

Town of Chevy Chase Testimony
Montgomery County Planning Board Public Hearing on Thrive Montgomery 2050
Irene N. Lane, Town Councilmember
November 19, 2020

Good afternoon. My name is Irene Lane and as a Town Councilmember, I speak on behalf of the Town of Chevy Chase. We very much appreciate the hard work that the Planning Board and staff have put into the development of this transformational plan with its laudable goals.

The Town along with 26 other communities representing over 33,000 residents has already submitted a united set of detailed written comments. Today, I would like to focus on four suggestions for improvement.

First, the **Definition of Complete Communities**: The Plan should specify the parameters for the diverse urban, suburban, and rural “Complete Communities” that exist throughout the County. In addition, in order to meet the County’s affordable and attainable housing goals, we encourage you to increase and diversify the areas for Missing Middle housing as affordable housing is more realistically achievable in areas outside the one-half mile zones around rail and BRT. Also, the Plan should leverage naturally occurring affordable housing options including adaptive re-use of malls and other retail/office buildings which post COVID-19 may no longer be viable for their original and intended use.

Second, the **Recognition of Municipal Regulatory Authority & Community Input**: While we understand the need for more affordable Missing Middle housing, the Plan’s implementation process should expressly state that the Plan’s policies and actions will be applied in a manner compatible with the current Master & Sector Planning process as well as within the current physical features of local neighborhoods. We recommend that the Plan expressly state that local municipalities continue to retain regulatory authority over building regulations for *all types* of residential housing within their jurisdictions, including Missing Middle housing, and that unincorporated neighborhoods have a *real say* about the physical changes that are being proposed within their boundaries.

Third, the **Strategy for Finance & Investment**: We strongly recommend that Thrive Montgomery provide equal weight to the importance of job creation, transit, and housing and include strategies for how public revenue will substantially increase in order to fund the Complete Community concept with its decentralized public facilities, small local schools, and transit infrastructure projects. Essentially, there needs to be a plan for how the County will thrive *economically* by attracting new industries, companies and small businesses to the County.

Fourth, the **Economic & Lifestyle Impact of COVID-19**: As this Plan will impact all residents, business owners, employees, regional commuters, and visitors for decades to come, we feel it is

important to factor in the changing realities of living and working as a result of the pandemic. Let us not forget that only two weeks ago, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve stated that while recent progress toward a vaccine was welcome news, it was “just too soon to assess with any confidence the implications of the news for the path of the economy...and that the post-pandemic economy (was) going to be different in some fundamental ways.” The Plan should design for the likelihood that the County’s budget will be severely constrained for some years to come – something that no number of PPPs will remedy.

We strongly recommend that careful attention be paid to and revisions be made based on the suggestions, concerns, and questions outlined in the Community Coalition’s detailed letter.

Thank you for your consideration.