



The Coalition for Smarter Growth and its puppet offspring, Montgomery 4 All, argue that Thrive Montgomery 2050 fully and effectively addresses affordable housing - that is, housing for those burdened with housing costs that take more than 30% of their income. These are the policies CSG notes in a recent email that Thrive proposes:

As part of the commitment to the Housing First approach, develop strategies to build deeply affordable housing and provide permanent supportive housing

Consider features of other housing models such as social housing that, in addition to providing long-term affordability for low and moderate-income households, emphasizes architectural quality, environmental performance, and social stability

Integrate people with disabilities, people transitioning from homelessness, and older adults into housing with appropriate affordability, amenities and services sized and designed to accommodate their households

Develop targeted strategies to minimize gentrification and displacement while promoting integration and avoiding the concentration of poverty

Refine regulatory tools and financial and other incentives with the goal of avoiding a net loss of market-rate and income-restricted affordable housing stock without erecting disincentives for the construction of additional units

OK so far, although rather obvious and not new.

Thrive is often described as a vision that in itself does not change any zoning or propose implementation of the policies it favors. For that it depends on subsequent zoning and legislative changes.

The Council of Governments (COG) has predicted that Montgomery County will add 200,000 additional residents by 2050, and has set a target that 75% of all new housing should be affordable to low- and moderate-income residents (extrapolating, about 150,000 of the 200,000 will need such housing). Given this mandate, one might think the first housing implementation priority would be expanding the pool of truly affordable housing. Think again.

We currently require new development and redevelopment to include 12.5-15% Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs). These are for people earning, before taxes, up to \$64,500 for a single individual on up to \$107,000 for a family of four. MPDUs will never accommodate all the people who need housing assistance.

The Planning Board has been working for months on a zoning text amendment (ZTA) to address housing in the county. Is it called the Affordable Housing Strategies Initiative? No. It's the *Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative*. Not deeply affordable housing. Housing for reasonably well-paid people, those who can afford a \$700,000 town house in Silver Spring. For the divorced 30-something who resents his 10-minute drive from his \$1800 a month apartment to see his children. For the family with young kids that



wants more room than they have in their starter brick colonial. For people who already have adequate, safe homes. Like many of the people in the Coalition for Smarter Growth and Montgomery 4 All. Not for people desperate for housing, willing to live in substandard apartments and rundown houses just for some shelter, because they can't find anything better for what they can pay.

The theory is that building more "attainable" housing will make more cheaper housing available to those with lower incomes. There's some research that says this works, and some that says it doesn't. Trickle-down housing, no best practices identified, and no reasonable likelihood of success. With COG's target of 75% of new housing to be affordable. And no recognition in the ZTA of the potential for displacement and gentrification of BIPOC and low-income communities in the name of "attainable" housing for predominantly higher income residents.

Why isn't affordable housing the *first* priority of the Planning Board? Because the version of Thrive Montgomery 2050 transmitted to the Council was rewritten by Casey Anderson, the Planning Board Chair who earns over \$200,000 a year, and was never subject to a public hearing at the Board. That may be one reason the racial equity review by the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) states, "Thrive leads with a vision for economic development that focuses on attracting new businesses and workers to the County who can afford to reside and/or work in mixed-use, transit-oriented town centers. Yet, this economic development approach could widen racial and social inequities as it primarily offers benefits to affluent and disproportionately White people."

The report also states, "*OLO stands ready to complete a more thorough RESJ review of Thrive that assesses the RESJ impact of each recommended policy and practice when the plan has been updated to reflect best practices to advance racial equity and social justice.*"

The Council has just hired a consultant to do outreach among BIPOC and low-income residents. It expects the consultant, Nspiregreen, to provide concrete recommendations about racial equity improvements to Thrive by early September. The Council aims to vote on a revised Thrive by October 25. It has already agreed to restore chapters on racial equity, economic development, and the environment. At this point, the Council will have about 7 weeks, with 6 work sessions planned, to revise and debate Thrive, ensure adequate racial equity/social justice review, and create a master plan that provides the legal predicate for future zoning and legislative action. There is no further requirement for a hearing or other public input. As Councilmember Katz said, the timeline is important - but getting it right is most important. That's a tall order.