

Hon. Thomas Hucker
President, Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Thrive Montgomery 2050 Planning Board Draft Plan

Dear Council President Hucker and Councilmembers,

The Maryland Building Industry Association (MBIA) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony for THRIVE 2050. First, we applaud the efforts to examine our current planning principles and to focus on our evolving County and we encourage the council to continue its work on this plan. It is important for the County to continue to advance its planning vision, especially in these uncertain times. Prior master plans in Montgomery County have served us well but no planning vision can be static. Second, we believe the plan does a great job of identifying and documenting trends, issues and challenges and suggesting various actions for the future. As the Building Industry Association, we are particularly pleased to see yet another acknowledgment that the County is not producing enough housing and that we need solutions to achieve the social, economic and fiscal objectives necessary for a healthy County in the future.

The goals, policies and actions set out in the plan, beginning at page 54 are useful to guide us in the future. The implementation chapter, beginning at page 127, is particularly helpful. Too often, we see broad vision documents produced with a lot of effort, but then find a lack of direction for implementation of those objectives. We encourage aggressive, short term implementation recommendations for solutions to the County's Housing Affordability crisis. Here again, as the Building Industry Association, we are particularly supportive of the recommendation to break down regulatory and other barriers. The industry certainly is part of the solution to achieving the goals set forth in the Plan, but we cannot do it without the support of government.

One question we raise, is the statement at page 38 referring to concentrating "all new growth" along transit corridors. This seems to be a bit of an overstatement given the diversity of housing and employment choices affected by societies since the beginning of time. While there have been ebbs and flows with respect to interest levels in urban, suburban and rural locations, each has its followers, and all are necessary. Just a few years ago the talk was that the "suburbs are dead" as millennials moved into the city. We then saw, even before COVID, that many of those same individuals began moving out

of the city when they started having families. That trend has intensified significantly in the new COVID environment and the apparent success forced experiment in which we have been involved regarding remote working. This probably means this trend will continue and will support economically, environmentally and socially acceptable lifestyles not connected to transit. We ask that the plan reflect this potential as well. Montgomery County is continually evolving with an Urban down-county that is redeveloping with mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented, sustainable communities. The general plan should acknowledge that redevelopment in urban areas may require different considerations with respect to environmental guidelines and requirements due to existing development conditions.

Another matter we would like to address is the counties current standards regarding Stream Valley Buffers and the unintended consequences of requiring them on sites that have been previously developed within urban areas. An amendment to the general plan sets the vision for numerous other planning documents and policies, and provides the opportunity to revise or improve upon the existing policies in response to the changes that have evolved over the past several decades. Stream Buffers in Urban Areas Stream buffers contained in the County's Environmental Guidelines were written for a different era when most development occurred on greenfield site that were either wooded or in agriculture. At this time, less was known about pollutant loading rates for Nitrogen and Phosphorous based on different land uses so a surrogate (conservative set aside) was used in the place of actual data or science.

We encourage the council to consider the County's growth envelope as it relates to its jurisdictional neighbors that have not placed the same development boundary limits and therefore are less constrained when it comes to growth. Consider the balance between preservation goals and population growth needs so the County can create housing for its future residents, while maintaining its economic strength, and enhancing and preserving its agricultural resources.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to offer our comments and feedback. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at gbenton@marylandbuilders.org or (202)-815-4239.

Respectfully,

Griffin Benton
Vice President of Government Affairs, MBIA