



THRIVE MONTGOMERY 2050

Racial Equity and
Social Justice Review



Thrive Montgomery 2050

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thrive Montgomery 2050 (Thrive 2050) is the new countywide general plan developed by the Montgomery County Planning Department. Thrive 2050 is a policy document that will guide future growth and development over the next 30 years.

Racial Equity and Social Justice Review

The Montgomery County Council contracted the Nspiregreen/Public Engagement Associates project team to work with the County and its residents to evaluate the current Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (“PHED”) Committee draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050 with a focus on issues of racial equity and social justice.

This project aims to ensure that historically disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups are more accurately and carefully represented in the Thrive 2050 plan. Central to this initiative, a public outreach effort was conducted to connected with Black, Indigenous, other ‘People of Color’ (BIPOC), and low-moderate income residents to gather input on their lived experiences and how they relate to the planning themes in Thrive 2050.

Feedback from engagement activities was used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current planning process and develop new recommendations on how to improve Thrive 2050 while centering issues of Racial Equity and Social Justice in all of the significant plan areas:

Compact Growth: Corridor Focused Development

Complete Communities: Mix of Uses and Forms

Design, Arts, and Culture: Investing and Building Community

Transportation and Communication Networks: Connecting People, Places, and Ideas

Housing for All: More of Everything

Parks and Recreation for an Increasingly Urban and Diverse Community: Active and Social

Generally, we found a lukewarm reaction to Thrive's policies amongst our target demographic. While we received some positive feedback, many people expressed frustration due to a perceived lack of context-sensitivity in approach that did not go far enough to consider and prioritize the needs of working class communities. Some folks expressed skepticism around successful plan implementation and felt that adverse unintended consequences were likely in their communities if certain safeguards were not reinforced in the methodology. Additionally, there were many who felt that the prior community engagement efforts were not adequate, and that the plan did not reflect a truly participatory process. One thing everyone could agree on, is that Montgomery County is doing a great job with their parks, recreation and open space planning.

FRAMING

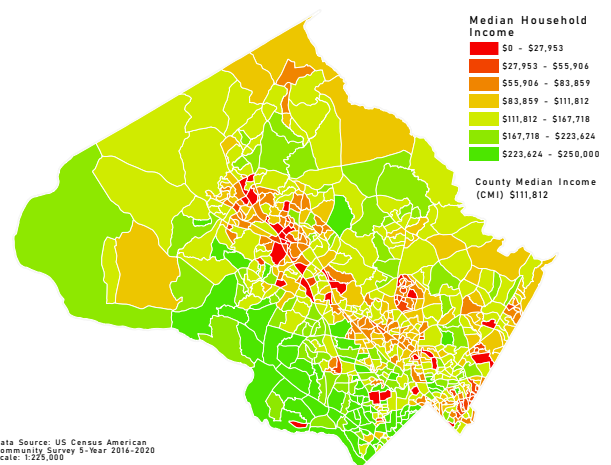
COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Our process was designed to engage Black, Indigenous, Latin/x, and other people of color, as well as low-moderate income individuals to learn about their lived experiences, their perspectives on Thrive 2050, and what they felt needed to be done in the County to advance Racial Equity and Social Justice.

Identifying and Consulting with Key Institutions

The importance of engaging local social and cultural institutions when seeking to build inroads into historically disadvantaged and vulnerable communities cannot be understated. These communities, in particular, grapple with diminished or nonexistent trust in public institutions due to historical exploitation and/or broken promises. As a result, it can make mobilizing genuine participation very difficult. One of the first steps to building relationships in these communities was to identify vital groups that help create the underlying social fabric. The essential groups comprise local community-based, faith-based, and focused immigrant organizations; schools; civic associations; community development corporations; third spaces (for example, barbershops, bodegas, or ethnic restaurants) that can serve as congregation points for community members where they will feel safe and comfortable expressing themselves.

Obtaining support from community leaders helped mobilize populations previously excluded or unengaged by prior planning initiatives to have a "seat at the table" in addressing the future of their communities and region.



The County's low-income communities are clustered along the central corridor (I-270) and along the east edge of the County. It is no coincidence that these areas are also where the majority of the people of color live.

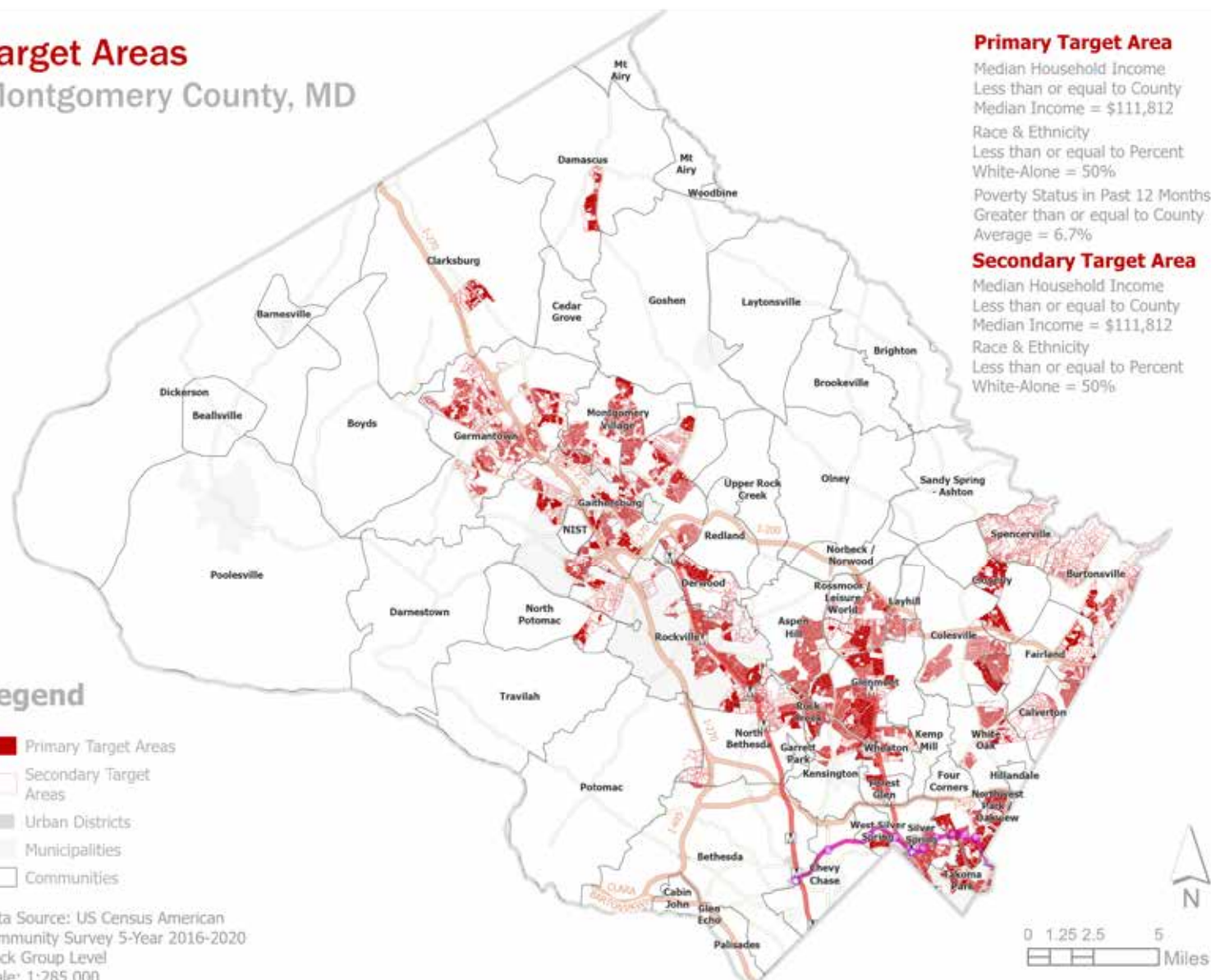
Target Areas

Montgomery County, MD

Legend

- Primary Target Areas
- Secondary Target Areas
- Urban Districts
- Municipalities
- Communities

Data Source: US Census American Community Survey 5-Year 2016-2020
Block Group Level
Scale: 1:285,000



Identifying Target Communities

A demographic analysis was conducted to identify key communities for targeted outreach including those with significant African American, Latinx, other significant/growing immigrant groups, and low-income populations.

Target Areas are areas within Montgomery County that have been identified, at the block group level, to have higher representation of minorities, low-income households, and poverty rates when compared to the County averages.

The Primary Target Areas are those with a Median Household Income that is less than or equal to \$111,812, a population where those identifying as white is less than 50-percent, and a proportion of those in poverty at 6.7 percent or higher.

Secondary Target Areas share similar characteristics with Primary Target Areas except for the poverty status factor.

Target Areas appear to be concentrated within urban areas, immediately adjacent to interstate highways such as I-270, and areas along the existing Metro Red Line and future Purple Line light rail.

The communities of Glenmont, Wheaton, Cloverly, and Oakview appear to have a high concentration of Primary Target Areas.

Lessons Learned

Task Overview

The consultant team was tasked with conducting a comprehensive review of previous Thrive 2050 Outreach and Engagement materials to identify ways in which community engagement could be improved and expanded to reach target communities and better integrate their feedback into the goals and priorities of the plan.

The team evaluated past engagement metrics and used input from the focus groups, survey, community forum, and other stakeholder conversations to review the engagement strategy adopted by the Montgomery County Planning Department and to provide recommendations on how future outreach and engagement can better reach out to and incorporate input from communities that were underrepresented in previous Thrive 2050 efforts.

Comprehensive Review of Previous Thrive 2050 Efforts

The Montgomery Planning Department officially conducted public outreach and engagement efforts from June 2019 to December 2021. Thrive 2050'S engagement efforts were guided by strong goals that sought to prioritize equitable engagement within underrepresented communities, offered metrics to determine level of success, and outlined communities of focus for the project. The metrics used to define success in outreach and engagement included:

The public will have provided significant meaningful input and feedback throughout the process.

The public understand that this planning is long view thinking, and the outcomes will come over many decades.

The public feel that they've been heard and see how their input is used.

People understand why some plan recommendations don't reflect their precise input.

The public support and advocate for the plan.

» *Envisioning Survey*

1500+ Participants

» *Newsletter Subscribers*

1374 Subscribers, 36 letters sent, 39% open rate and 8% click rate

» *Virtual Meetings*

286 Participants, 36 letters sent, 39% open rate and 8% click rate

» *Mailers and Public Testimony*

90,000 mailers sent to equity emphasis areas to invite people to provide public testimony. Total of 85 people provided public testimony.

» *Advertisements*

Transit ads reached 6500 Daily/ 1.4 million on Metro Platforms.
Online advertisements: clicks on ads 9250+ and reached 1.1 million people.

» *Thrive 2050 Website*

68,139 Views

» *Meetings in a Box*

1300 Meeting-in-a-Box sent to HOAS and Community Associations

Additionally, outreach and engagement to community organizations was outlined to be successful when community organizations were able to:

- Provide expertise, insight, and feedback throughout the entire process.

- Help engage community members.

- Feel good about the plan and support plan recommendations, and specifically embrace the policy recommendations that came from the plan.

Thrive 2050's engagement strategy also specifically identified community groups of focus that needed to be prioritized during the engagement process. These groups included renters, Latin/x residents, foreign born residents, African Americans, Millennial and Gen X families, High School and College students, community based organizations, and small business.

The outreach goals and metrics that were identified from the beginning follow public engagement best practices of identifying actionable goals for outreach, identifying populations of focus particularly those previously underrepresented in planning processes, and agreeing on metrics that can measure the success of engagement activities.

However, while these goals were clear and present from the beginning of the outreach and engagement process, they were not reviewed or connected to engagement activities as the project progressed. Evaluating

Outreach and Engagement Successes

The outreach and engagement efforts that were conducted from June 2019 to December 2021 benefitted from successful outreach tactics, platforms, and engagement levels. Overall, the Montgomery County Planning department reported that approximately 12,000 residents from Montgomery County were reached by the earliest stages of engagement. Participation levels in the Thrive 2050 newsletter demonstrated a significant interest in staying involved in the Thrive 2050 process. The newsletter received 1374 subscribers and the open rates and click rates averaged 39% and 8% respectively. The Montgomery Planning Department invested funding in advertising in areas that were accessible to most residents within the populations of interest for engagement. These advertisements were able to reach approximately 6500 daily from transit ads and 1.4 million on Metro platforms.

Equity was also centered on the design of some engagement activities. Specifically, the planning department sent 90,000 mailers to households in equity emphasis areas to invite residents to provide public testimony. A total of 85 people were able to testify at the planning board hearing. However, it was not clear if these participants received information about this engagement opportunity from the 90,000 mailers.

COVID-19 and Virtual Engagement

Thrive 2050's engagement and outreach process was impacted by the sudden public health emergency brought by the COVID-19 Pandemic. While in-person engagement efforts were put on pause, the planning department was successful in quickly adapting some of their engagement activities into virtual opportunities. Some of these activities included providing more informational virtual meetings, continue to engage via their newsletter platform, and promoting innovative virtual series such as 'Pints with a Planner' and the 'Ask me Anything' series. The planning department reported that approximately 286 participants participated in virtual meetings.

Public Outreach and Engagement Shortcomings

Three main issues were identified as being the primary problems with past Thrive 2050 Outreach: a lack of demographic data gathering, lack of racial representation in early phases of engagement, and lack of transparency and clarity about the stakeholder and community outreach process.

01. Lack of Demographic Data Gathering and Reporting

Engagement activities such as the Envisioning Quiz, Newsletter Subscribers, and Mailers sent to equity emphasis areas engaged a significant number of residents. However, there was no proper demographic documentation from participants. Engagement activities lacked sign-up sheets with demographic questions during virtual meetings or a demographic information section on the Envisioning Quiz. Additionally, mailers sent to emphasis areas have been highlighted as the primary equity-based engagement method implemented in this process. However, demographic information was not captured if any of the 90,000 fliers were received by the target population.

02. Racial Representation in Early Stages of Planning

Input received during focus groups and the Thrive Montgomery 2050 questionnaire show that the public was not satisfied with the racial representation of the group of participants from the first round of engagement. There were no methods applied to evaluate the demographic information of active participants from the first round of engagement. However, the 2020 Thrive Montgomery 2050 Questionnaire asked participants if they participated in previous engagement activities hosted by the Montgomery County Planning Department. 411 people expressed that they had participated in the early stages of engagement. Out of these 411 participants, 94 chose to not answer the question and 324 identified as white. 260 people reported having an income over \$75,000, with a majority of this group having an income that exceeded 100k. While these survey questions are not meant to provide a complete representation of the people that were involved in early phases of Thrive 2050 engagement, these numbers do give a good idea of the demographic background of the majority of participants from the first phase of engagement.

03. Lack of Clarity and Transparency in the Outreach and Engagement Process.

During the focus groups and public forum, stakeholders expressed not trusting the outreach that was done to community organizations. Two primary problems were identified:

Meetings were scheduled with community organizations; however, they were scheduled to discuss other different issues than Thrive Montgomery 2050. During these meetings, Thrive Montgomery 2050 was mentioned in relationship to the issues already being discussed but it was not the sole topic of the meeting. Community members did not think it was transparent to list those meetings as part of Thrive Montgomery 2050 outreach.

Meetings with community organizations were listed down as official activities of the outreach process. However, multiple community members from these organizations expressed never having heard of Thrive 2050 or the meetings that took place about Thrive 2050.

Public Engagement and Outreach Recommendations

The consultant team has put together a series of general recommendations that directly addresses some of the shortcomings from the early phases of Thrive 2050 Engagement. These general recommendations are more tailored to make changes to current agency procedures that can serve as more equitable blueprint for future engagement plans or efforts. In addition to these recommendations, there are additional recommendations on how to more equitably reach out to BIPOC communities. Recommendations with ** were directly recommended by members of the public.

General Recommendations

General Recommendations	Details
Adopt a formal and uniform agency procedure to collect demographic information from engagement participants.	Use Title VI requirements as benchmarks goals for collecting demographic data during engagement efforts. Title VI demographic data collection requirements should be the starting point for this process and not the standard. Aside from race/ethnicity, income, gender, zipcode, age, town/city, consider including asking other questions such as sexual and gender orientation, housing status, country of origin, language barriers, and level of education.
Require the creation of Public Outreach and Engagement Plans for each project that requires public participation	These plans need to differentiate the planning, implementation, and metrics associated with engagement vs. those associated with outreach. This will create transparency and clarity in the level of effort that goes into conducting outreach and the level of success in getting people to actually participate in the activities being promoted.
Invest Time and Resources in Community Relationship Building Outside of Official Engagement Project Timelines **	Engagement activities will benefit from higher levels of engagement when community members and leaders feel personally connected to the project or know about agency promoting the engagement events. This type of awareness and comfort cannot be created during tight engagement timelines. Consider doing some of the actions that were implemented during early stages of engagement, such as meeting-in-a-box tool kits, pop-up at community events, and general presentations about planning work throughout the year.
Prioritize community input-based planning process by being transparent about how public input is being utilized in planning projects. **	Be clear with the public about the type of input you need from them and how their input will be utilized throughout the project. Do not bury or isolate public input reporting in public engagement reports or appendices, instead find ways to directly connect planning and technical work with public input. Be clear about how public input influenced planning work in official work like planning documents, reports, and presentations.

Recommendations for Engagement for Future Long Range Planning work

Recommendation	Details
Complete a Comprehensive Study of Racialized Planning History in Montgomery County to help guide future community outreach and engagement work.	This study should focus on determining social impacts and economic loss due to racist policies and practices. Establish full implementation plan aimed at economic empowerment for communities of color.
For future plans, require an equity analysis which focuses on the impacts of growth strategies on displacement and opportunity for people of color.	Use this analysis to evaluate future planning recommendations and strategies and to identify populations of focus for future engagement work.
For future range planning work, design and implement a statistically significant survey that represents the values and opinions across all demographic groups. Establish statistically significant thresholds to reach out to underrepresented communities in the county.	Offer this statistically significant survey as part of a greater mixed methods engagement process. This includes supplementing the survey with additional focus groups, pop-ups, or community organization presentations to make sure qualitative methods are being utilized to reach out to underrepresented communities that might not feel comfortable participating in big quantitative engagement efforts.
Look for opportunities to empower communities of color and low-income communities on advisory and Decision Making Boards. **	Do not expect people to independently volunteer time and effort into these efforts. Conduct targeted outreach within community organizations, schools, and other advocacy groups that are actively engaged in underrepresented communities to share information about advisory and decision making boards and ways to be involved.

Best Practices in Outreach and Engagement in BIPOC Communities

BIPOC Outreach Best Practices

Invest significant resources in grassroots recruitment and engagement with and for underrepresented populations. **

Offer meetings at different times and days to include people who work in the evenings and make meetings more accessible with less writing, more oral communication that mirrors the way people speak and understand English. **

Utilize onsite child care during engagement events. **

Make engagement far more convenient and accessible. Convene in traditionally underserved communities. Meet at times and locations convenient to them. **

Reach out at the beginning of a process to the county's wealth of nonprofits and faith-based organizations. Collaborate with a subset of them as genuine partners in the outreach and engagement. **

Come to these communities very early in the process to understand their concerns, needs, and aspirations. Then follow-up and work with them throughout the process.

Involve youth directly in all aspects of the work and be more versatile and innovative in how you reach them. **

Bring Thrive Discussions to the People. Go to: metro stops, international grocery stores, food banks, libraries, cultural exchanges, barbershops, public schools, Montgomery College, Universities at Shady Grove. **

Table at public events, parades, festivals, urban walking trails, or grocery stores like Westfield Mall or Costco in Wheaton.

Tailor surveys to the people you want to reach. Create more than 1 survey to help gather input from various perspectives.

Offer compensation for participation. **

Have trusted constituents who are part of communities to co-host meetings/events with Thrive planning leads.

Look for community ambassadors to convene the conversation. If possible, have them facilitate with incentives.

Invest further time in Thrive 2050 to engage BIPOC communities. Thrive 2050 needs 1-2 more years for community chats. **

Conduct door to door canvassing in equity emphasis areas to engage with residents from low-income backgrounds and BIPOC communities. **

Executing a Comprehensive Engagement Approach

As part of the Racial Equity and Social Justice analysis of Thrive Montgomery 2050, the Office of Montgomery County Council requested our team to design and execute a robust community outreach strategy to obtain input from communities of color and other underrepresented groups in the County.

Nspiregreen and Public Engagement Associates (PEA) implemented a five-part effort to ensure the voices of people of color, immigrants, and residents from lower-income households were well represented in this process.

Focus Groups

We convened eight focus groups involving nearly 90 residents from these groups in a two-hour process to learn about and weigh in on the basic elements of Thrive 2050 while also providing a unique perspective on where the plan falls short on racial equity and social justice issues

Community Questionnaire

We deployed a community survey focused on reaching our target populations, which was also disseminated widely. More than 1,850 county residents took the Thrive 2050 racial equity and social justice survey, with nearly 37 percent of them from BIPOC communities.

Large Community Forum

We organized a single, community-wide, virtual Community Forum in mid-August attended by more than 150 county residents (from nearly 300 registrants), about half of whom were BIPOC. Residents learned and were polled on key elements of the Thrive 2050

plan and then provided in-depth input on how the plan could ensure a greater focus on racial equity strategy and outcomes, as well as how to improve future engagement in planning initiatives with BIPOC communities.

Recruitment and Engagement Advisory Group

Given the constraints of time, we pulled together a relatively small advisory team to:

- solicit feedback, in mid-July, on our overall recruitment and engagement strategy as well as provide input on equity issues

- provide initial analysis, in mid-August, of input and feedback received from our engagements and receive guidance on preparing for the final report.

Community Pop-ups

We held a series of seven pop-up events, at community festivals, Metro stations, and shopping centers from late July through mid August. At each high traffic area, we gave people access to the community survey (through the use of project tablets), distributed flyers about the project and the forum, and engaged in brief conversations about key issues in the Thrive 2050 plan.

As a result of these extensive efforts in a very compressed time frame (early July-mid August), Nspiregreen has identified a comprehensive set of themes from the community's input on Thrive 2050 and drafted recommendations about how County officials can improve community engagement with underserved communities in the future.



RACIAL EQUITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE //

FOCUS GROUPS

The Outreach and Participant Recruitment Strategy

General Strategy

Involving Montgomery County residents underrepresented in discussions about THRIVE 2050 in the previous Planning Department outreach efforts presented many challenges for our team. Those who the planning department had difficulty including in initial efforts remain "hard to reach" for many reasons. The consulting team had to make special efforts to get valuable feedback from them. This task was made much more difficult by the compressed timeframe for this project since the scope of work only allocated 6-8 weeks to organize and conduct all of the activities. This timeframe works inadequately when schools are not in session, people are away on vacation, and many organizations are less active.

To get as much meaningful input as possible from low-moderate income residents, immigrants, and members of racial and ethnic minorities, we crafted a strategy based on two key principles that are particularly important when working with people underrepresented in the discussion of important issues. Those two principles are:

Issue invitations that are as personal as possible—This means talking directly with key individuals, sending personal emails, and following up with texts or calls to those who express interest.

Work closely with organizations trusted by those we are trying to reach—People who are not generally involved in discussions are much more likely to respond positively if asked to do so by an organization they are a part of

Another belief underlying our outreach strategy is that planners should **compensate people** from these target communities who give significant time to share their views, if possible. The need for compensation is particularly true given the large number of activities the work scope required the consultant team to conduct in a short period. Fortunately, the Nspiregreen team obtained funding from the Montgomery County Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice to compensate focus group participants and created a raffle for those who filled out the survey. Montgomery County also provided free meals for all in-person focus group participants. This support was essential to our success in getting people involved—especially in the focus groups.

While our main focus was on issuing targeted invitations to key individuals and groups, we also experimented with several methods of reaching out to the broader target population to reach more significant numbers of people. We sent emails to selected lists, mailed postcards to residents in target neighborhoods, and conducted "pop-up meetings" in selected neighborhoods.

Community Advisory Group

To assist our personalized and direct outreach efforts, we created an informal advisory group to help us develop strategy and make contacts. Each of the ten members of this advisory group are well connected in the communities we sought to engage. They gave valuable advice and guidance about how to get people involved. We held two meetings with this group, and we also consulted individually with most of them on multiple occasions. The members of the advisory group were:

Ana Martinez—IMPACT Silver Spring and MORE

Eneshal Miller—Educational Sustainability Mobilization

Mady Nadjé—Everyday Canvassing

Vanessa Pinto—CHEER

Dan Reed—Greater Greater Washington

Rhiannon Reeves—Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

Harriet Shangarai—Office of Community Partnerships

Izola Shaw—Montgomery County Racial Equity Network (MORE)

Lene Tsegaye—Kefa Café/ Ethiopian community groups

Alex Vazquez—CASA de Maryland

Personal Invitations to Participate

We began our invitation process by developing a key contacts list composed of individuals, groups, organizations, and county agencies that are part of our target communities and/or work closely with them in some way. More than 150 contacts were on this list, and we issued direct invitations to participate to all of them. This list included leaders in these communities and organizations representing almost every ethnic group in Montgomery County. Several groups also focused on economic development and the specific concerns of low-moderate income people. We also contacted some groups active in particular neighborhoods as well as a few key churches and direct service organizations.

In most cases, we made the initial contact with a personal email, and whenever possible, it was followed up by a phone call and/or a text message. Individuals were presented with several ways that they - and those they work with - could be involved, such as filling out the survey, participating in a focus group and/or attending the public forum. We made an explicit effort to get clear commitments about how they would help so we could follow up and support their efforts. We sent multiple personal invitations to almost everyone on the list, and shared follow-up information (i.e., copies of the surveys in different languages and registration information for the forum) as it became available.

We shared another set of personal invitations directly with members of two specific communities—Takoma Park and Briggs-Chaney. To organize focus groups and promote the survey, we partnered with Everyday Canvassing to reach out to individuals they had previously talked to as they went door to door in those areas. We developed a telephone script that the Everyday Canvassing staff used and some follow-up materials they could send to interested individuals. They had a very high response rate from the calls they made; as a result, we were able to fill two focus groups entirely from the individuals who responded in these two neighborhoods.

Work with Trusted Organizations

Trust is a key factor in getting people who have not previously been involved to take time to give feedback on something like Thrive 2050. Therefore, working with organizations that are known and respected in the community was essential to our efforts. Fortunately, more than half of the 40 groups we contacted agreed to assist our outreach efforts in some way. The most common actions were to promote the survey and help us to recruit focus group participants. Groups did this in various ways, such as forwarding information to their mailing lists, inserting links in their newsletters, making announcements at meetings, and referring us to specific individuals who wanted to participate.

Below is a list of some of the key organizations we reached out to about getting their members involved in our efforts:

Action in Montgomery (AIM)
African American Chamber of Commerce
Asian American LEAD
CASA de Maryland
CHEER Takoma Park
Educational Sustainability Mobilization
Ethiopian Community Center
Everyday Canvassing

Francophone Africans Alliance
Gandhi Brigade
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Identity
Impact Silver Spring
Jews United for Justice
Korean Community Service Center
Latino Civic Project

Leadership Montgomery
League of Educators for Asian American Progress
Montgomery County Food Council
Montgomery County Students for Change
Montgomery County Muslim Foundation
NAACP Montgomery County Chapter
SEIU local 500
Vietnamese Americans Association

In addition, we also worked with representatives of several Montgomery County agencies that work closely with those we were seeking to involve, including:

Regional Service Centers—We reached out to all five service centers and had frequent contact with the ones in East County and Silver Spring; one of the focus groups took place in the East County Regional Center

Gilchrist Immigrant Resources Centers—We sent information and made calls to staff in the main center in Wheaton and the one in Gaithersburg.

Office of Community Partnerships—We had contact with the OCP staff that work with immigrant communities from Africa, Vietnam, Ethiopia, China, and Latin America and asked them to promote the surveys in various languages.

We worked closely with organizations comprised of members of two of the hardest-to-reach populations: 1) Spanish-speaking residents and 2) students of color (ages 16-25). We made agreements with CASA de Maryland in Wheaton and CHEER in Long Branch to host focus groups and recruit members of their organizations to participate. Both groups did this successfully, and their offices held focus groups in Spanish. In addition, we worked with several different groups to identify participants for a focus group held with high school and college students. Montgomery County Students for Change, staff at Montgomery College, and the Gandhi Brigade all assisted in recruiting a diverse group of students for an online focus group.

Outreach to Broader Target Population

Although our strategy focused primarily on making direct and personal appeals for involvement, we also undertook three other efforts in the hopes of significantly expanding the number of people who could be involved. We did that in three ways:

Sending emails to existing lists of interested individuals—we sent emails to a total of about 2000 people who had been previously involved in discussions on THRIVE 2050 as well as those county residents Public Engagement Associates had worked with on fair housing and other social justice issues

Mailing postcards to residents in equity focus areas—we mailed a postcard to 27,000 people who are residents of the Target Areas we identified in our demographic analysis of the County

Organizing "pop-up meetings" in communities—we went to seven locations in target communities, handed out hundreds of flyers, and invited residents to fill out the survey and participate in other ways.

These outreach efforts were particularly helpful in increasing the number of people who took the survey and registered for the forum. Still, they also attracted significant numbers of people who were not in our target demographic. In particular, the email lists had a significant number of people already active in Montgomery County, and many responded to the invitation to join our activities. Even though we targeted the postcards to equity focus areas, they also seemed to attract a surprisingly high percentage of people who were not our target demographic. The "pop-up meetings" reached more directly into the communities we were focused on, but the brief nature of the involvement limited what feedback we could gather.

Lessons Learned on Recruitment and Outreach During This Brief Project

- The time allowed for this project was not adequate, and the summer months presented additional challenges
- Most people respond very positively to personal outreach that seeks to make a connection and build a relationship
- Surveys are a good vehicle for getting input from a wide range of individuals
- Having trusted organizations endorse the outreach and host specific programs is crucial to effective involvement
- Incentives are essential for significant commitments of time like a focus group
- Traditional efforts to reach people through large email lists make it more challenging to keep outreach focused on those who have been underrepresented
- Mass mailing of postcards helped us attract individuals to take the survey and community forum but were less helpful to attract people from the target groups we were seeking to engage for the focus groups
- Pop Up Meetings have good potential to reach those not involved but need to have significant staff and resources to be successful

What we heard

A Summary of Perspectives

Overall

In the pages that follow, we will provide more detail on the results of each of the main venues for collecting feedback and guidance on Thrive 2050:

Eight Focus Groups involving 90 participants

A Community Questionnaire engaging more than 1,850 respondents

A large Community Forum convening more than 150 residents

7 pop-ups conducted at key equity areas in the county – distributed over 650 flyers

Overall Thrive Polling Results for BIPOC Residents

Focus Area	Focus Groups	Community Forum	Questionnaire
Housing	54% strongly agree/agree – issues 51% strongly agree/agree on policies	61% strongly agree/agree – issues 52% strongly agree/agree on policies	63% absolutely fits my vision/fits my vision for where the county should be going
Transportation	69% strongly agree/agree – issues 61% strongly agree/agree on policies	63% strongly agree/agree – issues 48% strongly agree/agree on policies	70% absolutely fits my vision/fits my vision for where the county should be going
Design, Arts, and Culture	53% strongly agree/agree – issues 69% strongly agree/agree on policies	45% strongly agree/agree – issues 46% strongly agree/agree on policies	61% absolutely fits my vision/fits my vision for where the county should be going
Parks and Recreation	77% strongly agree/agree – issues 83% strongly agree/agree on policies	48% strongly agree/agree – issues 45% strongly agree/agree on policies	77% absolutely fits my vision/fits my vision for where the county should be going

Overall, BIPOC residents liked the planning methodology in Thrive 2050. There were, however, real concerns about the housing strategies and how effective they might be in addressing a whole host of serious challenges. Residents wanted assurances that the housing strategies (designed to integrate their communities) would not, in fact, displace them replicating challenges experienced during 'Urban Renewal'.

Residents also expressed concerns about Transportation policies being too focused on transit and not acknowledging the needs of the working class who rely on their vehicles to access jobs and employment.

There was also widespread acknowledgement that the Design, Arts, and Culture issues and policies did not feel inclusive of communities of color, especially considering the immense contributions these communities make to driving culture.

BIPOC residents overwhelmingly supported the parks and recreation planning issues and policies

What we heard

A Summary of Perspectives

Focus Groups

Core to our consultant team's work and where we invested the most time and effort was organizing and convening **eight focus groups involving 90 residents.**

Why so much time and effort? We wanted to ensure that we found the right mix of people for each meeting and the right mix of groups to meet our mandate of engaging residents of color and low-to-moderate (LMI) income residents. These were the **key populations missing from the original Thrive 2050 process.**

Over three weeks, from July 27th to August 18th, our team convened focus groups as follows:

Wednesday, July 27th, 6:30-8:30pm for thirteen **youth and young adults of color** from across the County (virtual)

Thursday, July 28th, 6:30-8:30pm for twelve LMI **residents of color in the Briggs-Cheney area** (in-person)

Wednesday, August 3rd, 6:30-8:30pm for eight LMI **residents of color in the Takoma Park area** (in-person)

Thursday, August 4th, 6:30-8:30pm for thirteen LMI, **Latinx residents in the Wheaton area** (in-person)

Thursday, August 4th, 6:30-8:30pm for nine **LMI residents from across the County** (virtual)

Tuesday, August 9th, 6:30-8:30pm for eleven **middle-class African American residents** from across the County (virtual)

Thursday, August 18th, 6:30-8:30pm for twelve low-income **Latinx residents in the Long Branch area** of Silver Spring (in-person)

Thursday, August 18th, 6:30-8:30pm for twelve **middle-class residents of color** from across the County (virtual)

Focus Group Meeting Design (& Polling Results)

All eight focus groups followed the same design, meaning we provided participants with the same presentation slides and asked them the same polling and discussion questions in each two-hour meeting.

All presentations began with an overview of the project, what a general plan is and does, and a high-level overview of Thrive Montgomery 2050. The remainder of each meeting delved into specifics of key elements of the draft plan.

A brief presentation, first on **Complete Communities** and then on **Compact Growth**, followed. Participants shared their responses to the following questions at the end of each segment:

What does a community need to be considered 'complete'?

Would you consider your community complete? Why or why not?

Do you agree that leveraging existing centers and corridors (compact development) is a good strategy for future development in the Thrive 2050 plan?

Next, the lead facilitator reviewed four critical components of Thrive 2050: housing, transportation, design/arts/culture, and parks and recreation, sharing major issues or challenges in each area that the master plan identified and key policies it proposed as strategies to pursue. Not every issue or proposed policy in the four areas were presented in the interest of time.

After the review of each issue, participants commented on the issues and proposed policies, and after each comment period, they took part in two polls:

Do you feel that the issues outlined in this area are representative of the challenges in your community?

Do you agree with the policies outlined in this area of Thrive 2050?

Across the eight focus groups, the policy area with the best polling was **Parks and Recreation**. About 77% of respondents believed that Thrive 2050 had effectively identified the issues, and 83% thought that the policies proposed were on target.

Broadly, **transportation** was the next highest vote-getter: about 69% believed the issues were identified well while 61% indicated they agreed with the proposed policies.

The **Design, Arts, and Culture** results were a little more mixed: while only a little more than half (53%) believed the issues were correctly identified, 69% believed the policies were.

The results for **Housing** were the lowest overall for the four policy areas: only 54% of respondents believed Thrive 2050 had identified the issues well, and even fewer (51%) thought it had identified the policies effectively.

The final segment of each focus group centered on a brief presentation on three elements of **racial equity and social justice** for the plan. Below are the elements and the discussion question we posed after a brief contextual presentation:

Integration

How important do you think residential integration (including educational) and economic integration ins to the future of the County?
If leaning toward important, why? If leaning toward not important, why?

Environmental Justice

If we define environmental injustice as including inadequate access to healthy food, inadequate transportation, air and water pollution, unsafe homes, etc.:

How well has the County done in recent years to address these issues in your community and other communities of color?

What do you see as the top priorities in the next decade(s) for the County to address concerning resolving environmental injustices in our communities?

Institutional reparations

Given that the County's planning, housing, and economic practices have involved pervasive racial discrimination in the past, what structures, systems, and policies would you want to see the County put in place to make essential (or fundamental) change to repair the damage?

Given time constraints, participants did not have a significant amount of time to weigh in on these substantial topics, but many offered essential insights on all three topics and how the County might address them.

You can [VIEW the focus group presentation in the Appendices](#)

Participants across the focus group meetings provided thoughtful remarks and stayed highly engaged throughout the two-hour process. We identified seven themes common to every session, as found below. Underneath every theme statement are representative comments made at the meetings that fit the overarching theme:

Overall Focus Group Themes

If We are to Have Complete Communities, We Must...

Satisfy Basic Needs for All

Invest in Good Infrastructure

Provide Affordable Housing and Economic Opportunities for All

Accept Everyone No Matter Race or Class (allowing everyone to be comfortable anywhere in the County)

Make Education a Number One Priority to Complete Communities

BUT ... are complete communities Attainable?

Are complete communities attainable for us?

The plan lacks realism about creating 'complete communities.'

We Need More Accessible, More Affordable Housing & Housing Options

We Need More Accessible, More Affordable Housing

We Need Accessible, Affordable Housing

The Lack of Affordability in Housing Currently is Huge

The County has an Enormous Number of Housing Challenges.

The County has a Large Number of Cost-burdened Households

We Need Far More Housing Options

We Have Doubts that the Plan Will Be Able to Overcome Our Significant Disparities

We Have Several Dimensions of Inequity: Amenities, Infrastructure, Services

There are Significant Disparities in Amenities across the County.

We Must Overcome Current Disparities in Education

We Have Numerous Geographic and Demographic Inequities

There are Multiple Disparities between Lower-East and Lower-West County.

There are Multiple Racial and Socioeconomic Inequities in the County

The County Needs to Fix Near-Term Issues before Implementing a Long-Term Vision

Discrimination and Racism in the County Continue to Segregate Us

The County Must Repair Broken Relationships with Black Families; Greater Equity will Require Some Form of Reparations

The County's Efforts to "Integrate" Will Make BIPOC Residents More Vulnerable

Residents have a Great Fear of Displacement

The County Needs to Safeguard Against Displacement.

Integration Will Not be Possible

Residents Don't Believe that Equal Development of Corridors Will Happen

The County is Not Currently Prioritizing Vulnerable People

A Focus on Arts and Culture Must Embrace & Understand Cultural Differences

We Need Better, More Convenient, Affordable, and Green Transportation

Thrive Must Focus on Reliable, Frequent, Convenient, and Affordable Public Transportation

We Need Better Public Transportation and Transportation Alternatives.

We Need a Commitment to Green Transportation

The Challenge with Compact Growth is it...

Extends the Problematic Legacy of Wedges/Corridors

Doesn't Focus on Needed Connectivity Across the County

Will Make Light Blue Parts of the Map Very Overcrowded

Has a Primary Focus on Transit, Which Ignores Blue Collar Workers' Needs

Won't Prioritize Good Jobs Near Our BIPOC Neighborhoods

Will Cause Worse Access for Us to Green & Open Space

Won't Benefit People of Color

We Need to Learn How to Plan Differently

The Plan Needs to Demonstrate Greater Flexibility in How it Addresses Communities & Issues

The Plan Needs to Provide Flexibility as Every Community is Different

We (BIPOC people) are Heard but Not Prioritized in Planning and Policy-making

High Level Themes for Each Focus Group

BIPOC Youth + Young Adults (July 27)

We Need Acceptance of Everybody. Complete community is ... where we accept everyone no matter race or class, allowing everyone to be comfortable anywhere in the county

We Need More Accessible, More Affordable Housing

We Have Several Dimensions of Inequity: Amenities, Infrastructure, Services

We're Heard but Not Prioritized in Planning and Policy-making

County Needs to Fix Near Term Issues before Implementing Long Term Vision

BIPOC LMI – Fairland-Briggs Chaney (July 28)

Need more and improved access to programs, activities, opportunities for youth and young adults

Crime and Security a threat to businesses and neighborhoods

Perception that they are not cared about

Need transit, but commutes are too long and service infrequent – disconnected from employment and destinations

Housing is substandard and building inspectors are not being accountable

Would like to have better housing locally AND opportunities to move elsewhere

Poor quality retail, want more commercial development

LMI & Immigrants - Takoma Park (Aug 3)

There are Significant Disparities in Amenities across the County.

The County Needs to Safeguard Against Displacement.

The County is Not Currently Prioritizing Vulnerable People

We Need Accessible, Affordable Housing

We Need Better Public Transportation and Transportation Alternatives.

We Must Overcome Current Disparities in Education

BIPOC LMI - Aug 4th Virtual

We Have Numerous Geographic and Demographic Inequities
 The Plan Lacks Realism about 'Complete Communities.'
 The County has a Large Number of Cost-burdened Households
 Residents have a Great Fear of Displacement
 The Plan Needs to Provide Flexibility as Every Community is Different

CASA (Low-Income Spanish, Aug 4)

Residents Don't Believe that Equal Development of Corridors Will Happen
 Education is the Number One Priority to Complete Communities for Latino Families
 Lack of Affordability in Housing Currently is Huge
 Good Jobs Do Not Exist Near Our Neighborhoods
 We Need a Commitment to Green Transportation

Middle Class African American - Aug 9th Virtual

There are Multiple Disparities between Lower-East and Lower-West County.
 There are Multiple Racial and Socioeconomic Inequities in the County
 The County has an Enormous Number of Housing Challenges.
 The Plan Needs to Demonstrate Greater Flexibility in How it Addresses Communities & Issues

CHEER - Low-Income Spanish (Aug 18)

Are Complete Communities Attainable for Us?
 Latinos Can't Benefit from Compact Growth
 A Primary Focus on Transit Ignores Our Non-Office Worker Needs
 A Focus on Arts and Culture Must Embrace & Understand Cultural Differences
 Integration Will Not be Possible

BIPOC LMI - Aug 18th (virtual)

If We are to Have Complete Communities, We Must ...
 Satisfy basic needs for all
 Invest in good infrastructure
 Provide affordable housing and economic opportunities for all
 The Challenge with Compact Growth is
 Extends problematic legacy of wedges/corridors
 Doesn't focus on needed connectivity across county
 Will make light blue parts of map very overcrowded
 We Need Far More Housing Options
 Thrive Must Focus on Reliable, Frequent, Convenient and Affordable Public Transportation
 We Need Better Access to Green & Open Space
 The County Must Repair Broken Relationships with Black Families
 Discrimination and Racism Continue to Segregate Us
 Integrate Potomac

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What we heard

A Summary of Perspectives

Community Questionnaire

The Thrive Montgomery 2050 Community Questionnaire was conducted from July 19, 2022, to August 20, 2022. A total of 1860 participants took the questionnaire, with 37 people taking the questionnaire entirely in Spanish. The questionnaire was designed to gather feedback, on 3 primary areas:

- Measure the level of public understanding of the focus planning areas on the plan including, compact growth, complete communities, housing, transportation, design, arts & culture, and parks & recreation.
- Incorporate racial equity and social justice-based questions to understand residents' perceptions on issues of race, discrimination, segregation, and equitable access to county resources.
- Understand the level of engagement and demographic background from participants previously engaged in Thrive 2050 public involvement work coordinated by the Montgomery County Planning Department.

While the Community Questionnaire was conducted to primarily gather input about the current focus identified in the plan, it also gathered information about other systemic issues of race, segregation, and equity not explicitly mentioned in the plan, but the nonetheless can impact how underrepresented community members experience housing, transportation, design, arts, culture, and parks and recreation in the county.

The questionnaire was conducted through SurveyMonkey and was open to any resident of Montgomery County who wanted to take the questionnaire. The decision to make this questionnaire open was explicit, allowing the consultant team to share the link with community organizations that already have the trust and established working relationships with BIPOC community members to disseminate the questionnaire through their networks.

People were incentivized to participate in the questionnaire by offering them the chance to enter a raffle to win either a \$10 or \$50 gift card. Because of this project's racial equity and social justice emphasis, all questions on the questionnaire, including the demographic questions, were required to be answered to officially enter the raffle.

Section 1: Public Awareness of Thrive Montgomery 2050

The initial section of the questionnaire sought to understand awareness about Thrive Montgomery 2050 and comprised three primary questions: Q1: Are you aware of Thrive Montgomery 2050, the general plan for the County? Q2 [If answer was yes to Q1]: When did you first become aware of Thrive 2050? Q3: Have you participated in the any of the following engagement activities in the past?

71% of participants who took the questionnaire were already aware of Thrive Montgomery 2050, while 29% had not heard of the draft plan. Of those who were aware, 17% had just learned about Thrive 2050 during the summer of 2022. The source of information about Thrive 2050 varied throughout the group, indicating already knowing about Thrive 2050. About half of the people learned about Thrive 2050 through previous engagement work done by Montgomery Planning.

Of those aware of Thrive, 79% were White, and 21% were BIPOC. Of those unaware of Thrive, the percentages were significantly different.

Section 2: Thrive Montgomery 2050 Planning Areas

Section 2 of the questionnaire first asked participants to describe their hopes for Montgomery County's future in 1-3 words. A word cloud of the most mentioned words can be found below. Among the most mentioned words were affordability, safety, sustainability, diversity, equity, affordable housing, jobs, walkability, and education.

Q7 What are 1-3 words that describe your hopes for Montgomery County's future?



Next, the questionnaire asked participants about their level of agreement on Thrive Montgomery 2050's three overarching priorities to develop a strong economy, protect the environment, and advance racial equity and social justice.

Overall, for all respondents, **protecting the environment received the most support - 55% strongly agreeing and 23% agreeing (78% total).**

Fostering a strong economy came second - 47% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing (77% total).

Racial equity and social justice came in third - 42% strongly agreeing and 21% agreeing (63% total).

Of the three priorities, **the highest percentage disagreed with racial equity and social justice as a priority - 23% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.**

BIPOC respondents had a somewhat different ordering of priorities: fostering a strong economy came first with 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing; protecting the environment came in second with 70%; racial equity and social justice came in a bit lower at 58%. Further, 28% of BIPOC respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that racial equity and social justice should be considered a priority.

Next, questionnaire respondents were asked, "Do the following six focus areas outline in Thrive 2050 fit your vision for where the County should be going?"

Overall Respondents			
Planning areas	Fits my Vision	Absolutely fits my vision	I don't understand what this is about
Parks and Recreation	33%	45%	3%
Transportation and Communications Network	29%	43%	3%
Housing for All	19%	40%	4%
Design Arts and Culture	35%	27%	4%
Compact Growth	23%	25%	10%
Complete Communities	22%	29%	13%

Overall, Parks and Recreation (78%) and Transportation and Communications Network (72%) received the best scores of either 'absolutely fits my vision' or 'fits my vision.' About six in ten respondents found a fit with Housing for All (59%) and Design, Arts, and Culture (62%), although Housing for All had a higher percentage indicating 'absolutely fits my vision' (40% vs. 27%).

Respondents rated the final two focus areas, compact growth (48%) and complete communities (51%), the lowest, with both receiving only about half for 'absolutely fits' or 'fits.' Respondents also expressed the most difficulty understanding the meaning of these two focus areas.

When looking at BIPOC responses separately, they too, viewed Parks and Recreation, Transportation, and Housing for All as the best fit for their vision for the County. BIPOC respondents also identified compact growth and complete communities as the most complex terms to understand.

BIPOC Respondents			
Planning areas	Fits my Vision	Absolutely fits my vision	I don't understand what this is about
Parks and Recreation	32%	45%	3%
Transportation and Communications Network	26%	44%	4%
Housing for All	19%	44%	4%
Design Arts and Culture	31%	30%	4%
Compact Growth	23%	24%	11%
Complete Communities	23%	30%	13%

Respondents were asked about other essential themes beyond the six focus areas. The most frequently cited were: schools/education (78 responses); equitable development throughout the County (38 mentions); protecting current neighborhoods (37 responses).

Concerns within Thrive 2050 Focus Planning Areas

Our questionnaire team also asked respondents about their concerns on other essential issues.

Jobs and Economic Opportunity: the top four concerns were the length of the commute (54%), transportation costs (45%), wages (45%), and access to local jobs (42%). BIPOC respondents also indicated that job opportunities and competition for jobs were of concern.

Housing Concerns: the top four concerns were cost (66%), safety (52%), housing quality (48%), access (43%). BIPOC respondents shared the same priority concerns.

Transportation Concerns: the top concerns were reliability (66%), convenience (58%), safety (53%), and cost (47%). Thirty-three percent indicated that accessibility for people with disabilities (33%) was also a significant concern. BIPOC respondents had nearly identical concerns. Parking also rated a high concern for BIPOC respondents (47%).

Parks and Public Space Concerns: the top concerns were safety (54%), pollution (52%), proximity to home (41%) and difficulty getting to parks/public spaces (32%). For BIPOC respondents, safety received a far higher percentage, 65%, of the vote.

When asked about concerns beyond the four categories above, BIPOC residents indicated crime, safety, overcrowded neighborhoods, high taxes, and increasing access to housing as key concerns.

Affordability and safety emerged as prominent issues across the questionnaire's quantitative and qualitative responses, especially for BIPOC respondents. Also, while displacement and gentrification were not in the top 4 concerns for housing, they continued to be prominent issues identified by participants. Overall, 32% of participants identified displacement as a housing-related concern, while among participants with lower incomes (from \$0-\$49,999) more than a third identified displacement as a significant concern.

Section 3: Race, Discrimination, and Equity Section

The Race, Discrimination, and Equity section asked participants to rate race relationships in Montgomery County, share their experience with discrimination in the County, and offer input about the level of public services that their neighborhoods receive.

Responses on a scale of 1-10 (10 being high) about how high a priority it should be for the government to address racial equity gaps in education, criminal justice, jobs, health, housing, and other areas the average response for overall respondents and for BIPOC respondents was 6.

When asked about the level of tension for race relations in the County, from not tense at all to very tense, overall responses were very similar to aggregated BIPOC responses.

	Overall	BIPOC
A little tense	23%	20%
Somewhat tense	24%	20%
Very tense	9%	8%

Yet, responses were quite different when respondents were asked about their personal experience with discrimination in the County.

	Overall	BIPOC
Yes, have experienced	19%	38%
No, haven't experienced	69%	46%

As you can see, more than double the percentage of BIPOC respondents compared with overall respondents reported having directly experienced discrimination in the County. BIPOC **participants reported having faced discrimination in education (17%), employment (16%), policing and court system (16%), and access to governmental resources (11%).**

Section 4: Demographic Information

Eighteen-hundred-sixty (1,860) people took the Thrive 2050 Community Questionnaire. The questionnaire asked a series of demographic questions to help identify the background of participants. Only 1308 participants completed the demographic section of the questionnaire, and just under 1300 shared their race ethnicity and household income.

Geography

Although dozens of cities and towns were represented in the questionnaire, residents from the following seven jurisdictions had the most participants: Silver Spring (410), Bethesda (133), Rockville (114), Chevy Chase (89), Gaithersburg (85), Takoma Park (64), and Wheaton (49).

Race and Country of Origin

A total of 1287 people reported their race. People were able to input more than once race to indicate mixed race. A total of 27 participants selected more than one option for race, which resulted in receiving more number of responses than the number of participants who shared their demographic information.

The breakdown was as follows:

White: 976 or 76%

Black or African American: 181 or 14%

American Indian or Alaska Native: 45 or 3.5%

Asian: 124 or 9.6%

Native Hawaiian or another Pacific Islander: 31 or 2.4%

Hispanic: 111 or 8.6%

Total BIPOC: 492 or 36%

Countries of Nationality

Nearly 1,300 shared their nationality. Nearly every part of the world was represented:

South America
Central America and Mexico
North Africa
Southeast Asia
Cuba and the Caribbean
Europe
Russia
China
Middle East
South Asia
USA

Income

1287 participants reported their income from 2020.

Under 15,000: 53

Between \$15,00 and \$29,999: 58

Between \$30,00 and \$49,00: 78

Between \$50,000 and \$74,999: 115

Between \$75,000 and \$99,999: 149

Between \$100,000 and \$150,000: 310

Over \$150,000: 524

Housing status:

Of the 1287 participants who reported their housing status, 12.2% were renters, 80.3% were homeowners, and the remaining 7.5% had

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What we heard

A Summary of Perspectives

Community Forum

The Nspiregreen team held a large online community forum near the end of the engagement process to expand the opportunity to provide input on the racial equity and social justice issues in the Thrive 2050 plan. Because the forum was promoted online and some emails went out to people who had participated in previous activities around Thrive 2050, those who registered were generally reflective of the broader Montgomery County demographics and not just those of our target audience. Thus, a majority of registrants were White and relatively affluent, but there was also a significant number people of color and low-moderate income residents who registered to attend.

In the end, more than 300 Montgomery County residents signed up to participate and, when we convened the meeting, there were 160 who actually attended. Although the participants in the forum had different demographics than in our other programs, it was helpful to see what the broader Montgomery County population felt about the issues we discussed and it enabled in-depth conversations and feedback across race and income levels.

We opened the meeting by asking people to place in Chat where they were participating from. Although only 60 of the 160 submitted to chat, we were quickly able to see that we had people from all across the County, including:

- The Silver Spring area inside and just outside the beltway, including folks from Brookeville, White Oak, and Hillendale, among others
- The Gaithersburg area, including Montgomery Village
- The broader Wheaton area, including Aspen Hill and Colesville
- The broader Bethesda area, including Chevy Chase, Kensington, and North Bethesda
- Germantown
- Rockville
- As far north as Clarksburg and as far southeast as Takoma Park

Community Forum Design (& Polling Results)

As we opened the meeting, we asked a series of demographic polling questions, the same ones posed in the focus groups.

The results were:

- Gender: 66% female; 32% male; 2% something not listed here
- Age: 18-34 years old – 9%; 35-54 years old – 36%; 55-64 – 24%; 65+ 34%
- Household income: 30% under \$75,000/year; 43% between \$75,000-\$150,000; 27% did not say
- Race/Ethnicity:
 - 1% American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 4% Asian or Asian American
 - 21% Black or African American
 - 7% Hispanic or Latino
 - 1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - 64% White
 - 4% Other not mentioned here
 - 2% Prefer not to say

Much as we did in the focus group meetings, we invested significant time presenting the key concepts, issues, and proposed policies across the Thrive 2050 plan: complete communities, compact growth, housing, transportation, design, arts, and culture, and parks and recreation.

After each mini-presentation, we asked attendees to answer three polling questions and to enter any ideas they had for that topic into the Chat.

For **Complete Communities**, we asked a single polling question – Do you agree that the focus on complete communities is a good strategy for future development in the Thrive 2050 plan?

Poll Result

60% strongly agreed or agreed, 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 13% indicated they did not know enough yet to say. Seven percent neither agreed or disagreed.

For **Compact Growth**, we also asked a single polling question – Do you agree that leveraging existing centers and corridors (compact development) is a good strategy for future development in the Thrive 2050 plan?

Poll Result

59% strongly agreed or agreed, 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 11% indicated they did not know enough yet to say. Eight percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

Next, we presented, in order, the key issues and proposed policies for the other four issue areas. For all four, we asked the same questions for each: (1) Do you feel that the issues outlined in the plan are representative of the challenges in your home community? (2) Do you agree with the proposed policies outlined in the plan? (3) How well do these policies address the issues of Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ).

Polling Results in the Four Policy Areas

For **Housing**:

Issues representative of challenges in your community:

61% strongly agree or agree, 27% disagree or strongly disagree

Agree with policies in the plan:

52% strongly agree or agree; 31% disagree or strongly disagree

How well policies address RESJ:

31% very well or well, 40% not well or not well at all, 18% I don't know enough yet to say

For Transportation:

Issues representative of challenges in your community:

63% strongly agree or agree, 25% disagree or strongly disagree

Agree with policies in the plan:

48% strongly agree or agree; 31% disagree or strongly disagree

How well policies address RESJ:

26% very well or well, 36% not well or not well at all, 24% I don't know enough yet to say

For Design, Arts, and Culture:

Issues representative of challenges in your community:

45% strongly agree or agree, 26% disagree or strongly disagree

Agree with policies in the plan:

46% strongly agree or agree; 21% disagree or strongly disagree

How well policies address RESJ:

23% very well or well, 37% not well or not well at all, 29% I don't know enough yet to say

For Parks and Recreation:

Issues representative of challenges in your community:

48% strongly agree or agree, 31% disagree or strongly disagree

Agree with policies in the plan:

45% strongly agree or agree; 21% disagree or strongly disagree

How well policies address RESJ:

23% very well or well, 33% not well or not well at all, 19% I don't know enough yet to say

Compared to the aggregated results from the focus groups, forum participants ranked three of these four policy areas lower for the plan's success in identifying the issues and its success in identifying policy proposals. The only area that ranked higher compared to the focus groups was housing, which was the lowest vote-getter of the four policy areas as rated by focus group members.

We asked for the policy areas for the new polling questions, and only a tiny minority of forum participants believed the plan's policies addressed RESJ well. About one-fifth to one-quarter of participants across the four areas believe they did not yet know enough to have an opinion one way or the other.

In the second half of this two-hour meeting, we provided a brief overview of how the issues of equity and justice show up in the current Thrive 2050 plan draft. We then proposed brief definitions of terms (equality, equity, and justice), and shared examples of where racial disparities show up and how Thrive 2050 has identified RESJ "target areas" in the plan.

After sharing some of the themes identified relating to RESJ in the focus groups, we moved everyone into six randomized breakout groups of about twenty-five participants.

In the first breakout, we asked participants to identify specific things the County can do to achieve prosperity while also addressing historical injustices and limiting future disparities.

In the lead into the second breakout, we shared ideas forward-thinking communities utilize to center historically disadvantaged communities in community planning. We then put them into the same breakout rooms to discuss their ideas for what the County should do to more effectively engage people of color, immigrants, and lower-income residents in future planning and policy-making initiatives.

After each discussion, we asked attendees to identify their most significant insight or takeaway from the conversation and place it in Chat.

On the next page, we summarize the common themes that emerged from both of those discussions. We also review the themes that emerged from 1000+ comments in Chat made throughout the meeting.

We concluded the meeting by asking everyone to respond to four final polling questions:

- How worried are you about displacement?
- What is the current level of trust in the Montgomery County government, especially concerning planning?
- What is your level of willingness to engage with the County on policy-making and planning in future years?
- To what degree would you like racial equity and social justice be incorporated into the Thrive 2050 plan?

Results for Final Polling Questions

For **displacement**: 53% very worried or worried; 30% not worried or not worried at all

For **trust**: 22% very high or high trust; 55% low or very low trust

For **willingness to engage**: 82% very willing or willing; 7% unwilling or very unwilling

For **incorporating RESJ**: 86% very important or important; 4% unimportant or very unimportant

You can [VIEW the community forum presentation in the Appendices](#).

Overall Community Forum Themes

Breakout Discussion #1: Rebalancing and Ensuring Greater Racial Equity & Social Justice

Invest Heavily in Racial Equity in the County's Future Development and Redevelopment
 Demonstrate Greater Urgency in Making Far More Housing Affordable
 Address and Counteract the County's Racist Legacy and Continuing Discrimination
 Pay Attention to Environmental Issues/Impacts
 Lift Up Populations Economically / Support Parents & Families
 Invest in Transit
 Provide Greater Equity in Quality Schools & Education
 Prioritize Seniors and Youth
 Compressed Time Frames are the Enemy of Equity & Justice

Breakout Discussion #2: Improving Community Engagement with Underrepresented Communities

Conduct Far More Robust Outreach When Engaging Underrepresented Communities
 Meet at Times and Places Convenient to Busy People
 Advertise Far and Wide in Our Communities
 Provide More Supports to Help People Engage
 Make Writing and Communications about the Plan Clear and Accessible
 Don't Enable or Advantage Privileged Voices
 Listen & Understand First in Order to Act Effectively

Chat Themes

Themes about the Outreach and Engagement Process

Involve Youth Directly and Be Versatile in How You Reach Out to Young People
 Lift Up Voices of Those Who are Underserved / Prioritize BIPOC People in BIPOC Forums
 Grassroots Organizing with and for Underrepresented Populations
 Reach Out to Nonprofits & Faith-based Organizations
 Make Engagement Convenient and Accessible
 Bring Thrive Discussions To The People (dozens of examples of where and how)
 Create Formal Mechanisms to Be More Inclusive
 Fund the Office of the People's Council
 Invest Further Time in Thrive to Engage BIPOC Communities

Equity and Thrive

How Will Thrive Remedy Past Wrongs and Current Disparities?
 If We're not Careful, Thrive Could Increase Inequity
 Broaden What's Included in the Definition of Equity
 Equity: What the County Already Has in Place
 Need Better Investments in Jobs, Education, Skills Training, and Benefit Programs
 Concerns that Displacement is Both Already Here and on the Near-Horizon
 We Need to Implement Effective Plans for the Differently-Abled

Housing

Concerns about Whether Enough Affordable Housing Will Be Built
 Concerns about Where Affordable Housing is Built
 I Can't Afford to Live Here or Am Concerned I Won't Be Able to in the Future
 What Will Happen to Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH)?
 What Will Happen to Single-Family Neighborhoods?
 MPDUs Will Never Accommodate All the People Who Need Affordable Housing.
 We Need Social and Cooperative Housing
 We Need Smaller, Context-Sensitive Plans & Planning.
 We Need Creative Approaches to Solve the Complex Housing Crisis
 We Need to Increase Developers' Impact Fees

Other Thrive Policy Areas

There's a Need to Balance Transportation Needs: Beyond Commuting, Beyond Growth Areas & Also to DMV Region
 Focus on the Environmental and Human Impact of Compact Growth on Existing Communities
 What We Must Incorporate, Environmentally, to Get this Right

Critiques of Thrive

A COMMON VIEW: Slow Down Thrive & Do it Right
 ANOTHER COMMON VIEW: Pass Thrive Now with Adjustments
 The Status Quo is a Significant Obstacle to Genuine Progress in the County
 The Thrive Plan is Difficult to Understand
 Most Residents Don't Know about Thrive
 Concerns Residents Have about what Thrive Doesn't Address

- The needs of BIPOC, seniors, and Upcounty jurisdictions
- The needs of these growing, vulnerable populations
- The disparities in amenities and investment between East and West county.
- Infrastructure, tree canopy, parking, school overcrowding
- How to implement the ideas in this plan
- Eliminating building-by-right
- Collaborative and innovative ways to address the high level of need in the County

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What we heard

A Summary of Perspectives

Pop Up Events

Nspiregreen and PEA, along with staff from Everyday Canvassing distributed approximately eight hundred plus flyers at various locations in Montgomery County promoting Thrive 2050 Survey, Focus Groups and Community Forum. Participants could access the survey using a QR Code, through the project website, and on tablets provided at 2-3 pop-ups. Pop-up outreach efforts included tables at various events and businesses, distributing flyers in targeted communities and high traffic areas, engaging residents in a conversation about the project. Locations were selected due to their proximity to targeted communities and businesses, access to large groups of Montgomery County BIPOC residents who fit within our targeted low-mid income range.

Pop-up	Address	Community
Wheaton Safeway and Wheaton Metro	11201 Georgia Ave	Wheaton
Wheaton Giant and surrounding small businesses	2900 University Boulevard West	Wheaton
Crossroads Farmers Market	Anne Street at University Boulevard E	Takoma
The Rio or the Crown in Gaithersburg	9841 Washingtonian Boulevard	Silver Spring
Rockville Metro & targeted neighborhoods	251 Hungerford Dr,	Rockville
Silver Spring Metro	8400 Colesville Rd	Silver Spring
International Food Festival in Downtown Silver Spring at Veteran's Plaza	Veterans Pl	Silver Spring

Pop-ups were conducted between 11am - 5pm, between August 5th - 16th. We distributed over 600 flyers promoting the questionnaire and engagement opportunities.

Wheaton Safeway and Wheaton Metro 100 Flyers – 3 hours

Wheaton Giant and surrounding small businesses 200 Flyers – 4 hours

Crossroads Farmers Market, 4 hours, talked to 74 people, distributed 60 postcards, and 10 people took the survey in person.

The Rio or the Crown in Gaithersburg 3 hours - 80

Rockville Metro & targeted neighborhoods 2 hours - 60 flyers

Silver Spring Metro 2 hours - 80 flyers

International Food Festival in Downtown Silver Spring at Veteran's Plaza 1.5 hours – 80 flyers

Recommended Changes to Thrive Montgomery 2050

General

- For all plan chapters, the “How will we evaluate progress?” sections need to include establishing specific targets for equity outcomes - for example: Establish criteria to support black owned businesses recruitment and retention
- After revising Thrive: Revisit with low-income and BIPOC communities to make sure communities can support the policies before passing the document
- Allow more time and resources to complete drafting RESJ Review language
- Conduct a housing study that will seek to address displacement fears by community, determine how to achieve growth targets, and identify barriers to successful implementation
- Establish working relationships with Communities that prioritize participatory planning and delegate power to vulnerable communities

Compact Growth

- Focus density near transit stations
- When new development comes, efforts need to be made to ensure that the existing community benefits in a significant and meaningful way. Community Benefit Agreements need to have accountability mechanisms and follow up to measure outcomes
- Partner compact growth with social work that helps residents access housing affordability resources.
- Create policy framework to ensure that BIPOC businesses are accessing opportunities in new development(s)
- In existing low-income areas, prioritize development of parks, open-space and institutional uses to support improved property values.
- If market rate housing is going to be built in areas with naturally occurring affordable housing, strong tools to prevent displacement are needed
- Design a clear growth management strategy to protect communities of color from displacement and overcrowding
- Neighborhood stabilization and conservation strategies for communities of color

Complete Communities

Planning must seek to strengthen existing communities to make them complete. Social networks should be leveraged, and institutions strengthened.

- Work with County to set up incentives for workforce development youth + adult
- Leverage partnerships to increase education access
- Identify way to improve access to recreational programming, jobs, and education for young people 16-24
- Incentives for BIPOC entrepreneurs + pathways to contracts
- Invest in racial equity

Design, Arts, and Culture: Investing and Building Community

- Leverage rich diversity in the County, especially in places like Silver Spring, Rockville, Gaithersburg, and Germantown.
 - Explore ways to celebrate “Diversity Hubs” in Montgomery County as places to reinforce inclusion.
- Invest in urban design and architecture that promotes safe communities and civic pride
 - Consider CPTED or other standards to encourage safe/welcoming public spaces
- Discourage walls and buffers which keep communities disconnected
- Create official channels for BIPOC artists, neighbors, and businesses owners to come together to provide input on arts and culture
- Create training, internship, and jobs programs for local artists, specifically local BIPOC artists, to get jobs in advancing public arts and culture.
- Prioritize inclusion of racial minorities and immigrants in public placemaking to help nurture a sense of culture which celebrates all residents
- Invest in urban design that allows communities to adapt to climate change and extreme weather patterns. Pair these plans with long-term maintenance plans to detail plans for maintenance, key players involved, and populations impacted by these plans.
- Sustainable Urban Design needs to be accompanied by formal guidance that ensures equitable use of design technique, sustainable materials, and investment in sustainable infrastructure in all neighborhoods, regardless of the demographic composition of a neighborhood.
- Create plans to specifically reuse existing viable buildings to support BIPOC entrepreneurs access affordable spaces for small local businesses.

Transportation and Communication Networks

- Improve access to the Ag reserve and urban centers, from neighborhoods through Multi-Modal Transit
- Subsidize the cost of shared mobility options for residents with limited access to train stations or bus stops.
- Encourage mixed-use zoning to integrate a balance of parking options to accommodate car-dependent residents
- Encourage Antiracism, accessibility, and implicit bias training for transportation officials, including decision makers, planners, agency leaders, and bus and train conductors.
- Address issues faced by commuters travelling to/from outside of the County for work through regional collaboration
- Consider exemptions for policies such as congestion pricing and reduced parking for low-income and BIPOC communities
- Look at ways to address the costs of transit
- Consider creating land uses such as lots for essential vehicles
- Improve communication to address anxiety over changes
- Identify strategies and partnerships to help address the “digital divide” bringing free networked resources to vulnerable communities

Housing for All

- Encourage establishment of rent to own programs and create systems to educate homeowners on how to protect and enhance their investments.
- Make home improvement and maintenance incentives available to low income property owners who spend a certain proportion of their income on housing costs.
- Weatherization programs will help with County’s sustainability goals and improve health outcomes for residents. Prioritize making grant dollars and incentives available to low income families to improve their indoor environmental quality and overall resource management.
- Integrate high-income neighborhoods by identifying a threshold of low-income housing which supports the local economy – enough housing should be provided to ensure that people who work in retail, service and other low wage earning employment sectors have the option not to commute.
- Develop a zoning and design strategy which allows different housing types to be built and high income (primarily single family) areas that will preserve existing property values through careful design and allow for low income residents to live with dignity.

- **Missing Middle:** Based on the observed trend over time of the widening wealth gap between economic elites and the working class, it is doubly important importance to ensure that future development makes room for the growing low to moderate income class. New development should preserve at least 15 to 20% of units for the lowest income earners, but also set aside at least 20% for low to moderate income households i.e. Workforce housing that people earning standard wage jobs can afford.
- Promote and expand inclusionary zoning with tools such as density bonuses and reduced parking requirements for developers that build affordable housing
- Develop system for measuring outcomes to ensure that initiatives put in place to help communities of color are having intended outcomes.
- Increase checks and balances to offset the personal bias that impacts programs meant to help people of color but end up causing problems due to inadequate safeguards.
- Reestablish the River Road Growth Corridor to provide opportunities for low-moderate income housing development.
- Identify new mechanisms to provide supportive housing for vulnerable residents, with a special focus on those who may be ageing out of youth programs (18-24)
- Advocate on the state and federal level of funding to support development of low-income housing
- Identify and inventory existing areas that have private restrictive covenants and work with state to address
- Work with lenders to make capital available to BIPOC and low-income first-time home buyers
 - identify subsidies to support down payment and weatherization
 - integrate green systems opportunities (solar, water, etc.)
- Identify Affordable housing targets and create realistic measures to reach them
- Preserve naturally occurring affordable housing
- Develop social and cooperative housing
- Strengthen strategies to deal with unsheltered populations
- Strengthen strategies aimed at foreclosure prevention
- Increase developer impact fees if the economic case can be made


Parks, Recreation, and Natural Resources

- Establish clear environmental thresholds and targets with a focus on improving access to parks and enhancing environmental quality and resource management in communities of color
- Inventory and establish plan to address environmental justice issues

Racial Equity and Social Inclusion

- Conduct analysis to determine social and economic costs of past discriminatory practices to develop an implementation plan to address the legacies of racism. This should serve as a baseline for determining what reparations might look like.
- Capital Improvement Program should be aligned with Thrive
 - Ensure the priority is given to projects that show benefit to vulnerable communities. Address the most serious 'wounds' first.
- Protect and preserve historic African-American and Indigenous sites
- Encourage distribution of assets and resources that reflects a prioritization of historically disadvantaged residents, giving them a chance to "catch-up" and level the proverbial playing field.
- Establish programs and policies which create opportunities for vulnerable groups to participate more fully in business opportunities
- Look for opportunities to improve outcomes for vulnerable communities through regional partnerships and collaboration
- Hospitality and Life Sciences cluster
 - Work to achieve a way in for low-income and minority residents through partnerships and workforce development opportunities
- Identify opportunities for Capacity Building to increase the capacity for Target communities to have meaningful participation
 - Create pathways into the planning profession for local people of color from diverse communities

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Racial Equity and
Social Justice

Plan Chapter

Introduction

Planning for Racial Equity and Social Justice

Urban Planning is the process by which communities build consensus around a shared vision for the future. Planning, like other tools, must be wielded carefully or its use can unintentionally [or intentionally] establish far-reaching consequences that disadvantage those who are not fully considered during the process...

Context

The modern planning profession was born out of social movements like the 'Tenement House Reform' movement which broadly exposed substandard living conditions endured by immigrant and working-class residents in New York City in the late 19th century. The resulting Tenement House Act of 1901 established one of the first laws governing how buildings should be constructed and regulated to account for human health and safety. Since that time, countless academics, organizers, politicians, and agitators alike have contributed to establishing urban planning as the 'epistemological field of study' which informs how so many of the decisions that impact our lives are made. Planning is the tool that the state wields when exercising its 'police power' to regulate and govern the development of land and infrastructure through plans, codes, and ordinances, and their associated administrative processes. As such, planning decisions have significant and cross-cutting impacts; how and where things are built (or not built) directly correlates to the physical quality of place and the quality of life for inhabitants. It is precisely because of the tremendous importance of planning why **who** gets to participate in the planning process matters so much in determining future outcomes.

Historically, there has frequently been an atmosphere of distrust around planning because there are often limited opportunities for everyday citizens to participate and truly be empowered in making the important decisions regarding the future growth and development of their communities. This dynamic is compounded by a legacy of exclusion reinforced through racism and classism. Generally speaking, power and decision-making authority in planning has been reserved for those with either direct political access, or those with privileges associated with wealth, education, race, and/or social status. This imbalance has contributed to a dynamic where the interests of 'capital' have often trumped the interest of the public good. While capitalism's market theory has its merits, one of its flaws is that there is no mechanism by which externalities (like pollution) get paid for. Planning's prescriptions are designed to correct for market failure[s] when the market is not able to correct itself. As such, planning is one of the primary tools available to us to deal with the problems of racial inequities and social injustices, which most often show up in the form of segregation, poverty, and its associated impacts.

This chapter will seek to identify how Montgomery County can improve the overall quality of life for ALL residents, deliberately achieve [more] equitable outcomes, and unwrite past injustices which adversely impact historically disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

Survey before Plan

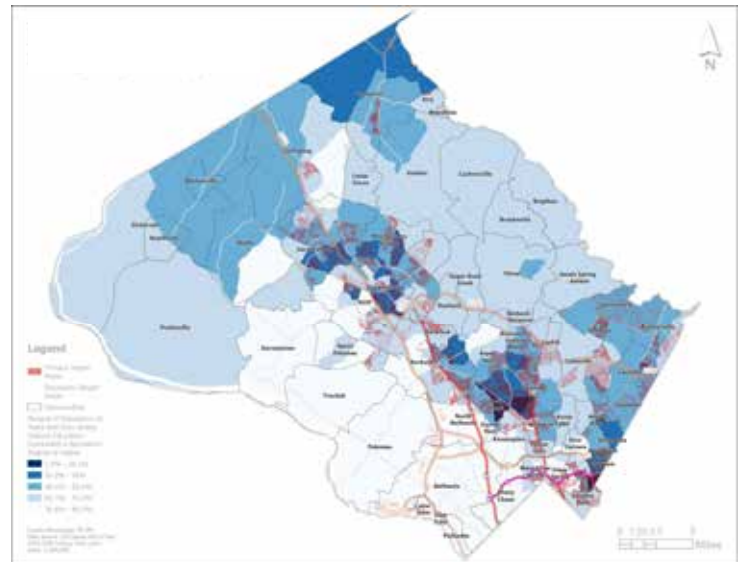
Foundational to planning theory is the work of Patrick Geddes, a planning pioneer, who theorized that you must 'survey before you plan'. The underlying idea is that before you can apply a prescription, you must thoroughly understand and diagnose the issues. Meaningful public engagement is the prerequisite to building the transparency, trust, and collaborative relationships with communities that are needed to establish the two-way learning process which supports holistic planning solutions. Without careful consultation with the community, it is unlikely that a comprehensive understanding of place can be achieved. John Forester, preeminent urban planning professor who writes on participatory planning processes emphasizes that the ears are the practitioners most useful tool, and that listening [is] the most important planning exercise.

Two Americas

During the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech about the "Two Americas" which highlighted the legacy of racial and economic oppression and the plight of poor people and how their lived experiences juxtapose with the promise of America as the land of opportunity, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Unfortunately, for the decades since this speech was given there are still significant swaths of the black, indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) communities that continue to be 'stuck' in cyclical poverty. The persistent challenges of social and economic mobility is clearly highlighted in the land use and economic patterns observed in Montgomery County, today.

In 2022, across America, we are still seeing communities of color disproportionately dealing with eroding infrastructure, substandard living conditions, and environmental justice issues like unsafe drinking water. These neighborhoods do not exist by coincidence, they were 'carved out' on the map, years ago, by people who wielded the 'dark side' of planning's power.

Too often, when these communities are finally paid attention, the original residents are displaced and unable to benefit. The cycle of disinvestment and real estate speculation in communities of color has been well documented over time, making 'Gentrification' one of the hottest issues impacting urban America today.



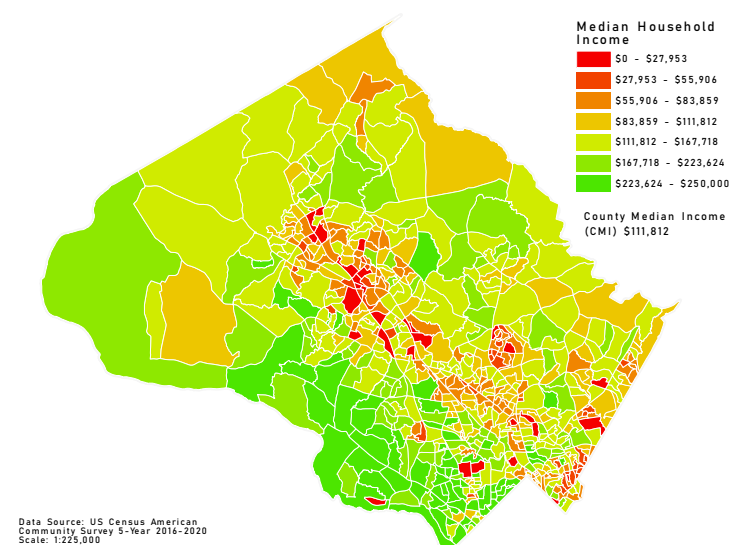
Educational Attainment

This map depicts Educational Attainment by showing, at the census tract level, the percent of the population 25 years and over who has at least obtained a bachelor's degree.

Census tracts with the low proportions (20.2%-36%) of those holding a bachelor's degree or higher are concentrated in tracts within Germantown, Montgomery Village, and Gaithersburg.

The Rock Creek, Wheaton, and Oakview communities have tracts with the lowest proportion (1.4%-20.1%) of the population holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

The tracts with lowest concentrations of educational attainment are also those that overlay the primary and secondary target areas with high concentrations of BIPOC and LMI residents.



Median Household Income

It is no coincidence that the Median Household Income map "follows" the education attainment map. The highly educated communities in West County far outpace incomes in other parts of the County.

Racial Equity

Racial equity work seeks to **heal**; implementation of its ideals requires an honest and careful examination of history to inform deliberate actions aimed at repairing past injustices which have disproportionately impacted black and indigenous communities in America. The legacy of racist policies, and the land-uses they influenced reverberate throughout the entire spectrum of communities of color with Latin/x, Asian, and other BIPOC communities experiencing different, but familiar challenges as their predecessors. Addressing racial equity requires an honest look at root causes of social problems and recognizing that some form of restitution is required to fix them.

To make planning more equitable we have to acknowledge the systems of racial discrimination and privilege which reinforce disparate outcomes for Montgomery County households. Planning alone cannot end racism and segregation, or prevent the erosion of cultural communities that wish to remain intact, it can however be an important tool to begin the work of dismantling long-established systems of privilege.

Social Justice

In a planning sense, wealth affords you the opportunity for exclusion: to live in an environment where you do not have to interact with poor people. However, due to the time value of money, the compound nature of wealth creation, and other factors the wealth gap between 'haves' and 'have-nots' is growing. This imbalance creates a strain on society which makes it unstable.

Social justice is a process by which working class people begin to access the privileges only enjoyed by the historically privileged class[es], to afford healthy lifestyles and to experience education and built environments which inspire them to lead happier and more productive lives. In modern times, this is becoming increasingly important as more and more people are finding it hard to thrive economically. As the County plans for the future, special attention needs to be paid to the hidden costs of poverty and determine ways to design communities to reduce problems associated with public health, crime, housing instability, food insecurity, and segregation.

“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.” – Nelson Mandela

Justice in Planning

A Right to the City?

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights (Harvey 23).

Property and Pacification

Quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city itself, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban political economy. The postmodernist penchant for encouraging the formation of market niches—in both consumer habits and cultural forms—surrounds the contemporary urban experience with an aura of freedom of choice, provided you have the money. Shopping malls, multiplexes and box stores proliferate, as do fast-food and artisanal market-places. We now have, as urban sociologist Sharon Zukin puts it, ‘pacification by cappuccino’ (Harvey 31).

Source: David Harvey, *Rebel Cities*

As inflation heats up, 64% of Americans are now living paycheck to paycheck

PUBLISHED TUE, MAR 8 2022 8:40 AM EST
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Jessica Dickler
@JDICKLER

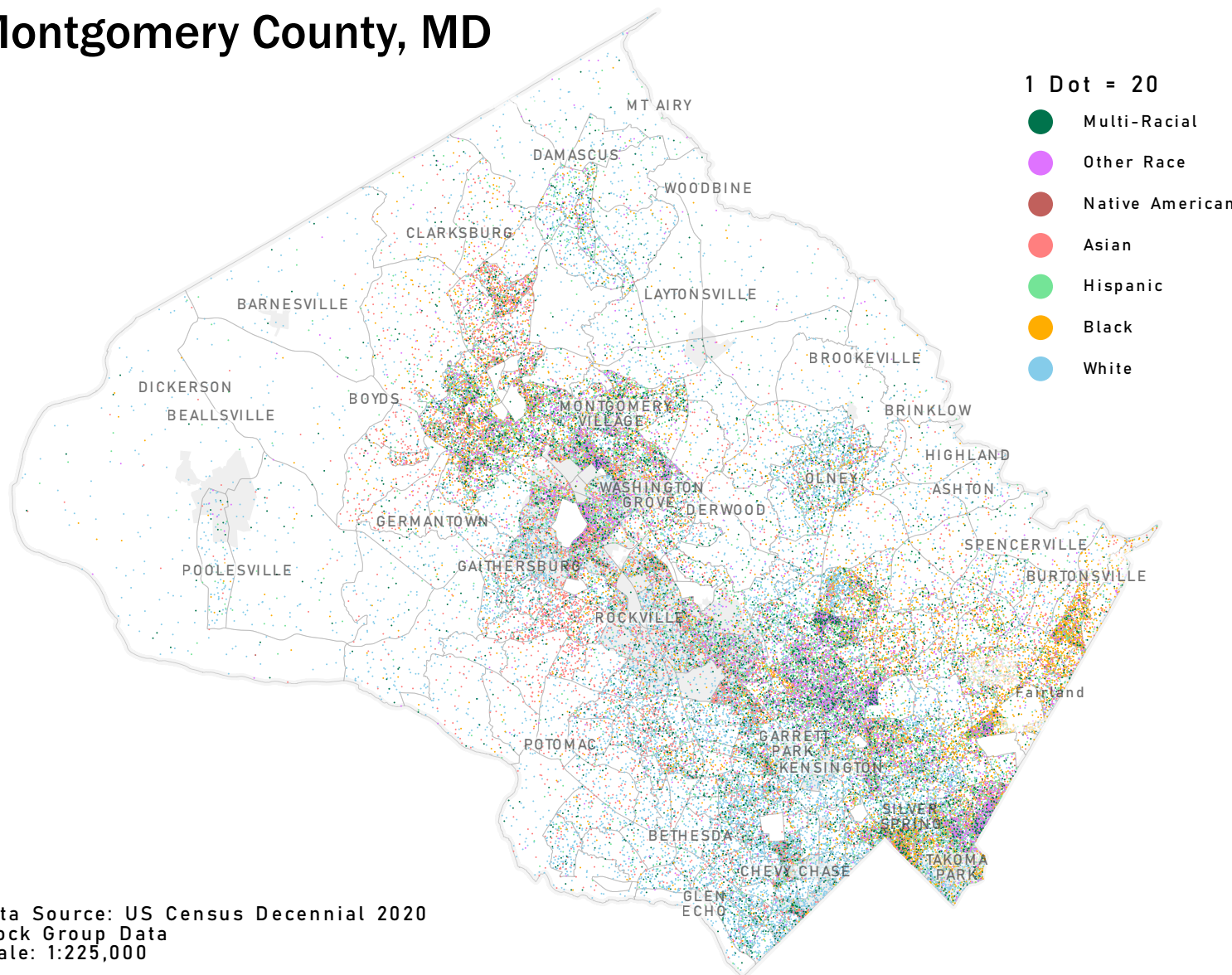
WATCH LIVE

KEY POINTS

- The increased cost of living is straining households nearly across the board.
- Almost two-thirds of Americans are now living paycheck to paycheck, according to one report.

Source: CNBC, Life Changes

Montgomery County, MD



Race & Ethnicity

This dot density map depicts the racial make-up of Montgomery County through showing the concentration and location of racial groups. The data, retrieved from the latest US Decennial census (2020), is depicted at the block group level with one dot representing twenty individuals. The order of racial groups was organized from least predominant to most predominant to ensure the visibility of less reoccurring dots and the representation of these groups. Some noticeable concentration of individual racial groups includes:

- High representation of Whites in Glen Echo, Chevy Chase and Kensington;
- High representation of Blacks in East Montgomery communities of Burtonsville, Fairland, Calverton, and Colesville;
- High representation of Asians around Rockville, Gaithersburg, Germantown, and Clarksburg;
- High representation of Hispanics around Montgomery Village, Washington Grove, Rockville, and Glenmont.

Areas like Silver Spring, Montgomery Village, Washington Grove, Wheaton, Glenmont, and Takoma Park contain a more diverse and concentrated population.

Areas that have greater density tend to have greater racial and ethnic diversity. In contrast, areas such as Boyds, Clarksburg, and Colesville has a diverse racial and ethnic make-up even at lesser densities.

Areas that have a high concentration of those identifying "Other Race" often also have those of more than one race or "Multi-Racial" close by.

Examining History (From Plan Draft)

After the Civil War, African Americans suffered from all forms of discrimination (social, housing, education, employment, commerce, health, etc.). The resulting alienation led to the creation of self-reliant kinship communities in many parts of Montgomery County in the late 19th century. A significant part of the history of racial injustice and discrimination suffered by African Americans includes the formation and subsequent decline (in some cases, destruction) of kinship communities in the early 20th century.

Over time, these communities suffered from lack of public investment in infrastructure such as new roads, sewer and water, schools, health clinics, and other public amenities and services needed to be viable places to live. Some communities suffered the devastating impacts of urban renewal policies of the 1960s. Others faced pressure to sell their houses or farms to developers for housing subdivisions. These communities declined because of an accumulation of racially-motivated actions paired with social, political, and economic circumstances. The very few of these communities that survived in some way include Ken-Gar in Kensington, Lyttonsville in Silver Spring, River Road in Bethesda, Scotland in Potomac, Stewartown in Gaithersburg, and Tobytown in Travilah.

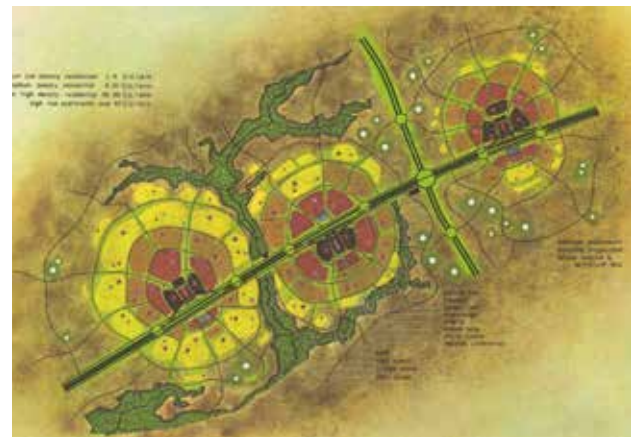
From the 1890s to the 1920s, the first suburban subdivisions in Silver Spring and Chevy Chase used racial covenants prohibiting African Americans and other racial and religious groups from purchasing land or homes. Well into the mid-20th century, these types of covenants were placed in the land records. Even after the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 to end these practices, a development pattern of segregation continued. Injustices were evident in unfair banking and lending practices; federal immigration policies; unequal public investment in schools, parks and other public facilities; and siting a disproportionately high number of undesirable uses, such as landfills, near communities of color.

In Montgomery County, the legacy of such discriminatory policies and the exclusionary zoning and other land use controls led to neighborhoods defined by income, race, and housing types. As a result of these practices and other societal factors, a significant quality of life gaps exist for various racial and ethnic groups in the county.

Urban renewal policies which may have been designed to address 'blight' were popularly coined "Negro removal" because the aftermath of efforts resulted in the disbandment of communities and created economic and social losses for African Americans and exacerbated psychological trauma.

On Wedges and Corridors (WAC)

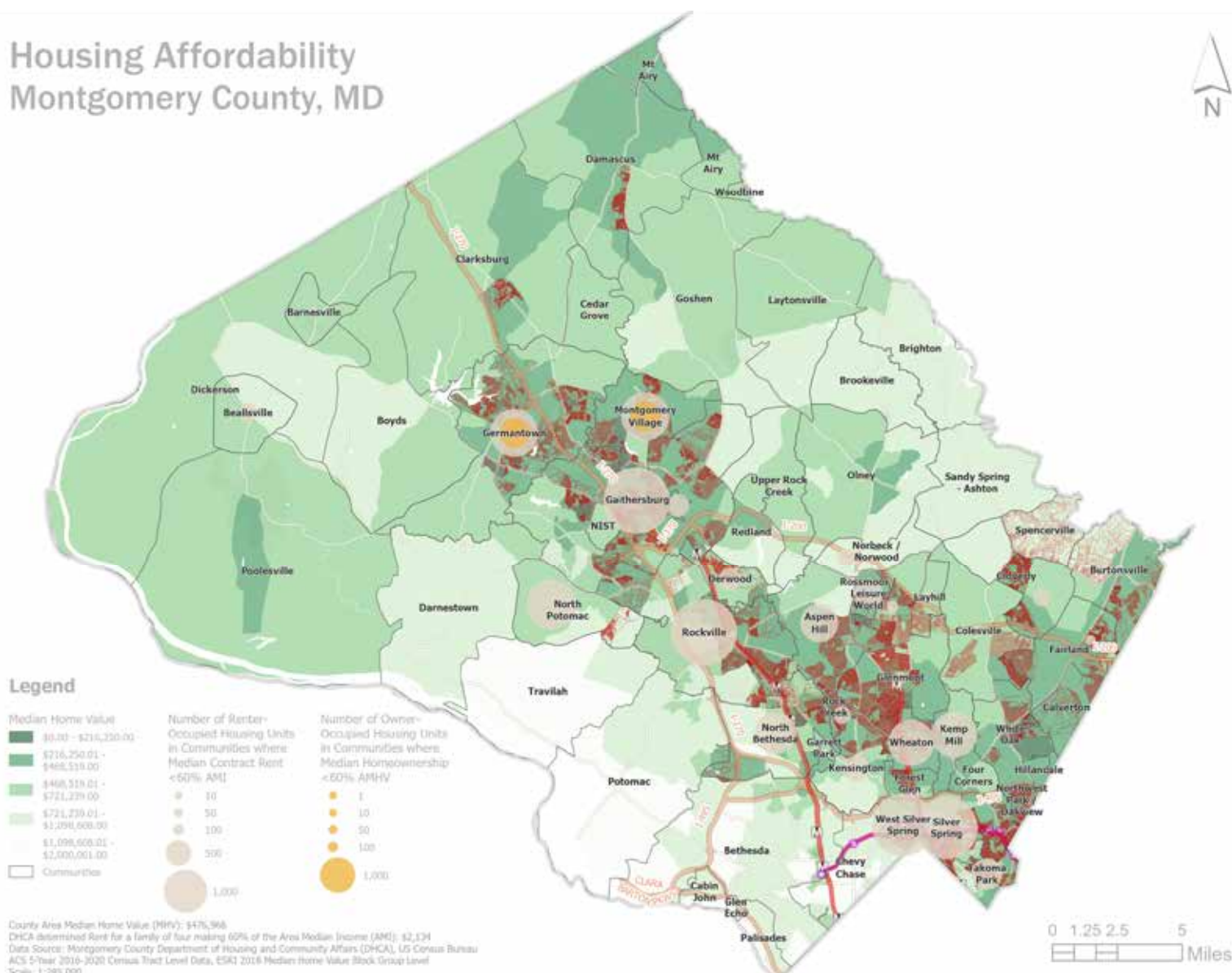
Thrive seeks to "modernize" the old Wedges and Corridors Plan. While it is prudent to not throw the proverbial "baby out with the bathwater," the WAC plan created "land use patterns... which left neighborhoods disconnected and reinforced segregation along racial and economic lines." If the old had plan adverse outcomes for historically disadvantaged groups, how do we address/mitigate its failures? What does "modernization" of the Wedges and Corridors Plan look like?



Wedges and Corridors Plan

To address segregation and economic inequality established in past zoning/land use planning, deliberate mechanisms need to be introduced to create racially and economically inclusive communities. Planning needs to consider social and economic consequences of efforts to integrate. Communities that face historic challenges need special attention paid to community development and stabilization to ensure that existing social networks and institutions are strengthened so that it is not harder for the existing community to survive in the reimagined one, but they feel a central part of it. Conversely, established areas need to create opportunities for less privileged to access the schools, jobs, natural resources, and other benefits through housing opportunity and improved physical access.

Housing Affordability Montgomery County, MD



Housing Affordability

This map depicts various layers including median home values, number of renter-occupied housing units where rent is less than 60-percent of area median income (AMI), and number of owner-occupied housing units where median homeownership is less than 60-percent of area median home value (AMHV). Data from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCA) shows \$2,134 as the rent for a family of four making 60% of AMI.

High concentrations of homes with MHVs at or below the County MHV (\$476,966) appears to make up most of the housing stock of census tracts in Germantown, Montgomery Village, and Gaithersburg. Communities in east Montgomery County such as White Oak and Calverton also have MHVs at or below the County MHV (\$476,966).

The availability of affordable rental housing units, shown here as less than 60-percent of AMI, are shown most prominently in Gaithersburg, Rockville, Silver Spring, and West Silver Spring. Each of these communities have over a thousand units where rent is less than 60-percent of AMI.

Owner-occupied Housing Units with an AMHV less than the County AMHV (\$476,966) are only present in Germantown and Montgomery Village.

The data clearly shows that access to affordable housing is going to be one of the biggest challenges faced by Montgomery County in the future. As such, real planning innovation will be required to protect working families from displacement.

Housing

Thrive's housing prescriptions to address racial equity and social justice largely center on a strategy to integrate communities with high concentrations of minorities and/or poverty with new development that attracts multi-racial and higher income households into the area. The strategies seek to integrate (gentrify) communities while simultaneously protecting existing residents from displacement. The idea of development without displacement is an exciting one, but these ideas, in practice are often acting in direct opposition of each other. Development without deliberate community and neighborhood conservation efforts will almost certainly result in (some) displacement. So, instead of ignoring this possibility, let's determine where people can go. Undoubtedly, many residents who currently occupy a community where they have historical, cultural, spiritual, and other ties (kinship) will want to remain in their home community. However, there will be some residents who may like to move to a more affluent area. Traditionally, planning documents are written to support **Housing Choice** as a strategic goal for future outcomes. When we juxtapose this idea with regional housing markets, it would seem that in order to balance the integration of low-income neighborhoods, some accommodation for rebalancing should be made to ensure that economic benefits begin to reach historically disadvantaged populations. As such, integration should be a two-way process, by which there should be a parallel strategy of making accommodation for low-income housing in areas which are already wealthy and thus providing new residents who want the choice of living somewhere else to achieve immediate access to communities that have close proximity to jobs, good education, etc. If we are going to promote development in the growth areas with new market-rate housing, there should also be provision of new low-income housing in high income areas to allow for housing choice in different markets.

The justification for this strategy is doubled when you consider that to support economic competitiveness and sustainability Thrive's number one transportation priority is connecting low-income communities to job areas, but the housing strategy should also seek to provide workforce housing locally. Consequently, areas of high wealth and business activity such as Bethesda should also include sufficient workforce and low-income housing to support housing choices for people who work in the area. Future planning should conduct detailed market analysis of labor markets and determine thresholds by which area plans should promote low-income, workforce,

and middle-class housing options to support a truly local community where commuting is "optional" because the mathematical possibility of a local workforce is reflected in the housing availability.

In our first focus group meeting with black and brown residents in East County, we heard a story as old as planning itself: several residents were embroiled in a legal case about their substandard housing conditions and alleged that the building inspector meant to enforce quality controls was being paid off. Almost every conversation we initiated on plan topics somehow found a way to veer off into issues of safety, crime, and feelings of neglect...

Residents of Montgomery County shared lots of challenging stories about their housing experiences. It is clear that many of the mechanisms put in place to help them are being offset by personal bias (racism) in the system or by individual actors. The County will need to be vigilant to seek accountability for all actors. Successfully addressing racism in housing will require deliberate action and systems of checks and balances.

Increase access to safe, affordable housing and promote wealth-building by confronting historical and ongoing harms and disparities caused by structural racism.

Housing Conditions Montgomery County, MD

Legend

Housing Cost Burden
50.0 Percent or More
1 Dot = 20

- Renter Households
- Owner Households with mortgage

Data Source: US Census American Community Survey 5-Year 2016-2020
Block Group + Census Tract Level
Scale: 1:285,000

Median Home Value and Income

Median Home Value (MHV)

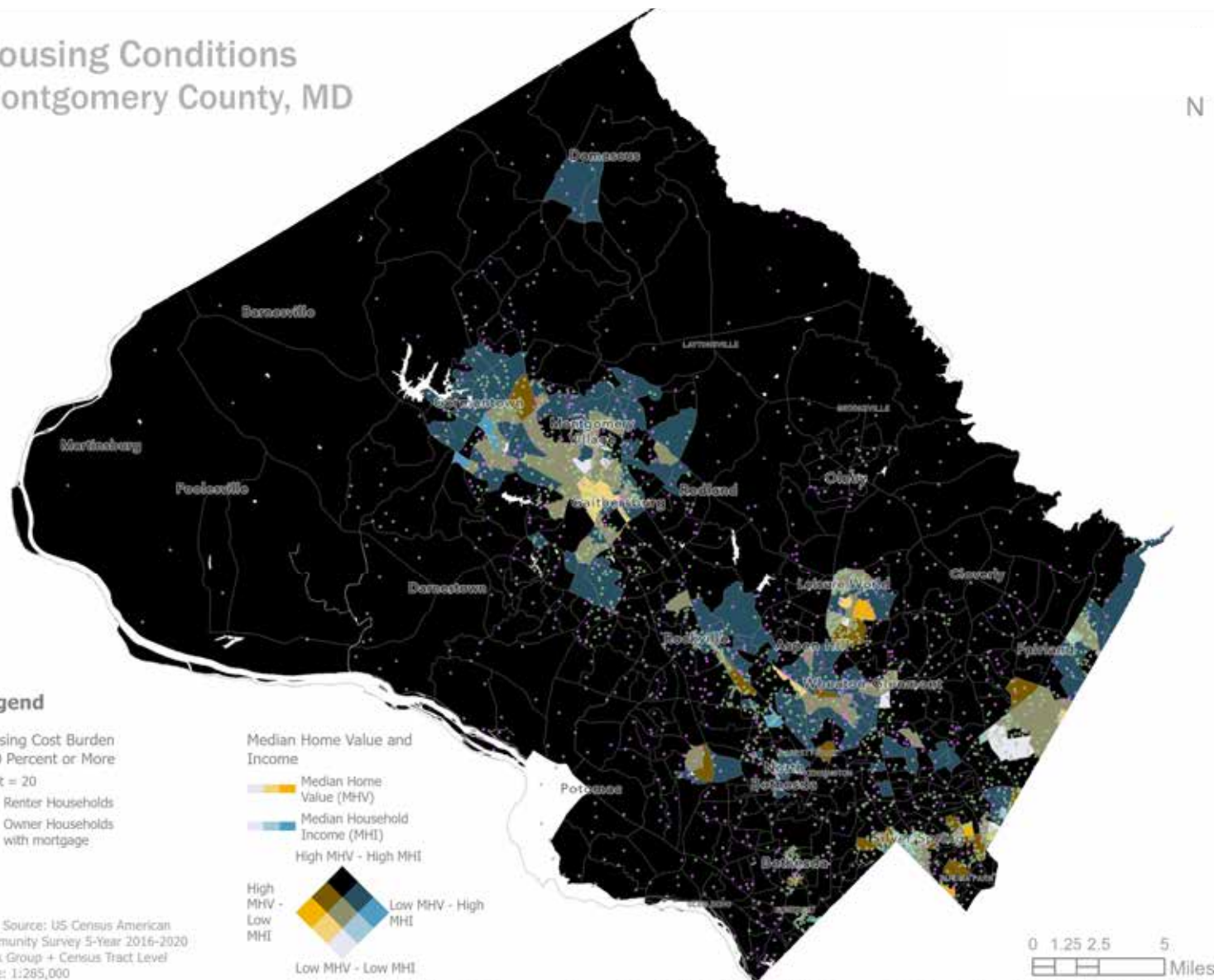
Median Household Income (MHI)

High MHV - High MHI

High MHV - Low MHI

Low MHV - High MHI

Low MHV - Low MHI



Housing Conditions

This map shows housing conditions in terms of areas with high-to-low ranges of median home value (MHV) compared to high-to-low median household income (MHI). The map also shows renter and owner households who are experiencing a housing cost burden of 50 percent or more, defined as extremely cost burdened by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCA). This means that 50 percent or more of a household's income is devoted to housing-related costs.

Census tracts that are approaching solid gold color represent high MHV and low MHI, an indicator of unaffordable housing. Tracts in Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, and Leisure World shows signs of this unaffordable housing.

Census tracts showing a light gray color represents low MHV and low MHI, an indicator for low income but also low-cost housing. Even so, households experiencing extreme housing cost burden may also be present in these tracts. Tracts in Montgomery Village, Glenmont, and White Oak exhibit these housing conditions with all of these showing a high incident of renter households experiencing extreme housing cost burden.

More urban areas like Montgomery Village, Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, and Germantown have high concentrations of renter household experiencing extreme housing cost burden.

More rural areas like Damascus, Olney, and Cloverly have higher instances of owner households experiencing extreme housing cost burden.

Compact Growth

Encouraging growth in already developed areas, has ripple effects. Density brings economic opportunity, but it can also degrade the quality of natural resources, parks, schools, and neighborhoods. If the majority of new development will occur in urban areas where existing naturally occurring affordable housing exists, special attention needs to be paid to ensure that as the population density increases, residents maintain equitable access to parks, recreation, natural resources, and high quality places which influence quality of life. Additionally, as density increases, increased consideration needs to be made towards maintenance and operations of public spaces and institutions to ensure that effective stewardship is achieved and maintained.

Environmental Justice

As the County grows, special attention will need to be paid to Environmental Justice issues. Undoubtedly, new residents will put a strain on infrastructure and sustainable practices will need to be implemented to ensure that the County is able to maintain good air and water quality, preserve urban tree canopy, manage stormwater, and invest in renewable sources of energy. Analysis of environmental quality shows that residents of the Target Areas where the majority of BIPOC and Low-Income residents live are more likely to be exposed to poor environmental conditions and live next to polluting land uses. As we look towards the future, and grapple with issues like climate change we need to be deliberate in protecting the County's vulnerable residents to ensure they do not have their life challenges compounded by disproportionate exposure to environmental threats.

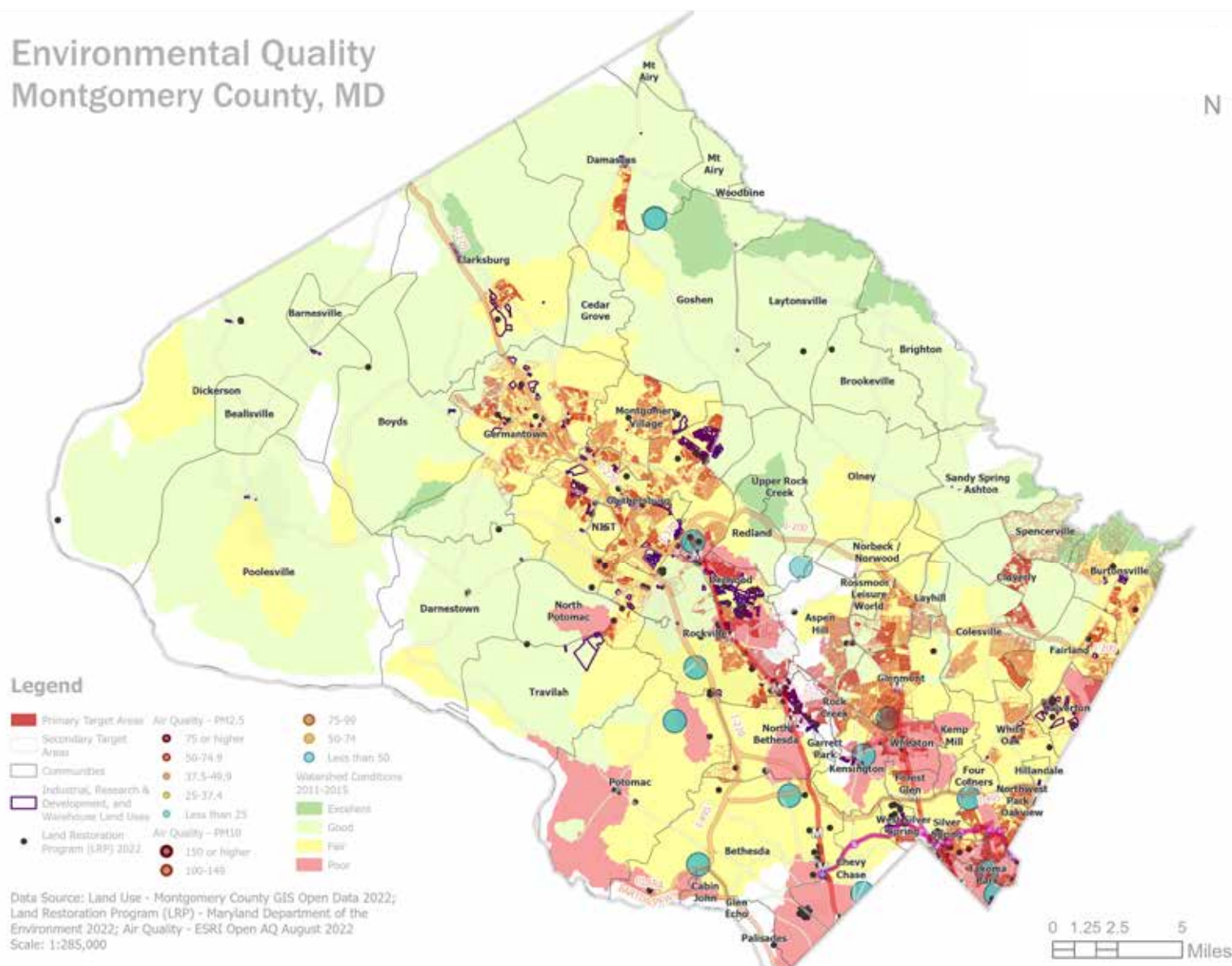
Transportation

The plight of the working class and many BIPOC people we talked to felt that the needs of working class families were not considered in the planning themes of Thrive. They felt that many of the “progressive” policies did not consider their current status in life and expressed how proposed changes would adversely impact their quality of life. Some people showed great resistance to the idea of '15-minute living' because they relied on their work vehicles to take them to different parts of the county where they had access to jobs. Many expressed that they rely on vehicle miles and parking availability to make a living. For some, getting a vehicle represented the possibility of financial independence. To others, the idea of riding a bike for leisure or to commute was seen as a luxury that comes with a level of economic empowerment they did not have yet. These sentiments are compounded by the long commutes even more traditional workers faced while using locally available transit options. There was a general sentiment that root issues needed to be addressed before new ideas could be successfully implemented.

Instead of welcoming these ideas as positive, they are often seen as a harbinger for gentrification and displacement. Ideas such as congestion pricing and reduced parking requirements that promote “good urbanism” are sometimes outside of the reality for working class people. There is a concern that shifting to this new way of life will make it harder for them to survive and in some instances this is true.

"I can't take my ladder on the Purple Line" - Montgomery County Resident

Environmental Quality Montgomery County, MD



Environmental Quality

This map depicts various layers that make up environmental quality conditions within Montgomery County. The layers include watershed conditions taken from 2011 through 2015, air quality measurements of particulate matter 2.5 and particulate matter (PM) 10, industrial land uses, and sites that qualify for the land restoration program (LRP).

A majority of the primary and secondary target areas are located within watersheds that are in fair to poor condition.

Target areas within watersheds experiencing poor conditions, like those in Derwood and Rockville, are adjacent to areas with industrial, research & development, and warehouse land uses. This land use category is associated with the processing of raw materials and hazardous substances, movement of heavy vehicles, and high impervious surfaces; functions that typically contribute to generation of pollutants, run-off, and poor watershed quality.

Target areas are also clustered around Land Restoration Program (LRP) sites, brownfield areas that are identified by the State of Maryland for restoration.

PM2.5 and PM10 values, as captured by the air quality monitors stationed throughout the County, show consistently low concentrations of particulate matter regardless of urban and rural typology.

Social Capital

In order for a shared sense of purpose to exist, it is not a one-way process. Communities where wealthy white residents are the norm also have to achieve integration and inclusivity. It could be argued that it is in fact more important for these communities to begin to see their communities as having a shared sense of purpose instead of only addressing racial and economic inequality at the "problem" side of the spectrum. Part of the inequality equation is the exclusivity of the wealthy, some of these doors need to start being opened to truly create a shared sense of purpose and belonging for ALL County residents. Exclusivity reinforces the racial and class divides within society.

Cultural Competence

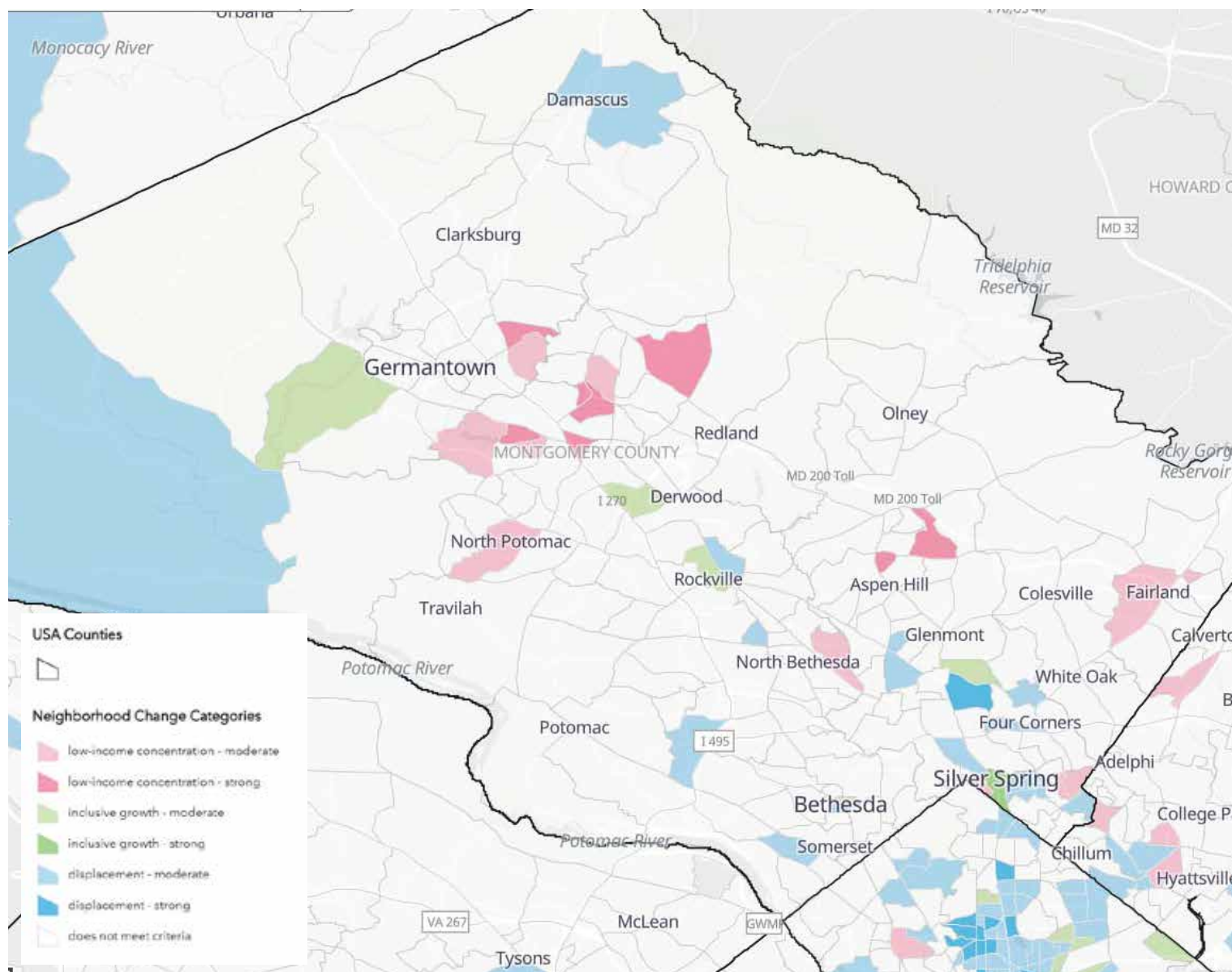
It is vital to have practitioners who can relate to the communities they serve. In executing planning in communities of color, practitioners must lead with deference. Being able to understand cultural cues and nuance plays a large role in comprehension and meaningful engagement. If communities feel that they are not being respected or understood, real conversations will not occur.

Community Development

The County has a tremendous opportunity, with Thrive, to develop partnerships with its communities that it can leverage to rebuild trust, strengthen relationships, and celebrate everything that is great about the region. Montgomery County has had success with diversifying by implementing inclusionary zoning in the 70's and 80's. Now, it is important to do the work to protect the existing communities. Planning should seek to leverage and strengthen the existing social networks and identify opportunities to empower local actors to be directly involved in the work of community development.

Economic Empowerment

Throughout the public engagement process, it was clear that displacement is a big fear for residents with less means, as they are witnessing escalating [home] prices. The vast majority of working class people expressed that they want access to better education and economic opportunity. Most people who struggle to make 'ends meet' prioritize economic advancement as their number one priority and planning for their communities should reflect that reality.



Neighborhood Change and Displacement Risk

The Montgomery County Planning Department is engaged in important work to understand the displacement risk in the County. These types of analysis need to be leveraged to understand how to protect neighborhoods and encourage Inclusive Growth. Across the board, low-income and BIPOC residents are very worried about displacement as a result of new development. More work needs to be put into understanding how to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing and establishing new affordable housing to ensure that Montgomery County doesn't lose the rich diversity, both racial and economic, to make it a complete community. If housing conditions continue on their trajectory, it is quite feasible that Montgomery County will cease to be a bedroom community, but a community that requires commuters from outside the region to staff its businesses. This dynamic would be in opposition to both the Equity and Sustainability goals of Thrive.