



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

M E M O R A N D U M

September 12, 2022

TO: Gabe Albornoz, President
Montgomery County Council

FROM: Marc Elrich, County Executive

SUBJECT: Thrive 2050

I have read the report from Nspiregreen and Public Engagement Associates, the consultant team hired at the request of the County Council to “identify the best option for obtaining targeted input from communities of color and other under-represented communities across the County; assist stakeholders with a chapter-by-chapter review of the policies and practices recommended in the PHED Committee draft; propose revisions to the Draft using best practices for developing racially and socially equitable policies; and assist with the development of a new chapter that describes the historical and current drivers of racial and social inequities in land use, housing, and transportation.” (See Council staff report, p. 1; PDF p. 3)

Based on the findings of the consultant team and the significant changes they recommend, I urge the Council to disapprove Thrive 2050 to allow more outreach to BIPOC and low-income residents. The many recommendations in the Report addressing racial equity and social justice (RESJ) should be given full consideration. Disapproving Thrive 2050 as now drafted would also allow sufficient time for additional public hearings and departmental review.

While proponents of the current draft plan for Thrive 2050 cite a survey that includes favorable responses to the stated goals of Thrive 2050, the answers were in response to questions that framed Thrive’s stated vision but not the land use policies it lays out to achieve that vision. In fact, the Report concludes that while Thrive’s goals were clearly stated at the beginning of the outreach and engagement process, they were not followed as the project progressed (See consultant team’s Report, p. 7; PDF, p. 11.) Later responses from residents to the consultant team expressed considerable doubt that the plan as now drafted would address the significant

geographic and demographic disparities and might instead make communities of color more vulnerable to displacement or a continuation of the disparities. The Report identified significant problems with the public outreach and engagement to date, along with proposed recommendations, that would take time to implement.

The proposed timetable calling for Council review and final action by October 25 does not allow enough time to digest and act on the many issues raised in this report. Rather than rushing to meet the statutory deadline for passage of land use plans by October 31 in an election year, the Council should welcome the opportunity to accept the Report's findings that there is a need for more outreach to and engagement of BIPOC and low-income residents and acknowledge the breadth of changes recommended on page 38 of the Report (PDF, p. 42). The many recommendations addressing racial equity and social justice (RESJ) should be given full consideration. Disapproving Thrive 2050 as now drafted would also allow sufficient time for additional public hearings and departmental review of new chapters that, as of this date, neither the public nor the Executive departments have seen.

The consultant team has proposed over 65 recommended changes to Thrive to address the concerns of BIPOC and low-income residents in concrete, direct terms. Among other things, the Report recommends Community Benefit Agreements; strong tools to prevent displacement, particularly in areas with Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH); more parks in BIPOC and low-income areas to increase housing values, Rent to Own Programs; and adding low-income housing to high-income areas by identifying a threshold of low-income housing that supports the local economy. Report, pgs. 38-40; PDF pgs. 42-44. These are only a few of the excellent recommendations that begin the process of including BIPOC and low-income residents as equal partners in the County's long-term plan for future growth.

Thank you for your consideration.

cc: Joy Nurmi, Chief of Staff to Council President