accessibility to heating and cooling systems are central** to the issue of adapting to climate change. Students pointed out that schools lack reliable A/C and heating systems. For low-income residents food security, especially during extreme weather, was a concern. For **cold weather**, respondents called for repairs to existing heating systems and improvements like better building insulation. Solutions offered: sharing resources (jackets, sanitizer, food) and offering safe locations to go during storms. For **extreme hot weather** residents wanted A/C at job sites, essential buildings, public areas and low-income households. Some suggested more trees and shade spots,

increased access to pools and sprinklers, and more drinking fountains (especially near bus stops).

- **Public transportation is another area where heating and cooling systems needs to be installed.** Residents also saw the need of shelters for homeless people during cold winters and hot summers as they are at most risk.
- **Broader concerns included exposure-induced illness (hypothermia or heat stroke) and the cost of healthcare** needed to treat these. Some also mentioned mold problems, and the risk posed to asthmatics.
- Residents **worried about flooding** feared it would lead to power outages (for houses and public buildings like schools), destruction through water damage and falling trees, and dangerous driving conditions. They wanted better sewage systems, more storm drains, and emergency information phone lines.
- Residents frequently cited a **need for further education and planning regarding extreme weather** (ex: pamphlets, online plans for county, hotlines to call). Respondents cited concerns with lack of community preparedness, especially for homeless and low-income individuals.

Traveling in the Community

- **Problems with public transit included accessibility (lack of access near homes, schools, places of employment), affordability, service quality, and timing issues that resulted in long commutes.** Many also mentioned unreliability of the transit schedule.
- **Issues with cleanliness** were cited as concerns both before and after (enhanced) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Solutions include: increasing private car use, staying at home, and providing hand sanitizer dispensers on transit. Many respondents, almost exclusively female, **noted issues with sexual harassment**, even assault, while on public transit or while walking at night. Solutions included: installing better lighting at night and cameras on transit.
- Respondents noted **concerns walking on busy roads** with sub-par sidewalks/crosswalks and reckless drivers. Highway 29 was mentioned in a response as a particularly dangerous crossing. Solutions include: police directing traffic at dangerous intersections, infrastructural improvements (ex: speedbumps), and improved signage or driver's education.

Safety

- Respondents mentioned **police as either positive (effective, wanted more of) or negative (issues with profiling/racism/brutality).** Some thought police abused their power and could not be trusted to be called in an emergency situation and were not effective in schools. Others welcomed police presence in their neighborhoods, schools, and as forces to combat crime and traffic issues. Respondents mostly welcomed security guards in communities and schools.
- Other safety issue included crime rate (higher in certain neighborhoods), need for security cameras, gang violence, gun violence, school shooting fears, fear of assault in

schools. Some respondents considered the County a safe place in general, but were able to cite times they felt unsafe.

Economic & Educational Inequities & Empowerment (many issues below are especially pertinent to youth, who made up a large proportion of those surveyed)

- Respondents cited a **need for more job opportunities** (for youth, BIPOC communities, low-income communities, and people with disabilities), issues with **wage inequity**, and discrimination in the hiring processes. Many were concerned about **financial security**, worsened by the pandemic. Some feared returning to work because of increased exposure to COVID. Others were unemployed because of the pandemic.
- Many wanted **more youth facilities**, places to gather/organize/share energy and ideas, mental health services, and sports opportunities.
- Respondents sometimes expressed **pride in MoCo's great school system and the diversity it contains**, although many residents highlighted **education inequities** within schools. There is a perception white students have more access to magnet, IB & AP classes while immigrant students are stuck in ESOL programs. Students noted inequities in access to laptops, tutors, college prep, SAT prep and the lack of affordable daycare (some need to care for siblings/children). These issues have been exacerbated by the pandemic (ex: need for internet/laptops).
- **This inequity was also cited between schools and consortia**, specifically the distribution of funding across consortia segregated by income and/or by race. Other inequities include lack of resources, attention, educational quality, and opportunities for student expression and leadership. Solutions offered included rezoning and redistribution of resources.
- In schools and classrooms, respondents noted issues of **mental health** and suggested expanding mental health services and drug use prevention/therapy. Respondents also mentioned instances of **racial discrimination**, specifically stereotyping, disproportionate punishments for Black students, and dismissing voices of BIPOC students. Solutions offered include anti-bias training, educational leadership listening to student feedback and stories (ex., racism, sexual harassment) and having follow-through/accountability, and redesigning the curriculum to cover racial issues (systemic racism, history that is not "whitewashed" by centering dominant white narratives), gender equity, etc.
- Other issues included **disability discrimination** and the need for environmental education.