

Thrive Montgomery 2050



A Strategic Framework for the Montgomery County
General Plan Update

ABSTRACT

The great communities, places and spaces that keep us calling Montgomery County “home” were shaped by planners and community members who developed Montgomery County’s 1964 General Plan, “On Wedges and Corridors.” This long-term land use policy document, published more than a half a century ago, set forth an overall vision, goals and policy principles that have guided the county’s physical development.

The General Plan informs several elements of development in the county, including the shape and character of every neighborhood, the types of community facilities and amenities that serve residents and businesses, and the ways we travel throughout the county. It is continually revised with amendments and through local master plans, sector plans and countywide functional plans. The General Plan was last comprehensively updated in 1969 and refined in 1993.

The goals of the 1964 General Plan and the 1969 Update (efficient land use, preservation of open spaces, opportunities for recreation, protection of environmental resources, connective transportation systems and a variety of living environments) continue to be relevant and essential. But tremendous and rapid technological, social, environmental, demographic and economic changes necessitate a fresh look at the long-range planning framework for Montgomery County.

Montgomery Planning has initiated an update of its General Plan, which aims to identify and examine the changes that are occurring so that we can plan in a way that shapes the future of our county with a shared vision, allowing us to preserve what we love about our county and improve those qualities that need work.

This Strategic Framework presents an organizing approach for the General Plan Update process. It defines preliminary Strategic Outcomes and Drivers of Change (presenting both opportunities and constraints) for Montgomery County based on initial input from a select group of leaders in the county and experts in the fields of planning and development. In collaboration with the community, Montgomery Planning will further refine these elements and define policies that will help the county thrive and continue to be a desirable place to live, work and play long into the future.

SOURCE OF COPIES

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
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Contents

01 GENERAL PLAN BACKGROUND	4
02 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK BACKGROUND	10
03 PRELIMINARY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK	16

01

02

03

General Plan Background

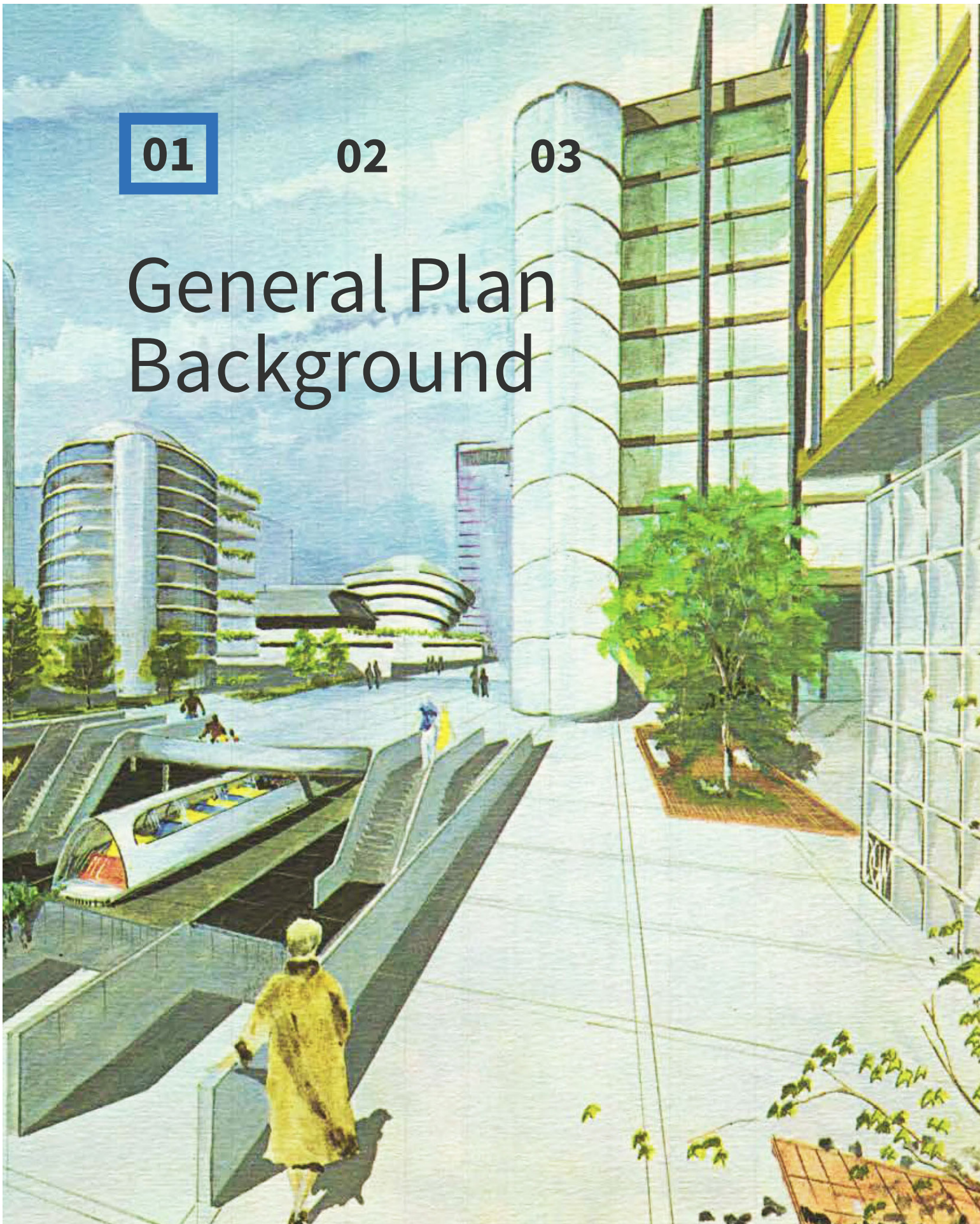


Image source: *On Wedges and Corridors* (1964)

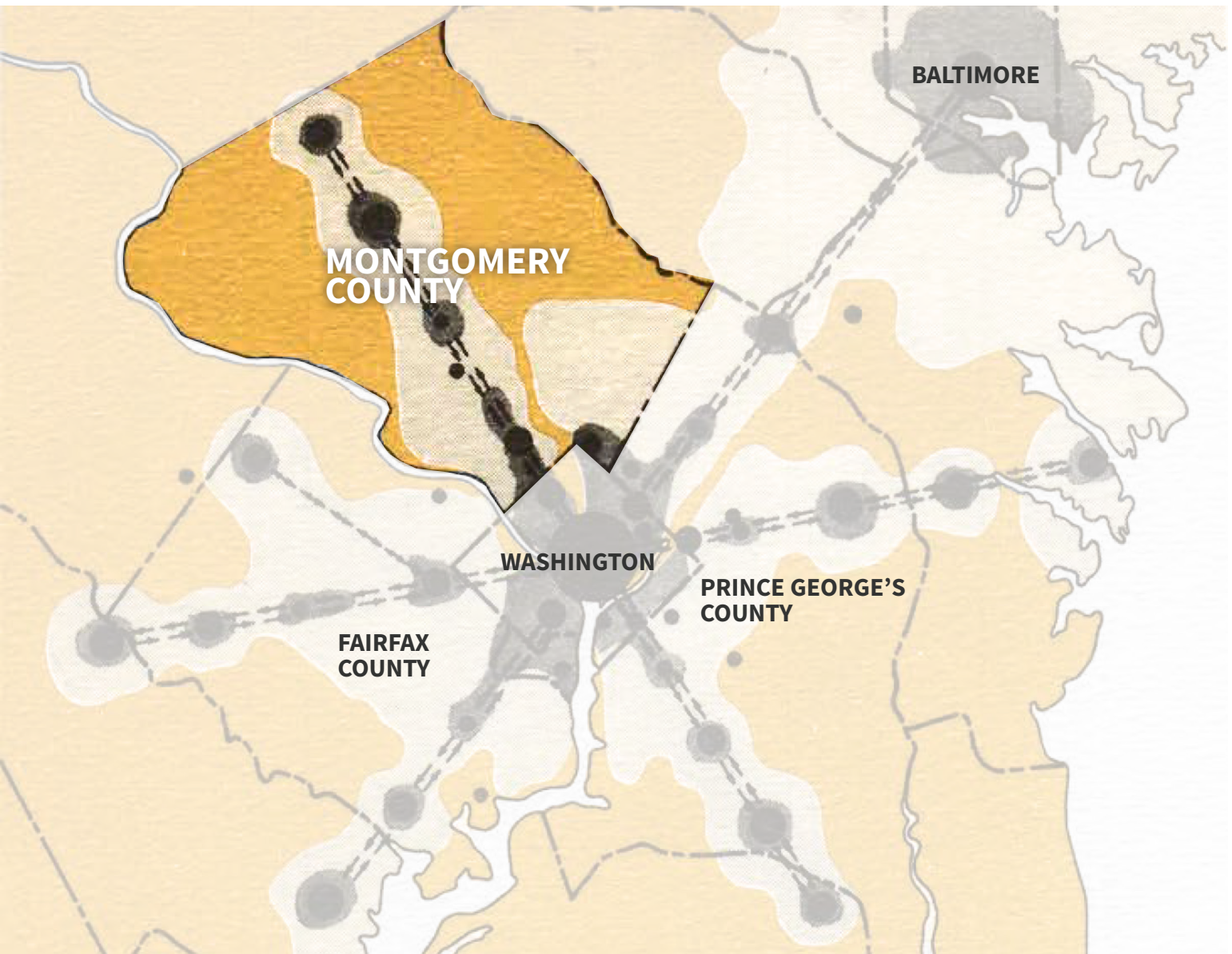
THE GENERAL PLAN—THE FOUNDATION OF LAND USE PLANNING IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

The 1964 General Plan, “On Wedges and Corridors,” set a long-term vision for growth in the county, providing a framework to encourage communities that are planned and developed in a coordinated, orderly way. The plan provided broad policy guidance for the county’s more specific countywide functional plans, and for local area master or

sector plans for specific areas, each of which establishes detailed recommendations for buildings, open spaces and infrastructure.

The 1964 plan’s intent for development in the county was, “A better environment for us and our children.” Its physical organization of “wedges and corridors” comes from a regional concept of channeling growth along major highways while preserving wedges of open space, farmland and low-density residential uses. This vision has guided the county’s plans and policies for more than five decades.

This graphic demonstrates the concept of wedges and corridors. Base image source: On Wedges and Corridors (1964)



THE EVOLUTION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan is not a static document; it was meant to evolve over time to respond to changes that affect land use. A comprehensive amendment to the 1964 General Plan was completed in 1969, with a major refinement in 1993. Although there have been no comprehensive amendments to the General Plan since 1969, the Housing Element was amended in 2011. In addition,

the county's overall planning framework is updated with each successive local area master or sector plan and countywide functional plan, which are amendments to the General Plan.

The 1964 General Plan set goals to "improve the manner in which growth takes place." The 1969 Update and the 1993 Refinement revised the goals and added specific objectives related to each. Table 1 outlines how the goals evolved from 1964 to 1993.

In addition to the General Plan itself, there have been more than 60 local area master/sector plans and countywide functional plans that have shaped the development of Montgomery County, all of which become part of the General Plan as amendments. Some relevant plans and regulations are shown on the timeline below.

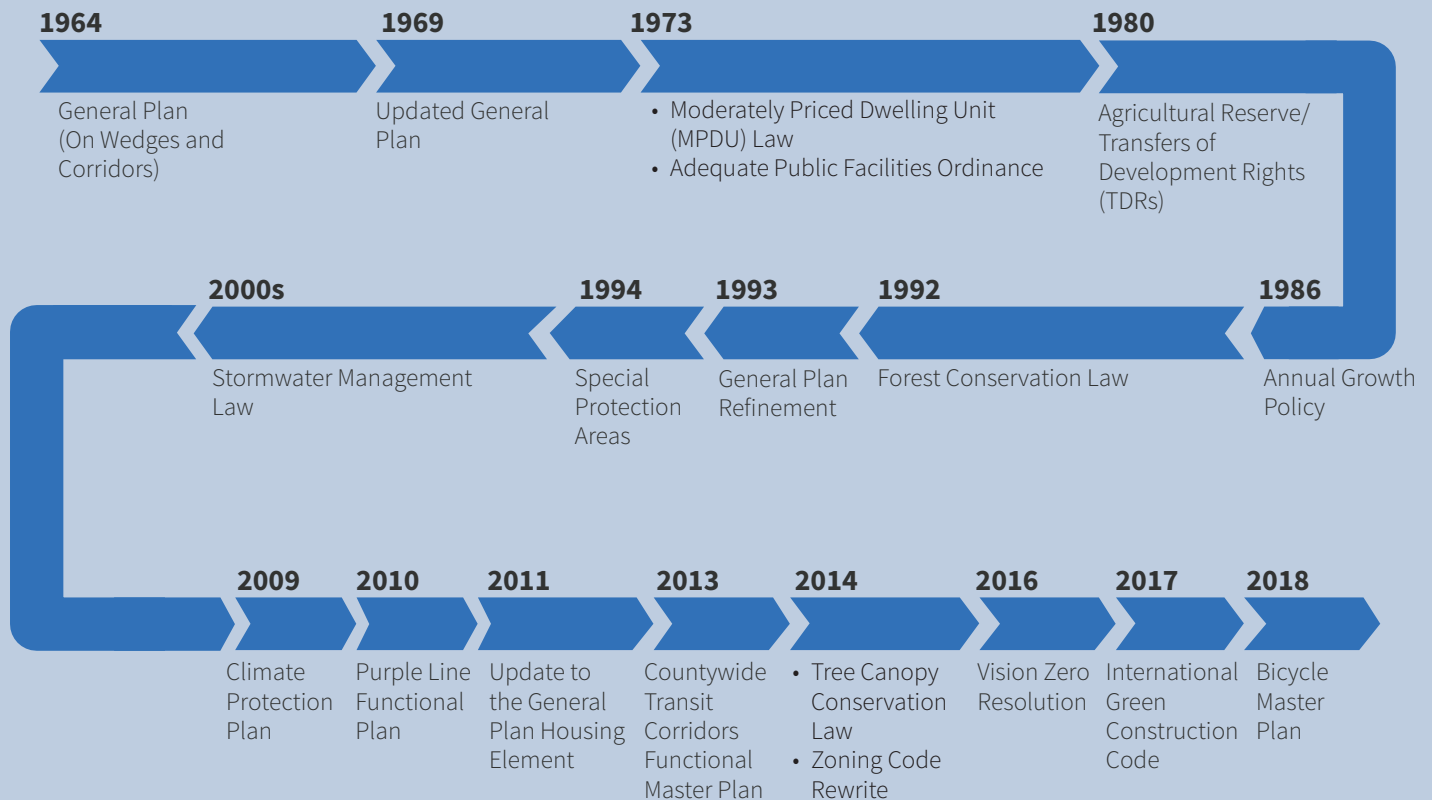


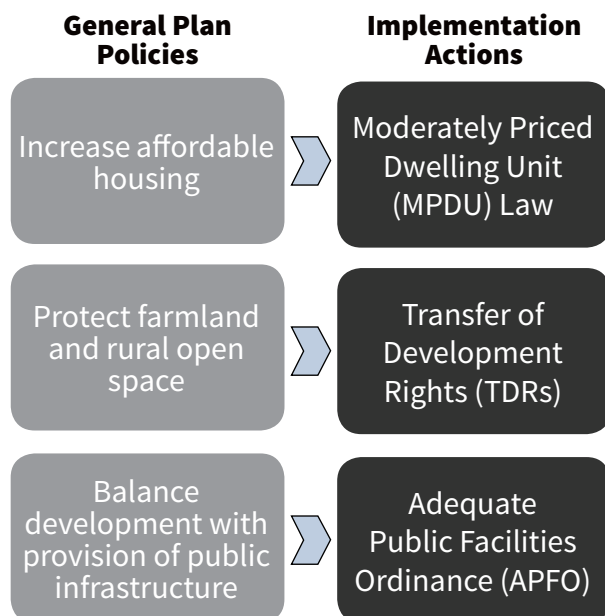
Table 1: Evolution of the General Plan's Goals

Category	1964 On Wedges & Corridors	1969 Updated General Plan	1993 General Plan Refinement
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use land efficiently • Encourage an orderly conversion of undeveloped land to urban use • Invite imaginative urban design • Encourage greater variety of living environments • Maintain large open spaces • Expand opportunities for outdoor recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve a balance among the various land uses insofar as the proper amount, types and distribution of each results in an environment and diversity of lifestyles that fulfill the requirements of the county's residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve a wide variety of land use and development densities consistent with the Wedges and Corridors pattern.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an efficient transportation system including rapid transit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a balanced circulation system which most efficiently serves the economic, social and environmental structure of the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance mobility by providing a safe and efficient transportation system offering a wide range of alternatives that serve the environmental, economic, social and land use needs of the county and provide a framework for development.
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect natural resources and encourage their proper development • Facilitate the orderly and efficient arrangement of public utilities and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve valuable natural and historic areas for the benefit of present and future generations. • Provide an aesthetic and healthful environment for present and future generations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and protect natural resources to provide a healthy and beautiful environment for present and future generations. Manage the impact of human activity on our natural resources in a balanced manner to sustain human, plant and animal life.
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure implementation of the plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A (no explicit goal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A (no explicit goal)
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A (no explicit goal, but addressed under the goal to "encourage a greater variety of living environments") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress the present quality and prestigious image of residential development in Montgomery County by further providing for a full range of housing choices conveniently located in suitable living environments for all incomes, ages and lifestyles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and maintain a wide choice of housing types and neighborhoods for people of all incomes, ages, lifestyles and physical capabilities at appropriate densities and locations.
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A (no explicit goal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A (no explicit goal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote a healthy economy, including a broad range of business, service and employment opportunities at appropriate locations.
Community Identity & Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A (no explicit goal, but addressed under the goals to "invite imaginative design" and "encourage a greater variety of living environments") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A (no explicit goal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several objectives focused on the topic, but no stated goal.
Regionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A (no explicit goal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A (no explicit goal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote regional cooperation and solutions to problems of mutual concern to Montgomery County, its neighbors and its municipalities.

IMPACTS OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The General Plan has had clear influences on development in the county. Perhaps the most obvious impact is the prevailing countywide development pattern, which follows the “wedges and corridors” vision of developed corridors separated by wedges of low-density residential areas and preserved land. Over the years, policies expressed in the plan have also led to major planning initiatives, as shown in the graphic below.

Three of the 1969 plan’s key recommendations contributed to development of major planning initiatives:



The Need for the Update

These trends, along with technological, social, environmental and economic changes, necessitate a fresh look at the long-range planning framework for Montgomery County to ensure that the county remains a vibrant and welcoming place where all can thrive over the next 30 years. The Montgomery County Planning Department is launching “Thrive Montgomery 2050” to create an updated General Plan for a thriving Montgomery County in the future.

The updated General Plan will be visionary. It will reflect the latest best practices to help Montgomery County flexibly accommodate growth and maintain its competitive edge over the next 30 years. At the same time, the updated General Plan will focus on preserving the qualities that have defined Montgomery County as one of the most desirable locations in the D.C. metro region. The General Plan will chart a course for the future and will address anticipated future challenges and propose solutions on issues such as housing, the economy, and transportation, as well as broader topics such as social equity and climate change.

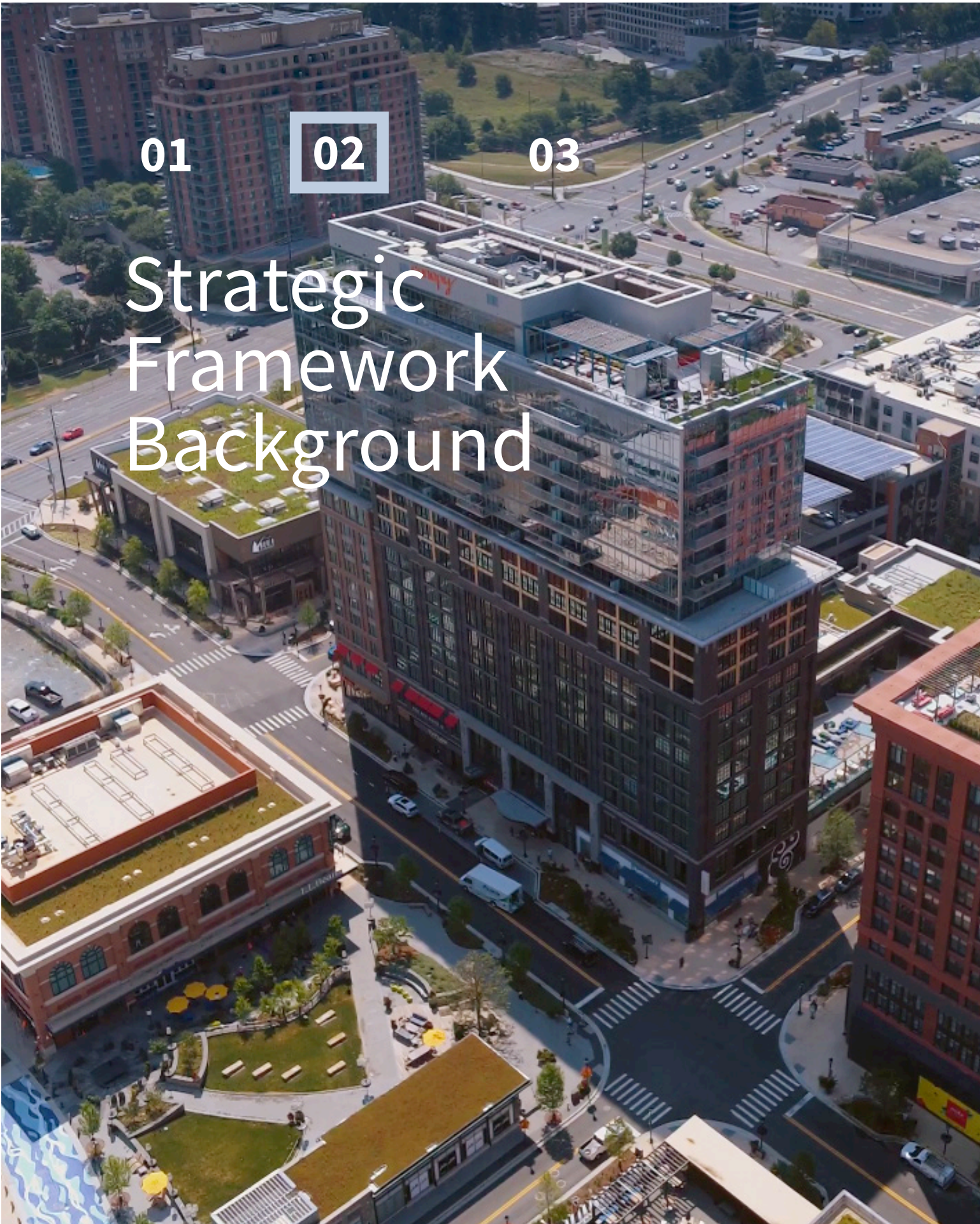
9

01

02

03

Strategic Framework Background



WHAT IS THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK & HOW WILL IT BE USED?

The Strategic Framework is a tool for approaching the General Plan Update process. While this document shares initial draft ideas about key planning issues for the future, it does not establish a final vision for the future of Montgomery County. Instead, the Strategic Framework provides a way to identify drivers of change that will affect Montgomery County's future. This document helps to frame discussions about these drivers of change during the planning process. It also looks at how the drivers of change relate to each other and how they might impact the county now and in the future.

The framework presented in this document is a draft – a first step in the process of developing a new General Plan. It will be reviewed and refined with the community during the General Plan Update process.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

- I.** Reviewed national and regional examples of other General/ Comprehensive Plans and reviewed interviews with other jurisdictions that have conducted update processes.
- II.** Met with public, institutional and private sector leaders in one-on-one interviews and small group discussions to obtain input about opportunities and concerns regarding the long-term future of Montgomery County.
- III.** Identified potential areas of focus for the planning process.
- IV.** Developed three draft strategic frameworks.
- V.** Discussed draft strategic frameworks with a small group of experts in the fields of planning and development.
- VI.** Refined the draft framework concept and presented it to the Montgomery County Planning Board.

Strategies to gather input on Strategic Framework:

Interviews with:

- County Council members and staff
- Current and former county Planning Board members
- University representatives
- Montgomery County Public Schools administration representatives
- Many county and regional agencies, including those focused on economic development, agricultural services, parks, water/sewer and transportation



Planning staff comments provided via sticky notes



Small group discussion with County Department Heads

Comments focused on:

The pros and cons of the existing General Plan in terms of functionality

Current and potential future trends and drivers of change in the county

Opportunities, challenges and priorities for the future

Participants identified some of the defining characteristics of the County:



**AGRICULTURAL
RESERVE**



**PARKS AND
NATURAL AREAS**



**GREAT
SCHOOLS**



**HIGH QUALITY
OF LIFE**



DIVERSITY

Participants identified their top concerns for the future & questions they would like to see addressed in the plan:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & COMPETITIVENESS

Will the federal government become less relevant for local employment? How can the county attract and retain jobs and innovative research potential?

EQUITY

How can all residents have access to opportunities related to employment and education? How can the county ensure that all residents are provided amenities and services?

ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

What will be the impacts of climate change? Will there be issues related to water availability?

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY & OPTIONS

How can the county be affordable for all who want to live here? What is the future of single-family neighborhoods? Will people be able to age in place if they want to?

AGRICULTURAL RESERVE

What is the future of the Agricultural Reserve?

TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS & MOBILITY

How can we improve east-west connectivity? How will new transportation innovations impact mobility for the county and region?

SCHOOLS

Will the county be able to maintain its high quality of education? How will the delivery of educational opportunities evolve?

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

How will tech shifts play out in terms of potential impacts on travel patterns, equity, land use, jobs, etc.?

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND IDEAS FOR THE PLAN UPDATE

The General Plan must be a useful document, providing strategies and tools to help all who will be implementing the plan to achieve its vision. Some comments that we received were not directly related to a specific challenge or opportunity but should, nevertheless, still be considered in the General Plan Update.

- The 1964 concept was based on the county as a largely undeveloped “greenfield” opportunity. Since the county is largely built out in areas marked for development, the plan must find ways to fill in gaps and redevelop underutilized properties.
- Acknowledging that our physical, built environment will continue to evolve, this plan should include general goals and a vision that can stay consistent even if the physical framework changes over time.
- Consider ways to make the county’s communities more significant on their own, rather than focusing on significance due primarily to proximity to DC.
- Use the General Plan Update process to build countywide cross-department cooperation and involvement that can make plan implementation more efficient and successful.
- Think beyond a land use plan: provide a comprehensive policy resource for all public and private stakeholders.



01

02

03

Preliminary Strategic Framework



The new General Plan will provide innovative policies to protect what's great and prepare for future changes so that Montgomery County can thrive over the next 30 years.

*The General Plan Strategic Framework includes **Strategic Outcomes** for the county's future that the General Plan should help achieve, and **Drivers of Change** that will impact the county's ability to achieve those outcomes. These components offer a starting point for approaching the General Plan Update planning process and will be further confirmed and refined through extensive community engagement and staff analysis during Thrive Montgomery 2050.*

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

The “Strategic Outcomes” for Thrive Montgomery 2050 reflect long-term priorities or core values for the county that the updated General Plan should help to achieve. These outcomes are cross-cutting and permeate the issues and topics that will be addressed in the General Plan. They, in turn, are impacted by current and future trends, such as demographic shifts, economic forces, technological innovations and climate change.

These outcomes will be reviewed and refined with the community's input during the Thrive Montgomery 2050 process.

Focusing on the Strategic Outcomes will encourage values-based discussions and will help focus conversations on the “big picture” long-term future of Montgomery County.

Strategic Outcomes



ECONOMIC HEALTH

- *Economic health means that Montgomery County has a forward-looking economy that is strong and competitive, with a variety of stable and well-paying jobs.*



COMMUNITY EQUITY

- *Community equity means that Montgomery County is a place where all residents, regardless of race, age, religion, ethnicity, national origin, income, physical ability or gender, have equal access to affordable housing, healthy food options, parks and open spaces, facilities and services, employment opportunities, a quality education and a variety of mobility options.*



ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

- *Environmental resilience means that Montgomery County is prepared to address the threats of climate change and uses the best available strategies to protect both built and natural resources to allow them to be enjoyed by future generations.*

ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE: EQUILIBRIUM

Each of the General Plan strategic outcomes— economic health, community equity and environmental resilience—will be needed for the county to be successful in the future. Additionally, Montgomery County thrives when the three Strategic Outcomes also are in equilibrium—where we can achieve each outcome without negatively impacting the others.

A healthy and robust economy should equally benefit all segments of the community while preserving and enhancing the health and resilience of the environment. A negative disruption to any one of these three outcomes will require a response by the public and private sectors to eliminate or mitigate the threat, implement innovative solutions and restore the desired level of performance for the county’s economy, equity and resilience.

Montgomery County should look holistically at how we can balance sometimes competing priorities or mitigate negative impacts on one of these outcomes in order to achieve a thriving Montgomery.



FORCES OF CHANGE

Drivers of Change: A change can be positive or negative and, therefore, is an opportunity to succeed if it is properly managed and harnessed to our advantage. But it can become a threat in the absence of an adequate response. The development of the three Strategic Outcomes was informed by recognizing the following Drivers of Change, which will be discussed with the community and refined as part of the General Plan development process:

- **Economic disruptions**, including growing competition among regions and jurisdictions and the impacts of technological innovations on the county’s economic climate.
- **Climate change** and its potential impacts on the economy, infrastructure, agriculture, health, recreation and natural habitat.
- **Demographic changes**, including international migration; an aging population; increasing diversity; and changes in family size and structure.
- **Technological innovations** such as Internet of Everything, autonomous vehicles and other mobility options, Smart City advancements, and energy sources.
- **Changes in lifestyle preferences** regarding housing and employment locations, transportation choices and travel patterns.

The drivers of change and related emerging trends are creating new issues as well as exacerbating existing ones. The following is a summary of major issues that Thrive Montgomery 2050 should explore to ensure the General Plan Update provides helpful and relevant planning guidance:

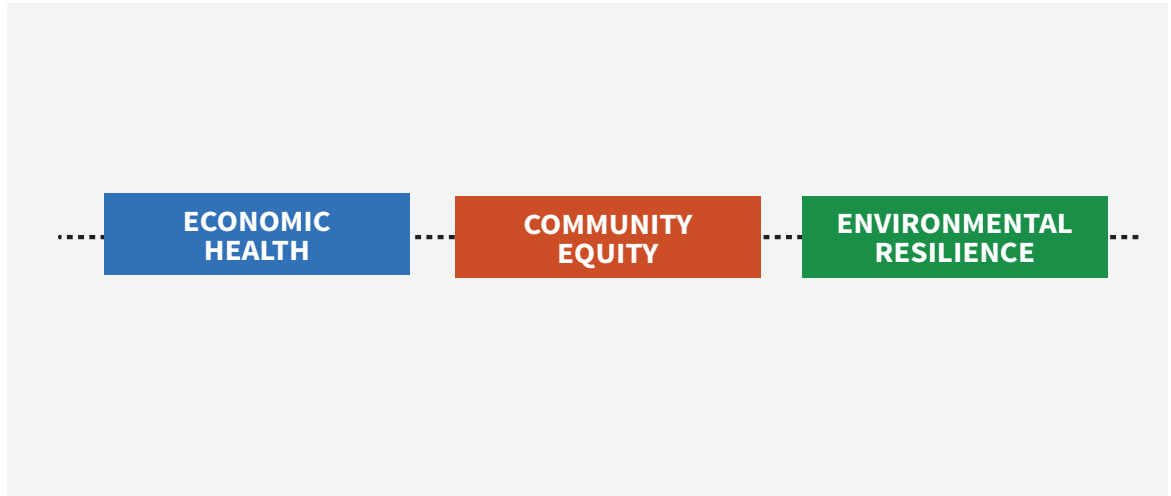
- **Economic Health:** Economic competitiveness, changing employment dynamics, role of higher education in economic development, diversifying economic sectors.
- **Environmental Resilience:** Forest and tree canopy protection and expansion, stream water quality and habitat protection, adaption to the impacts of climate change.
- **Community Equity:** Racial, social and economic inequality, unequal distribution of amenities and services, stagnant incomes, increasing poverty and wealth gap, displacement, gaps in educational performance and achievement, discrimination, economic segregation and east-west county divide.
- **Housing:** Housing affordability, including low-income and workforce housing, and provision of a variety of housing types to meet diverse community needs.
- **Transportation:** Multimodal transportation options, congestion, Vision Zero safety issues and impacts of new mobility options.
- **Technology:** Cross-cutting impacts of technology on land use, transportation, employment and other issues.
- **Infrastructure:** Water and sewer capacity, aging infrastructure, resilient utility infrastructure, high speed internet access.
- **Agricultural Reserve:** Future of the Ag Reserve in a changing agricultural context and economy.
- **Major Corridors:** Role of the major corridors in the land use evolution of the county.
- **Growth Management:** Growth management framework in the light of changes in land use and development from greenfields to infill development.
- **Community Design and Culture:** The design of the public realm and its changing role in the community life, arts and cultural resources for a diverse county, compatibility of infill with existing development.
- **Other Quality of Life Issues:** Access to better health care options and healthy food choices, parks and open spaces, community cohesion and community facilities, such as education, recreation, and safety.

Proactive and reactive actions can be taken to counter or harness the impacts of change and restore balance within and among the Strategic Outcomes. Actions are the initiatives, policies, planning principles, or other steps the county can take in order to achieve the desired future. They will be redefined over time as Drivers shift and as new responses emerge. The General Plan, as a high-level, long-term policy document, will need to consider several things to identify planning policies that will spur needed actions in the future:

- What impacts are the Drivers having, or likely to have, on the county's ability to realize its goals?
- How can the county proactively respond to the near and long-term changes to harness the change and ensure that the Strategic Outcomes retain their desired state?
- What actions should be taken (in terms of policies, initiatives, etc.) to mitigate negative impacts and restore the desired state of achievement for each outcome?
- What are the potential changes which should be monitored to trigger future action?

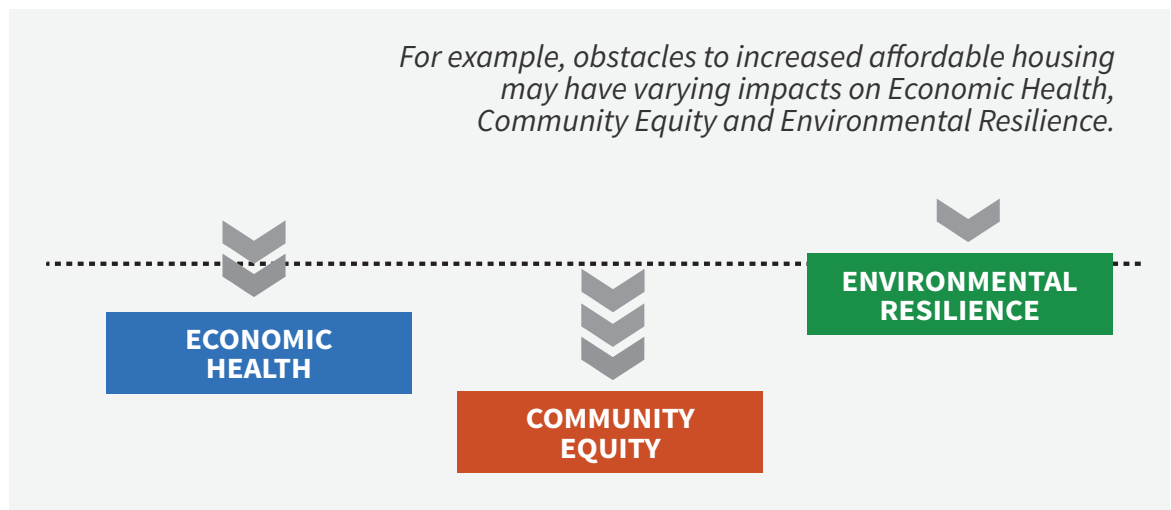
STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Montgomery County thrives when it can achieve each desired outcome without negatively impacting other outcomes.



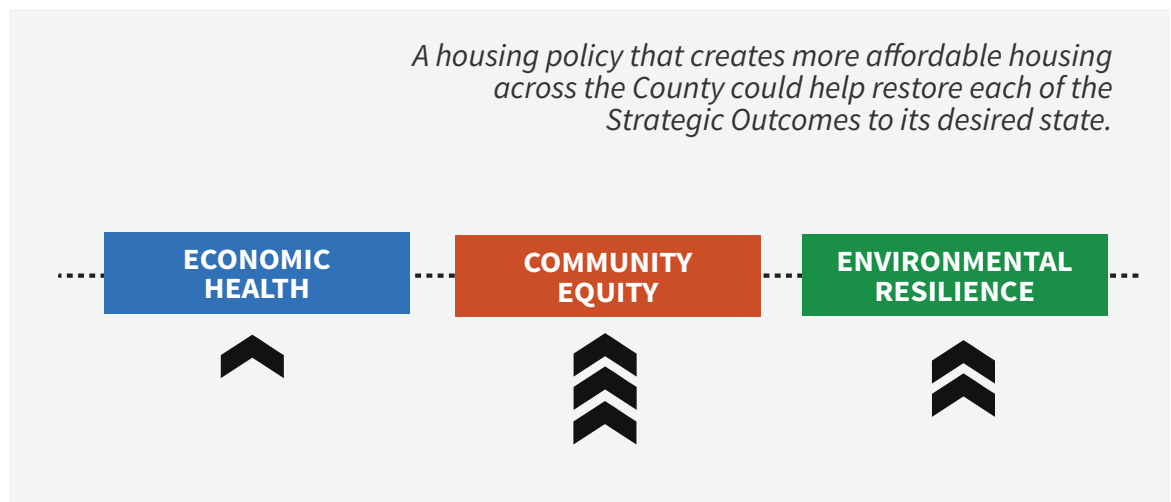
DRIVERS

Each change may impact the Strategic Outcomes in different major and minor ways.



ACTIONS

Policy and Implementation Actions can be taken to counter the negative impacts of each change and restore each outcome to its desired state.

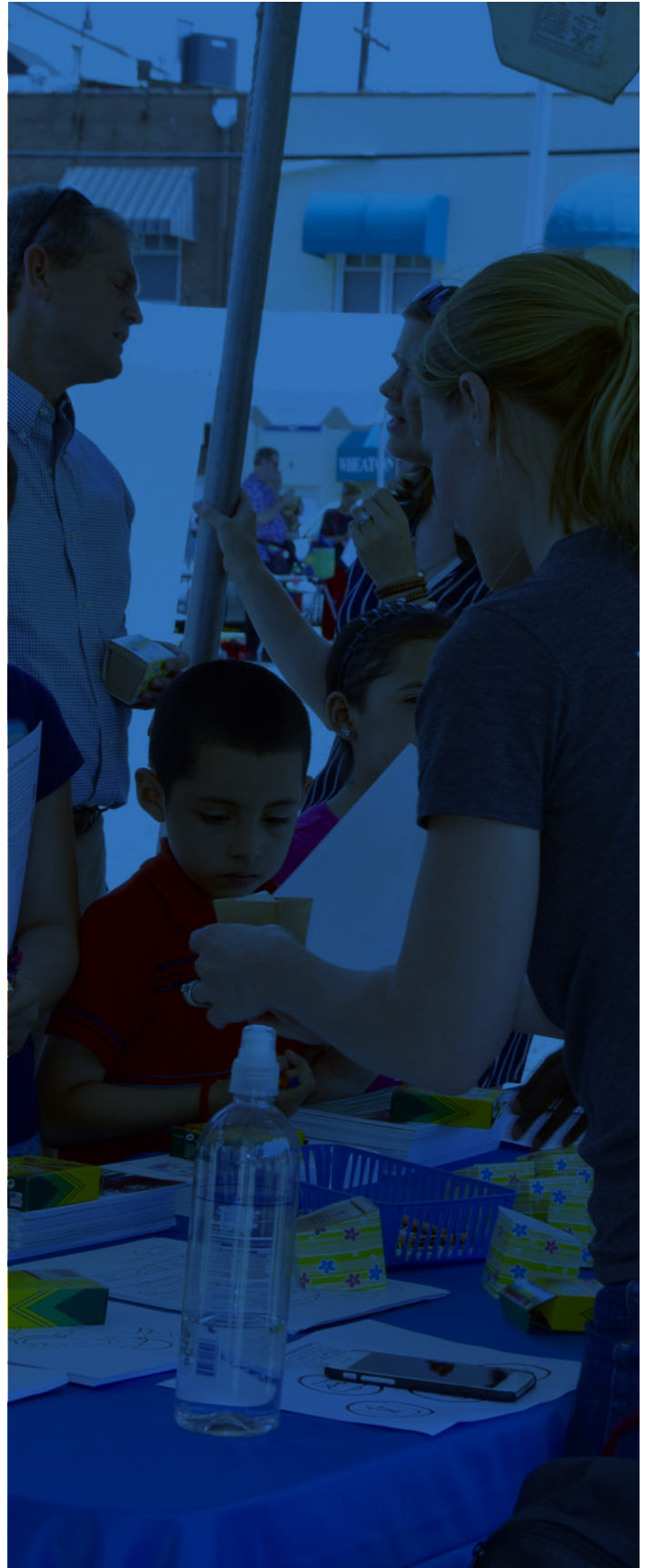


USING THE FRAMEWORK IN THE PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

This framework will be used to help guide initial analysis during the General Plan Update process and will be refined through community feedback and input from various stakeholders and decision makers who will be responsible for implementing the Plan's recommendations.

While Drivers of Change will vary over time, and policy and other implementation actions will evolve, the Strategic Outcomes will provide consistent guideposts on which the county should maintain its focus while addressing current and future opportunities and challenges over time.

The value of the Strategic Framework will be achieved through input from the community, county government staff, elected officials, residents and others as part of Thrive Montgomery 2050. That input will allow us to better understand the vision and needs of the community, the impacts of the Drivers of Change on the county's future, and ways to tackle these opportunities and challenges through the General Plan.





THRIVE

MONTGOMERY 2050

Let's Plan Our Future. Together.