



To,
The Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland

June 29, 2021

Reg: Thrive Montgomery 2050

Dear Council President Hucker and members of the Montgomery County Council,

Sierra Club Montgomery County group is pleased to support Thrive 2050.

We believe this plan will set a strong foundation for the county over the next 30 years, as we move forward to address our many challenges and fully embrace some great opportunities. It can create a more vibrant, equitable, and livable community!

THRIVE 2050 is a comprehensive plan that will help the county address three key issues of great importance to Sierra Club -- a) socioeconomic equity, b) climate change, and c) economic development.

EQUITY-

Sierra Club believes that America's most critical environmental issue is climate change, and our most critical social issue is racial justice and equity.

We need housing that is affordable at a variety of price points. We must no longer separate neighborhoods and communities along racial/socioeconomic lines. More racially and socioeconomically integrated communities can help replace our current "high-poverty" and "low-poverty" schools.

Inclusion of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC):

Considering that THRIVE advocates for a robust future that includes creation of diverse neighborhoods to promote racial justice and equity, we urge for stronger policies and language in the Plan that align with the County's Racial Equity and Social Justice Act and strengthen the community outreach & engagement efforts to be more inclusive of communities of color that are most disproportionately affected by climate change.

CLIMATE-

The THRIVE plan concentrates new development (and redevelopment) in compact, mixed-use, mixed-income, pleasant walkable/bikeable neighborhoods along transit-accessible corridors. People will live within a comfortable distance of schools, childcare, retail, restaurants, offices, and open spaces for gathering – MANY daily trips can be completed without the need to drive.

With transit as a way of life, we don't need new roadways --- let's remove M-83 from the Masterplan of Highways and Transitways.

With reduced automobile travel and increased walking and biking, we should see a reduction in Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT), greenhouse gas, air and water pollution. Compact development allows more space for parks, trails and recreation areas. THRIVE's plans for protecting streams and increasing urban tree canopy will also help.

Protection and creation of greenspaces: Thrive includes the vision of complete communities connected also by green corridors. These corridors serve as critical natural infrastructure because they increase resilience to the impacts of climate change and protect water quality. We support the Plan's recommendation of increasing the number of parks, protecting our parks as natural solutions for climate resilience, biodiversity, and habitat protection, and fostering healthy communities. We support creating more opportunities and eliminating barriers for underserved communities to enjoy the wonders of our Parks system.

No net loss of forests: No Net Loss of forests has also been a priority goal of the Sierra Club Maryland Chapter in efforts to strengthen the state Forest Conservation Act. It has now been achieved in Anne Arundel, Howard and Fredrick Countiesⁱ.

Montgomery County continues to lose trees and forest cover. Between 2008 and 2016, development in the County cleared 1,383 acres of forests – the 5th highest amount of forest cleared among all counties in Marylandⁱⁱ. Updating the county's Forest Conservation Law and setting a policy goal in the General Plan to do so such that the county adopts a “no net loss of forest” policy, would be an important step towards protecting our natural resources as key climate mitigation prevention measures.

Net zero buildings: Buildings, are the largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions in the county. It is therefore essential that the Plan have a stronger building greenhouse gas reduction policy in place to create sustainable, energy efficient buildings that reduce GHG. We urge the Council to adopt the 2018 IgCC green construction code.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT-

THRIVE will drive Montgomery County to become a more vibrant and attractive place to live and work. This will increase our ability to recruit and retain top level employers and employees – thus spurring economic development.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to present Sierra Club's strong support for THRIVE.

Shruti Bhatnagar,
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ⁱ Frederick County Government (2020) Frederick's Forest Conservation Law Changes. Available from: <https://frederickcountymd>.

ⁱⁱ CBF (2018) Based on data from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources from individual county Forest Conservation Act Annual Reports and compiled by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Some comparative data was only partial because counties did not submit at least two annual reports to the State, in violation of the State Forest Conservation Act law. Available from: <https://www.cbf.org/document-library/cbf-guides-fact-sheets/md-fca-fact-sheet.pdf>