

Hello everyone. The Darnestown Civic Association wishes to thank Chair Anderson, Vice Chair 'Fawne'-Gonzalez, and the rest of the board for allowing us to testify today. We also wish to thank Director Wright and the entire Montgomery Planning staff for their exceptional work which we enjoy every day as we live our lives in Montgomery County.

### **Select Overall Observations**

Schools are a vital and central part of our communities yet their inclusion in Thrive seems tangential and strained at best. We hope current governance and planning structures are able to overcome obstacles so our schools can be an integral part of Thrive.

We are surprised about the lack of points around watersheds and other fragile ecological resources as they are the backbone of green corridors and require more protection than ever as we increase the human activity in green corridors.

We were a bit A bit startled by:

Action 3.5.3.b: Encourage and facilitate the physical integration of higher education campuses such as Montgomery College and the Universities at Shady Grove into their urban surroundings.

We are perplexed and concerned about the Universities at Shady Grove being seen as having urban surroundings. We fear solving sprawl and corridor bloat by making urban areas larger could be an unintended and undesirable consequence of Thrive.

We are encouraged by:

Action 8.6.1.c: Establish a neighborhood design center within the Planning Department that equitably supports citizens through community-engaged design and planning services for projects identified by neighborhood residents.

and

Policy 6.1.3: Support the concepts of compact form of development and complete communities to avoid sprawl. Limit expansion of new roads and of the sewer and water system to direct new development to areas served by existing infrastructure.

We think it important to address all basic needs as done for food specifically in:

Action 7.4.1.a: Develop a food security plan with the Montgomery County Food Council and county agencies to include urban, suburban and rural farming that expands access to local foods.

Policy 7.4.8: Establish food production and distribution infrastructure to enable county growers to process their products locally and to reach residents through culinary, grocery and wholesale outlets. This system will increase the competitiveness of farmers and reduce reliance on imported agricultural products and associated carbon emissions.

We believe delivery services should have mandatory training, certification and licensing around safe driving practices, package handling and where food safety is involved the level of care should be equal to other food services. Thrive recognizes the growing role of delivery in our society and can prepare legislators for pre-cursor elements of public policy around emerging trends embraced by Thrive.

Lastly, we think agile, multi-dimensional statements of approach are more effective than monolithic aspirational statements and myopic single solutions looking for problems to solve. The statement in Theme 7 Diverse and Adaptable Growth is an example of a statement of approach we think works well.

“Managing Growth as a Mature, Built-Out County

Since the future is unpredictable, we must be flexible and nimble in our plans and implementation tools so we can change quickly and adapt to new conditions and still be able to keep our focus on achieving the desired outcomes no matter what challenges and disruptions we will face. Today, technological innovations such as wayfinding apps can give us real time information expanding our ability to manage traffic in a whole different way. Increases in the number of people working remotely, as well as demand for office space, and could change the traffic conditions significantly.

We must manage growth and development as a mature, built out county by maximizing use of constrained land, and explore new mechanisms to evaluate and deliver public facilities and infrastructure improvements.”

We believe Diverse and Adaptable Growth is best served with diverse and adaptable solutions.

## Rural Design

While initially appealing, it now seems odd to have Design principles combined in Theme 8 with Arts and Culture.

Statements in Theme 7 Diverse and Adaptable Growth are concerning. For example, the following paragraph about the applicability of urbanism and compact development:

The principles of urbanism and compact development can be applied in urban, suburban and rural areas to address the variation in context, scale, intensity and the desired community character. According to a ULI paper, compact development “does not imply high-rise or even uniformly high density, but rather higher average “blended” densities. Compact development also features a mix of land uses, development of strong population and employment centers, interconnection of streets, and the design of structures and spaces at a human scale.”<sup>51</sup>

We are open minded but wary and doubt the recursive nature of compaction and believe at its core it the belies the most desirable features of each form type. As stated earlier we prefer a broader solution set of design principles. We envision a dynamic and broad range of Complete Communities across a wide spectrum of densities each with their own interpretive application of design principles befitting their defining aspects.

We are similarly concerned about the following statement in the Theme 8 Design, Arts, and Culture Vision section:

A comprehensive urban design vision strengthens and creates a collection of great towns, cities and rural villages, each with neighborhoods built around a walkable center.

We are not sure we share the concept or agree about what those neighborhood centers would look like in a rural setting.

We want to be clear we do not view compact urban form design elements as compatible with rural villages. For example, while the design work was comprehensive and well done, the Sandy Spring Rural Village Plan strikes us as particularly not rural.

We welcome the opportunity to continue to explore these design and form gradient elements with you, the staff, and our community.

Thank you for your time and attention.