

7. Diverse and Adaptable Growth

Issues and Challenges

The [1964 General Plan](#) laid out the broad planning principles based on the “Wedges and Corridors” concept. These principles generally worked, and the county grew in an orderly fashion into an economic engine for the state and a desirable home to more than a million people. However, the county’s current land use and development patterns need to be reimagined to deal with the current and emerging issues of technological innovation, traffic congestion, economic and equity issues, and the threats of climate change.

Continuing the current land use pattern supported mainly by driving is not sustainable. As outlined in the previous chapters, this pattern of development has negative implications for the county’s economy, housing affordability, traffic congestion and environmental sustainability and resilience. And it will continue the current pattern of inequality and separation of its neighborhoods by income and race.

On the positive side, the Agricultural Reserve has significant value as a tool to preserve farmland and rural open space as well as to provide numerous environmental benefits (e.g., protecting downstream water quality) and opportunities for local food production and carbon sequestration. But there are competing demands for land and other purposes, such as solar energy production, which put pressure on the Agricultural Reserve. It faces local and global challenges including a loss of contiguous farmland, lack of funding to purchase preservation easements, extreme weather events associated with climate change, technological advancements and global trade disputes.

Vision for Diverse and Adaptable Growth

In 2050, Montgomery County’s growth is focused on infill development and redevelopment in areas of the county supported by rail and BRT that lead to improved human and environmental health and healthy, active lifestyles. Focusing new growth and redevelopment along transit corridors transforms auto-centric roads into people-centric places. Reduction of automobiles fosters stewardship of treasured resources, including the Agricultural Reserve, parkland and environmentally sensitive areas. Residents have access to healthy, local food provided through agriculture integrated into urban and suburban neighborhoods and increased local food production in the Agricultural Reserve. Growth and development are served by adequate, timely and equitable public facilities and infrastructure. The regulatory mechanisms to support this development are nimble and focused on design excellence and achieve measurable, equitable outcomes.

Diverse and Compact Growth

Thrive Montgomery 2050 envisions a shift from the conventional suburban model of car-oriented greenfield development to walkable urbanism based on a compact form of infill development and redevelopment resulting in Complete Communities as described in the first chapter.

A compact form of development uses the idea of a village or a town center with places of commerce and gathering in the center of a walkable residential community. Compact form of building

essentially means using a smaller footprint of buildings placed close together. When designed appropriately, compact development provides a number of advantages over suburban sprawl including efficient land use, more natural areas for recreation and preservation, reduced automobile travel and increased walking and biking and reduced expense for building and maintaining infrastructure. “When a variety of uses are close together, people are more likely to walk, public places are livelier, and a civic identity develops more readily than in a conventionally planned development.”⁵⁰

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

A large part of the future growth in the county must be transit-oriented with both jobs and housing located within walking distance of the existing and planned rail and BRT stations. Montgomery County should focus future growth not around these transit stations but also on the connective tissue between them—the network major corridors (MD 355, Georgia Avenue, Route 29, Veirs Mill Road, University Boulevard, New Hampshire Avenue, Corridor Cities Transitway, and North Bethesda Transitway). As Montgomery County transitions from greenfield development to infill and redevelopment to accommodate future growth in a changing social and natural environment, these corridors provide an opportunity to help the county grow and improve economic health, equity and environmental resilience.

Managing Growth as a Mature, Built-Out County

Since the future is unpredictable, we must be flexible and nimble in our plans and implementation tools so we can change quickly and adapt to new conditions and still be able to keep our focus on achieving the desired outcomes no matter what challenges and disruptions we will face. Today, technological innovations such as wayfinding apps can give us real time information expanding our ability to manage traffic in a whole different way. Increases in the number of people working remotely, as well as demand for office space, and could change the traffic conditions significantly. We must manage growth and development as a mature, built out county by maximizing use of constrained land, and explore new mechanisms to evaluate and deliver public facilities and infrastructure improvements.

The Role of Agriculture in Neighborhoods and the Agricultural Reserve

While the establishment of the Agricultural Reserve successfully preserved farmland and rural open space in the county, the nationally recognized planning initiative, needs to evolve to address the changing circumstances over the next 30 years. We will continue to retain the Agricultural Reserve and celebrate its value in sustaining farmland and rural open space and providing opportunities for local food production and carbon sequestration.

We will also expand access to healthy food and agricultural employment through the diversification of the agricultural sector, including urban and suburban farming.

Goals, Policies and Actions

Goal 7.1: Focus growth on infill development and redevelopment concentrated around rail and BRT.

Policy 7.1.1: Direct Montgomery County's future growth—to include a mixture of uses and a diversity of housing types—to areas supported by rail and BRT.

Action 7.1.1.a: Initiate an update to [the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways](#) to identify typologies for transit station nodes in rail and BRT corridors.

Action 7.1.1.b: Initiate master, sector and corridor plans to analyze land use and zoning in areas accessible to rail and BRT to identify opportunities for infill development, redevelopment and adaptive reuse.

Action 7.1.1.c: Study opportunities to leverage federal, state and local tax incentives, publicly owned land, and land investment opportunities to achieve a diverse mixture of housing options and activities in areas supported by transit.

Policy 7.1.2: Prioritize the development of the highest density around rail and BRT.

Policy 7.1.3: Encourage redevelopment of underutilized properties, particularly near rail and BRT, by updating zoning and developing a suite of financial tools needed to catalyze redevelopment.

Policy 7.1.4: Create new and enhance existing parks near rail and BRT to provide an equitable distribution of active, social and contemplative park experiences.

Goal 7.2: Transform land uses surrounding rail and BRT corridors to accommodate future population growth and varied lifestyle preferences in attractive, walkable and mixed-use communities.

Policy 7.2.1: Incentivize development and public realm improvements along rail and BRT corridors.

Action 7.2.1.a: Initiate master, sector and corridor plans to transform rail and BRT corridors and station areas and identify opportunities to incentivize development and improvements.

Action 7.2.1.b: Conduct an evaluation of the Commercial / Residential and Employment Zones Incentive Density Implementation Guidelines for development projects, including the required public benefits, and public benefit categories and criteria so as to provide incentives for increased density around rail and BRT corridors.

Policy 7.2.2: Develop the county as an interconnected web of transportation and green corridors focused on pedestrians and bicyclists.

Action 7.2.2.a: Identify transportation and green corridors across the county and develop a framework for enhancing their quality, connectivity and potential to support neighborhood centers for the communities they connect.

Action 7.2.2.b: Develop an action plan to link stream valleys, natural lands, parks, open spaces and tree-lined boulevards to create natural corridors throughout the county to provide trails for walking and biking and to link habitats.

Action 7.2.2.c: Develop an action plan to convert auto-dominated corridors and underutilized utility rights-of-way into high-performance, sustainable environments that link transit-oriented communities and allow appropriate connections into less dense adjacent neighborhoods.

Policy 7.2.3: Advance compact, mixed-use development surrounding rail and BRT stations in land use and zoning policies and regulations.

Policy 7.2.4: Retrofit single-use areas to accommodate higher densities and a mixture of uses within a 15-minute walk or bike ride of rail and BRT stations.

Goal 7.3: Manage future growth and development as a mature, built-out county by maximizing use of constrained land and identifying innovative solutions to deliver public facilities and infrastructure.

Policy 7.3.1: Create flexible and adaptable land use policies, programs and regulations that allow for unanticipated changes in land use and development as technology, economy, climate change and other factors create the need for quickly updating the county's regulatory mechanisms.

Action 7.3.1.a: Use public space and redevelopment opportunities to build resilience and respond and adapt to climate change.

Action 7.3.1.b: Identify opportunities for adaptive reuse in suburban communities for stormwater management and flood control.

Policy 7.3.2: Develop new methods of funding public infrastructure by capturing increases in land value due to growth, development and increased density. Recover and reinvest this value in public infrastructure.

Action 7.3.2.a: Identify successful case studies to learn how other communities across the United States are using land value capture to fund investment in public infrastructure.

Policy 7.3.3: Leverage existing publicly owned land to provide public facilities and services and encourage co-location of essential services such as schools, medical clinics, daycare centers, libraries, parks and recreation centers.

Policy 7.3.4: Expand the use of public-private partnerships to achieve co-location of essential services with private redevelopment.

Goal 7.4: Strengthen Montgomery County's agricultural character to ensure the prosperity of the Agricultural Reserve into the future. Balance advancements in industry practices to enhance the Agricultural Reserve. Sustain farmland, rural open space and rural environmental resources to support the well-being of the entire county.

Policy 7.4.1: Eliminate barriers and broaden access to healthy food, agritourism and agricultural employment through the support and diversification of the agricultural sector including urban and suburban farming. Identify opportunities for adaptive reuse of underutilized urban and suburban land for farming.

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

Action 7.4.1.b: Update the Montgomery County Zoning Code to identify urban and suburban farming as permitted uses.

Action 7.4.1.c: Examine the Urban Agricultural Property Tax Credit to identify opportunities to enhance

and expand the tax credit to support urban and suburban farming.

Action 7.4.1.d: Revise the Commercial/Residential and Employment Zones Incentive Density Implementation Guidelines to identify urban and suburban farming as a public benefit.

Policy 7.4.2: Maintain and enhance the Agricultural Reserve as a national model for supporting and protecting agriculture and rural open space that provides vital economic, environmental and health benefits in a major metropolitan area. Study, promote and monitor the economic, environmental and health benefits of the Agricultural Reserve.

Action 7.4.2.a: Conduct a study of the economic impacts of the county's agricultural industry. Identify future trends and opportunities to remain competitive in food production and distribution.

Action 7.4.2.b: Develop a strategic plan that builds upon the Agricultural Reserve to engage culinary entrepreneurs, leading food research organizations and high-tech rural and urban farmers in food-based innovation and self-reliance in food production.

Policy 7.4.3: Support and enhance policies that provide opportunities for new farmers who want to own and operate their own farms in the county.

Action 7.4.3.a: Connect students with growers and producers in the Agricultural Reserve and with relevant federal and state agencies to help develop a talent pipeline for sustainable agriculture and the biosciences industry.

Policy 7.4.4: Increase public awareness of the agricultural, environmental and economic benefits of the Agricultural Reserve and better connect communities throughout the county to this vital resource through public education and outreach, school programs, and fostering agritourism and ecotourism.

Policy 7.4.5: Provide residential communities in the Agricultural Reserve with adequate infrastructure and services in a way that preserves the agricultural heritage and the unique character of this resource and supports the needs of evolving agricultural practices.

Action 7.4.5.a: Identify opportunities for co-location of public services in a compact form to connect rural communities with improved access to resources that support health, safety and well-being.

Policy 7.4.6: Maintain agriculture as the primary land use in the Agricultural Reserve through policies, regulations, easements and incentives. Promote farming, support farmland and open

space conservation, protect environmentally sensitive areas, respond to climate change and ensure that rural complete communities are compatible with the intent of the Reserve.

Policy 7.4.7: Balance support for an evolving agricultural industry with the conservation of farmland, rural open space and environmental resources in the Agricultural Reserve.

Action 7.4.7.a: Develop recommendations to enhance economic viability and environmental resilience to reflect the evolution in agriculture.

Action 7.4.7.b: Analyze the Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance, including industrially zoned land, to support an evolving agricultural industry. Identify recommendations for flexibility in accommodating industries and services that support agriculture including food processing, distribution, sale, consumption and waste management.

Action 7.4.7.c: Look at and enhance the Transfer of Development Rights and the Building Lot Termination programs to ensure that they continue to fulfill their desired goal of preserving contiguous farmland as well as maintaining the economic viability of farming.

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