



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL PRESIDENT

MEMORANDUM

October 21, 2022

TO: Marc Elrich, County Executive

FROM: Gabe Albornoz, Council President
Montgomery County Council

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gabe Albornoz', written over the printed name.

SUBJECT: Thrive Montgomery 2050

The Council has received your Oct. 20 letter with your continued opposition to moving Montgomery County forward. This time it's related to your ongoing objections about Thrive Montgomery 2050, which is the first comprehensive rewrite of Montgomery County's General Plan since 1969. The Council must plan for the future of our community, and we cannot do that appropriately or effectively based on principles that are more than a half century old.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is the policy document that envisions what Montgomery County's future could look like when we all come together to meet the evolving needs of our residents and our community. This plan gives us a clear path forward to create places where we can increase affordable housing, improve transit and strengthen businesses together in equitable sustainable ways.

Using Thrive Montgomery 2050 as a guide will help us realize a County centered on accessible, mixed-use corridors that connect residents, employees and visitors to each other and the Washington metropolitan region. For our community to grow, evolve and remain competitive, we must create places where housing, transit, parks, and businesses can successfully coexist and where we can meet our environmental, economic and housing goals in an equitable way.

During the last 18 months of Council work and community outreach on Thrive Montgomery 2050, you have had numerous opportunities to engage in a productive dialogue with your Council colleagues and offer proactive solutions that would make progress on housing and transportation challenges. Instead, you choose to focus on obstructing a proactive approach for Montgomery County's future.

Additionally, your letter mistakenly suggests that because the Council lost confidence in the Montgomery County Planning Board members and swiftly took action to address the issue, that

all the work of the planning staff, Council staff, the Planning, Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee and the Council is meaningless. This is pure political posturing.

As you will remember from your time as a Councilmember, when you opposed multiple master and sector plans, the Council receives independent guidance from land use and legal staff. The Montgomery County Charter provides all powers related to zoning, planning and subdivision to the Council.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is the most reviewed general plan in Montgomery County's history, and we have solicited community input to shape the document throughout the development and review process.

In addition to the outreach done by the Montgomery County Planning Department, the Council held two public hearing in June of 2021. The Council held two more listening sessions devoted to the PHED Committee draft of the Plan. Community meetings were also coordinated by each of the County's Regional Services Center directors in partnership with Council staff.

The PHED Committee held nine worksessions. The Council has also met nine times to discuss the Plan. Moreover, the Council engaged the support of Nspiregreen and Public Engagement Associates. This consulting team brought extensive planning and public engagement experience to develop a racial equity and social justice review of the engagement process, as well as a review of the policies and practices recommended in the Plan.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 provides an essential and overarching framework for Montgomery County's future. It provides the foundation for guiding all of us to meet the needs of our community while we grow and focuses on preserving our outstanding quality of life that brings individuals to our community to live, work, start a business and raise a family.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 also promotes housing for all residents by supporting a diversity of housing types to meet the unique needs of residents; supports the strengthening of tenant protections to ensure healthy and fair housing; and supports the creation of neighborhood stabilization strategies for communities of color.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the Council recognizes that housing affordability is a complicated issue that impacts residents across all income levels and requires a multi-pronged approach and innovative strategies. Addressing housing affordability requires the public and private sector working together to use all available financial and development tools to meet our regional housing goals.

With this background, I will address the issues you raise in your letter.

Chapters about economic development, environmental resilience and racial equity

The Council decided at its June 21 worksession to add three new chapters to the Plan. Each chapter focuses on one of the overarching objectives--economic development, environmental resilience and racial equity and social justice. These chapters provide a foundation for the policies and

practices in later chapters of the Plan. Each of these chapters were posted prior to the standard posting times for Council items and have been available for public review and input.

Growth maps

With respect to the growth maps, both the PHED Committee and the Council have stated that the 1993 Refinement Map will be added back into the Plan. It is valid background information and was discussed during the PHED Committee's worksession on the 2050 Growth Map.

The map in each general plan uses unique terminology to depict different areas of the County. The 2050 Growth map uses the term limited growth area instead of suburban communities or residential wedge, but this doesn't change the land uses allowed in these areas. The underlying zoning for these areas consists of residential and commercial mixed-use areas, as well as commercial uses allowed in residential zones. It is misleading to imply that the terminology on the Growth Map is equivalent to the land uses allowed under zoning.

Rezoning issues

Just like the current General Plan, Thrive Montgomery 2050 does not change zoning; instead, it provides guidance for future zoning changes. All future zoning actions will be reviewed independently based on the guidance in Thrive Montgomery 2050 with input from the public and decision-making by the Council.

Racial equity and social justice

The Council worked diligently to ensure that the review process for Thrive Montgomery 2050 was completed with care, transparency and community input using public hearings, community meetings, pop-up events and surveys. The work of our consulting team of Nspiregreen and Public Engagement Associates was essential to incorporating the views of underrepresented residents.

This work led to the creation of the racial equity and social justice chapter. It also provided a better understanding of how past land use policies have impacted historically marginalized communities in Montgomery County that will help shape recommendations about how future policies and planning efforts can be more just and equitable.

The consulting team also provided recommendations for each chapter of the Plan. The Council added several new practices in response, including one aimed at ensuring opportunities for minority-owned or operated businesses dealing with development or redevelopment and another supporting the preservation of African American and Indigenous cultural sites and resources.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is the first step for Montgomery County's future growth and development, and after 18 months of review and debate at the Council, it's time to lay the foundation needed to start making it happen.

I look forward to working with you on innovative strategies to generate new housing across our community, promote economic development and create innovative transportation strategies to proactively move Montgomery County forward to serve our residents today and for future generations who will keep our community thriving.