

IN SUPPORT OF THRIVE 2050



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

March 21, 2022

County Executive Marc Elrich and Members of the County Council:

[Delivered via e-mail]

Advice from the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board re:

IN SUPPORT OF THRIVE 2050

Dear County Executive Marc Elrich and Members of the County Council,

On behalf of the Silver Spring Citizens' Advisory Board, we urge you to approve the Thrive 2050 plan as is currently written and direct the Planning Board to continue to examine ways that the County can support the development and preservation of affordable and workforce housing.

Last month, at the request of County Council President Albornoz, the five Citizens Advisory Boards across the county devoted their regularly scheduled meeting to hearing public comments on the new general plan, Thrive 2050. This was not the SSCAB's first public meeting on Thrive 2050. Most recently, we held a public discussion with Planning Board Chair Anderson on November 22, 2021 that was well attended. The January SSCAB meeting was also well attended, although many of the attendees were the same as those at the first meeting. The comments from the public were, roughly, 65% in favor and 35% opposed, and this is consistent with previous SSCAB meetings on the subject. Given the passionate testimony we heard both in support and in opposition, we felt it appropriate to provide an advice letter on the topic.

Since 1964, the county land use planning has been guided by the "Wedges and Corridors" general plan. While it has been significantly updated twice, much of the original document remains current. Over the ensuing 58 years, Montgomery County has changed from a largely rural county to a complex mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. The Planning Commission and their staff developed Thrive as a road map for addressing the needs of the County residents and reflecting the current development patterns. The plan's development was an enormous challenge and resulted in a document which can be itself challenging at times.

One significant problem with the 1964 plan is that it largely ignored the East County US 29 corridor. Consequently, East County has lagged behind the I-270 corridor for 50 years. Thrive seeks to address this disparity, but the plan could be stronger on support for neighborhoods such as Long Branch, Lyttonsville, and Oakview, which have not benefitted as much from the County's overall growth and prosperity. Additionally, the plan should include more emphasis on how the land use changes it envisions would support affordable housing countywide. Furthermore, we would like to see a greater emphasis on the importance of programs for the county's young people.

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The Silver Spring Regional Area is one of the County's most important economic hubs. It has excellent access to public transit, a wide array of land uses including commercial, retail, industrial, and residential. It is home to the Montgomery College Takoma Park / Silver Spring campus and has a thriving arts community. Silver Spring is home to people with a wide diversity of incomes, cultures, and racial identities. For an urban area it still enjoys significant tree and park resources which will be important to balance future growth. The SSCAB specifically supports Thrive because it sets a plan for the future that would do the following:

- o Promote the development and preservation of affordable and workforce housing
- o Allow for more variety of housing types
- o Place greater emphasis on walkability and transit access and a decreased emphasis on vehicular mobility
- o Recommend actionable steps to help improve the environment while allowing greater density in urban hubs such as Silver Spring

It was helpful for the SSCAB to hear that most residents who spoke at the SSCA meetings were in favor of the plan. In general, residents supported measures to promote affordable housing, walkability, and better transit options. We noted that some of the residents who spoke did not seem to understand how the plan would be operationalized at the neighborhood level in the future. Also noted was the effort made to include minority input and that it was largely unsuccessful. SSCAB and committee meetings should focus on minority attendance and how it might be improved upon.

We applaud Council President Alborno for using the CAB meetings to solicit additional public comment. Far too often we hear members of the public saying, "That is the first time I heard about that." While we would like to see some of the aforementioned changes, we as a board support Thrive 2050 and would like to see it come before the Council for approval in the near future.

Thank you in advance for your consideration

Lysette House*
Chair

Sofia Bushen*
Vice-Chair

Parliamentarian
Melanie Fonder Kaye*

Secretary
Katherine Lucas McKay*

(*Signatures on file)

CC: Jacob Newman, Silver Spring Regional Area Director
Members of the SSCAB