



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

October 6, 2021

Chuck Boyd, AICP
Director, Planning Coordination
Maryland Department of Planning
301 W. Preston Street, Suite 1101
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Mr. Boyd:

I am writing to request that the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) conduct a supplementary review of the current Planning Board Draft of the County's proposed new General Plan, known as Thrive Montgomery 2050. The comments that MDP sent to the Planning Board on November 6, 2020, were based on MDP's review of the Working Draft Plan, which became the Public Hearing Draft presented to the public for comment on November 19, 2020.

Shortly after that public hearing, the Planning Board began a chapter-by-chapter rewrite, one at a time, deleting some chapters entirely, adding new chapters, and generally removing key recommendations over the course of several months. The process was extremely confusing to the public, and even to the relevant executive agencies. The result was little public and agency participation during the rewrite. No additional public hearing was held on the changed Planning Board Draft; it was transmitted to the Montgomery County Council on April 13, 2021, and it is now being reviewed by the Montgomery County Council.

Here is a link to the Thrive 2050 Public Hearing Draft: <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Public-Hearing-Draft-Plan-Thrive-Montgomery-2050-final-10-5.pdf> and here is a link to the Planning Board Draft https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/THRIVE-Planning-Board-Draft-2021-Pages_web.pdf. A comparison of the Table of Contents of each document shows the extent of the revisions. Among the changes:

- The chapters on Economic Development (Public Hearing Draft Chapter 3, Resilient

Economy) and the Environment (Public Hearing Draft Chapter 6, Healthy and Sustainable Environment) have been removed from the Planning Board Draft; the Planning Board Draft added a new chapter called “Parks and Recreation for an Increasingly Urban and Diverse Community: Active and Social.” Comments on the environment and the economy have been scattered throughout the Planning Board Draft.

- Most of the policy and action items presented in the chapters of the Public Hearing Draft, many of which MDP cited in its comments, have either been removed or watered down. Instead, the Planning Board includes many of these recommendations in a separate document that is not part of the General Plan; they will not be considered in the Council’s review process. The Director of the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection has written to the County Council committee reviewing Thrive 2050 to ask councilmembers to restore the chapter on the environment, as well as the substantive policy statements and action items.

MDP’s comments of November 6, 2020, note that there are minimum state law requirements for certain elements within a charter county’s general plan, as well as for implementation of the 12 State Visions. Because these are all essential parts of a General Plan expected to guide our land use policies for the next few decades, I request that MDP comment on whether the Planning Board Draft adequately addresses the key elements and the 12 State Visions.

Finally, I want to confirm to you my understanding that the Maryland Department of Planning coordinates and provides only limited review of the proposed revisions to Montgomery County’s General Plan upon request and, further, that you have no authority over the adoption of the plan and typically defer to the local process on land use matters. I am making this request for a supplementary review because of the unusual and considerable changes made between the time MDP sent its comments on the Working Draft in November 2020 and the Planning Board transmitted the new Planning Board Draft to the County Council in April 2021-- and because of the importance of the General Plan to Montgomery County. As the Planning Board states in the introduction to the Planning Board Draft (p.4), “[e]very jurisdiction must adopt some form of general or ‘comprehensive’ plan as a legal predicate for the exercise of the government’s land use and zoning powers...”

The Council committee reviewing the plan has scheduled work sessions through October 18th; after that, the full Council will begin its review. I would appreciate having your input prior to Council’s review.

Sincerely,



Marc Elrich
County Executive