

October 5, 2021

TO: Council President Hucker and Councilmembers Friedson, Jawando, and Riemer
CC: County Council staff Marlene Michaelson, Pam Dunn, Glenn Orlin

RE: CALL TO INCLUDE A COMPREHENSIVE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN AS A CORE PRIORITY OF THRIVE 2050

The Thrive 2050 Plan (“Thrive”) is a self-described “vision for the county [that] encompasses broad, county-wide policy recommendations for land use, zoning, housing, the economy, equity, transportation, parks and open space, the environment, and historic resources” for the next thirty years. Thrive lists “environmental resiliency” as one of the top three plan outcomes, yet it currently has no dedicated section specifically addressing environmental protection, restoration, or climate change adaptation and carbon sequestration during this era of climate and ecological crisis. To address Thrive’s deficiency, **we call on the County Council to include in Thrive a requirement that the County develop, fund, and implement a comprehensive plan of action to restore and increase green infrastructure (defined below) to specifically combat the defining environmental crises of our time.**

Green infrastructure – meaning interconnected forested greenways (e.g., the Nature Way shown at right), conservation landscaping, constructed wetlands, and native biodiverse habitats – functions as a fundamental, nature-based solution to the environmental and public health challenges that will increasingly emerge as the climate change crisis intensifies. **Communities are not complete without green infrastructure.**



Pasir Panjang Nature Way

Research demonstrates that **green infrastructure planning is essential in a context of urban densification** ([Haaland & Konijnendijk van den Bosch, 2015](#)). Ironically, the Thrive appendix defines a “functional master plan” as “a master plan addressing ... a county-wide system, such as ... green infrastructure” Despite this specific reference, while Montgomery County drafted such a plan over 10 years ago, it has never adopted a Green Infrastructure Functional Master Plan (Montgomery Planning website, 2020).

A plan for green infrastructure in every community is essential for ensuring that all communities are healthy and complete. Complete communities must be prepared for extreme weather events – including flooding and extended periods of intense heat, particularly in the event of power outages. Complete communities need widespread green infrastructure to improve air quality, absorb stormwater and clean streams, recharge groundwater, sequester carbon, and promote biodiversity, all of which in turn improve human health, food systems, and reduce greenhouse gases.

AS I HAVE TRIED TO ILLUSTRATE, WE
NEED TO RESTORE NATURE TO OUR
HOME LANDSCAPES, TO OUR CORPORATE
LANDSCAPES, TO OUR MUNICIPAL
PARKS, AND TO AS MUCH OF OUR
INFRASTRUCTURE AS WE CAN, BECAUSE
OUR PARKS AND PRESERVES ARE NOT
LARGE ENOUGH TO DO THE JOB ALONE.

Douglas W. Tallamy

*Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that
Starts in Your Yard*

#kindlequotes

Thrive 2050 does dedicate a section to public parks and recreation, where the natural environment is mentioned. We agree that improving and strengthening our public park system is important, however **parks alone cannot be expected to function as green infrastructure for the bulk of the County – particularly in dense down-County areas.**

A green infrastructure plan must set targets to increase forests and tree canopy, preserve habitat diversity, and plan a connected system of natural areas across private and public lands, with a special focus on urban areas, corridors, and priority neighborhoods targeted for increased densities. Such a plan should also guide development and permitting processes.

To accomplish this objective, Thrive 2050 must state clearly that equitably distributed green infrastructure is a public priority – and require that a comprehensive plan of action to restore and increase green infrastructure across the County be crafted, in concert with the County's Climate Action Plan.

We urge the Council to show environmental leadership during this time when the County is being swept up into a world experiencing the twin crises of accelerating climate change and widespread biodiversity loss.

Sincerely,

Urban Ecosystem Restorations Conservation Montgomery Montgomery Countryside Alliance
Rock Creek Conservancy Potomac Conservancy Audubon Naturalist Society
Sugarloaf Citizens' Association TAME Coalition Little Falls Watershed Alliance
Cedar Lane Environmental Justice Ministry Takoma Alliance for Local Living Economy
Cedar Lane Ecosystems Study Group Our Revolution Montgomery County
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
Charles Koiner Conservancy for Urban Farming
EPIC (Empowering People in Communities) of Montgomery County
Brandy Brooks, Candidate for Montgomery County Council At-Large

References

Haaland, C., & Konijnendijk van den Bosch, C. (2015). Challenges and strategies for urban green-space planning in cities undergoing densification: A review. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2015.07.009>

Montgomery Planning Website: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/environment/> : "To better support native species, maintain ecological processes, sustain air and water resources, and contribute to human health and quality of life, environmental planners drafted a green infrastructure plan to protect an interconnected system. The plan, which was put on hold due to 2010 budget cuts, will consider greater environmental viability, value, and function than the sum of the individual resources and develop strategies to protect a connected network of waterways, wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitats and other natural areas of countywide significance.