

**November 30, 2021, Thrive Montgomery 2050 Listening Session: Written Statement
Montgomery County Racial Equity Network (MORE)**

The Montgomery County Racial Equity Network (MORE) asks the County Council to ensure that the draft general plan – Thrive Montgomery 2050, receives a Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement before it is voted on. By applying the Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact tool, which generates the Statement, the Council can better predict if Thrive will help to advance equity, or not.

The Council must ensure that Thrive does not continue to exacerbate the long-standing county inequities and lead to unintended consequences, such as the displacement of low-income residents and gentrification.

- Among county renter households in 2019, rent burden (expending 30 percent or more of income on rent) was experienced among 66 percent of Latinx renters and 60 percent of Black renters; compared to 40 percent of White renters and 33 percent of Asian renters ¹.
- Among county COVID Relief Rental Program clients (approved as of April 4, 2021), 43 percent were Black, and 37 percent were Latinx while 9 percent were White, and 3 percent were Asian or Pacific Islanders.²
- Among families experiencing homelessness in 2020 in the county, 78 percent were Black, 15 percent were White, 9 percent were Latinx, and 2 percent were Asian³.

MORE does not have a current position either for or against the current draft of Thrive at this time. MORE is advocating for an equitable, fact-informed review process of the plan by using the best tool we have.

MORE understands that an equitable engagement process leads to equitable outcomes. While the Planning Department states that the primary audience for their Thrive engagement outreach includes “residents who have been historically underrepresented in the planning process” such as “renters, Latinos, foreign born residents, and African Americans”⁴; without collecting, sharing and breaking down total audience numbers by race, renter status, etcetera – we question how the Planning Department is tracking and evaluating their outreach to engage their primary audience in significant ways. Sharing disaggregated data by underrepresented groups is fundamental to monitoring and achieving equity.

A November 2 article in the *DCist* noted that “When the council held two virtual public hearings on Thrive in June, nearly 90 residents testified, and only six were Black”.⁵ This indicates that Black residents are likely continuing to be underrepresented in the Thrive engagement process.

MORE acknowledges that the Planning Department conducted their own internal racial equity review of their plan. To be clear, MORE is testifying for a different process. The Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement we want is developed from outside of the Planning Department– objectively and independently prepared by the Office of Legislative Oversight through a transparent, community trusted, co-created process that is routinely conducted for draft legislation.

¹ Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Zoning Text Amendment Statement; <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/ZTA/2021/ZTA21-07.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Thrive Montgomery Outreach and Engagement Appendix; <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Thrive-Montgomery-Outreach-appendix-4-12.pdf>

⁵ *Dcist, Montgomery County’s New General Plan Ignites Debate Over Race And Affordability* <https://dcist.com/story/21/11/02/thrive-montgomery-2050-controversy/>

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MORE also acknowledges that the Planning Board is required to provide a Statement for Zoning Text Amendments.⁶ Although this is one step forward, Thrive will guide all planning decisions, beyond zoning, for the next 30 years. Our approach to equity should be all encompassing, as structural racism is all encompassing.

Since the Planning Board is not required to conduct this Statement for any of its plans, there are very few safeguards to protect our communities from any negative impacts of planning policies. But as the Council, you are one of them.

MORE ask you to act on your commitment to advance equity, by requiring that Thrive receive a Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement.

Thank you.

⁶ Racial Equity and Social Justice Act Amendment 44-20;
<https://montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/RESJAct.pdf>