



# CONCLUSION

Thrive Montgomery 2050 establishes a framework for responding to economic, demographic, social, and environmental change in ways that are rooted in enduring lessons about what has made places successful in the past, while remaining adaptable to unforeseen circumstances. That is why the plan emphasizes the basic concepts of compact form; diversity of building types and design; and complementary transportation infrastructure, instead of attempting to predict the pace and direction of technological innovation or the consequences of catastrophic events, whether natural or man-made, whose long-term effects are impossible to forecast with certainty.



This plan seeks to ensure that we are prepared to face multiple possible futures. This document is therefore a guidebook, not an exhaustive list of prescriptions. It does not address every topic relevant to our future, but it provides strong direction for decisions about land use, transportation, and related issues within the ability of local government to influence.

**Cooperation among public and private sectors in implementation**

The policies and actions proposed within Thrive Montgomery 2050 focus primarily on subjects under the authority of the Planning and Parks Departments. Full implementation of its recommendations, however, will require the cooperation of many other government bodies. For example, updating the zoning code will require coordination with Department

of Permitting Services, while changes to street design standards require coordination with the Department of Transportation and the State Highway Administration. Agencies such as the Arts and Humanities Council will lead the creation of a new cultural plan, and the Department of Recreation, working with the Parks Department, will help expand opportunities for physical activity.



Market-driven development will play an important role in implementing Thrive Montgomery 2050. We are embarking on an ambitious effort in an age of intense competition and disruption in the private sector and shrinking fiscal capacity of government entities at all levels. To successfully implement these bold ideas, we will need to strategically align public and private investments to maximize their long-term benefits to the county. Future growth will be focused in a compact footprint through private sector-led real estate projects. Infill and redevelopment along major corridors will create a finer-grained network of streets and add gathering spaces that complement publicly owned parks. Property owners will retrofit outdated buildings for new

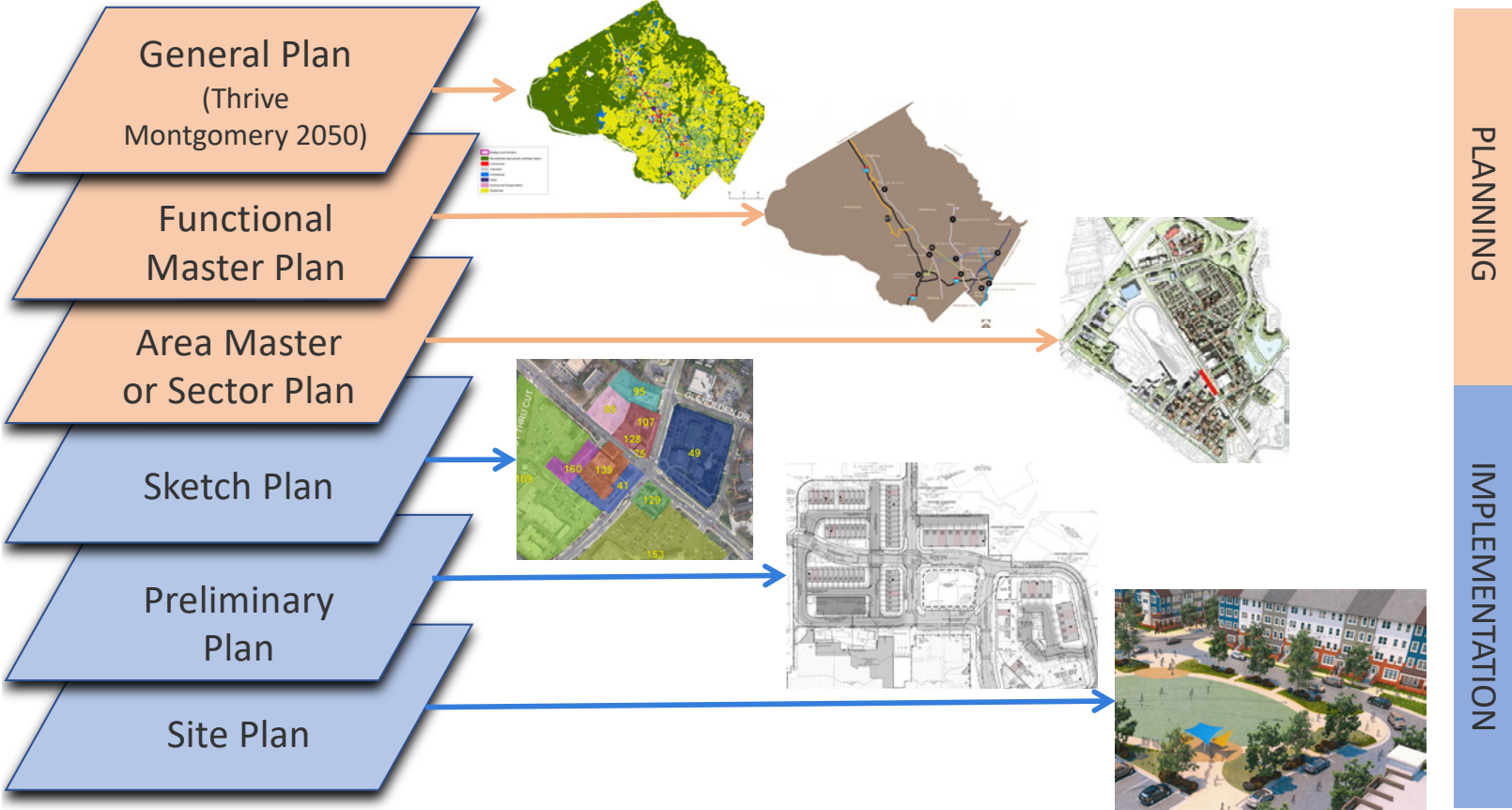
uses and enhance environmental performance by redeveloping surface parking lots and incorporating stormwater management. Private investment in diverse housing types and neighborhood serving retail will fill in missing amenities and lead to more Complete Communities.

**Moving from plans to action**

To start the process of implementing the ideas in Thrive Montgomery 2050, a standalone “Actions Document” has been created that covers short, medium, and long-term tasks for implementing the policies proposed in this plan. The Actions Document will help direct the work program for the Planning and Parks Departments and guide certain other government agencies. It should

not be considered exhaustive, and it should be updated regularly. It covers:

- Reviews of existing policies, regulations, and programs;
- Studies and new master, functional, or facility plans to delve more deeply into the topics addressed in the policies, collect and analyze data, and identify detailed strategies for decision making and implementation;
- Development of tools and templates to support master planning, regulatory review and other planning processes; and
- Changes to agency governance and practices that shape how decisions are made.





Along the way, the county undoubtedly will encounter issues not anticipated by this plan. The indicators listed below are intended, along with the more detailed metrics listed in previous chapters, to guide how these types of issues and potential responses should be evaluated and allow for periodic assessments of progress to inform priorities and set shorter-term goals:

- Economic performance and competitiveness
- Wage and job growth
- New business formation
- Economic output per capita
- Physical activity and public health
- Racial equity and social inclusion
- Racial and economic integration of neighborhoods and schools
- Measures of social capital, civic engagement, and community trust
- Equitable life outcomes across race, income, age, gender, etc.
- Environmental sustainability and resilience
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Vehicle miles traveled
- Water and air quality

The county’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP) should be aligned with Thrive Montgomery 2050’s recommendations to create the conditions to attract private development through the provision of transit, sidewalks and a walkable grid of streets, great urban parks, and high-performing and racially integrated schools. The combination of such public and private investments is the most reliable long-term strategy for expanding

the county’s tax base by attracting workers to the high-quality Complete Communities, which in turn will entice businesses and employers to locate here to be closer to a broadly skilled work force. Impact fees from private development will help fund provision of specific public services, but new sources of funding such as tax increment financing, land value capture, and other mechanisms along with more effective use of county assets such as public land and right-of-way will be needed.



# WHAT CAN THRIVE MONTGOMERY 2050 – OR ANY PLAN – ACHIEVE?

Planners have influence over the physical development of the communities where they work but their power is limited. They do not have the expertise, resources, or authority to control decisions not directly related to real estate development, transportation infrastructure, or the administration of parks. Land use regulation can prevent or impose conditions on real estate development, but it cannot compel the owner of a property to build on it. Planning agencies can help other governmental bodies identify problems and suggest solutions but generally do not control budget decisions relating to public infrastructure or services.

So, what is the role (and value) of planning? Planning helps to facilitate the success of human settlements in specific places – in this case, the 504 square miles comprising Montgomery County. People come together to live and work in groups in order to engage in economic, social, and intellectual exchange. The development of land to accommodate these groups produces settlements of varying size and scale ranging from a few houses or stores at a rural crossroads to a village, town, city, or ultimately a conurbation such as the Washington metropolitan area. The task of planners is to help guide the creation and evolution of the built environment in ways that will assist these settlements in maximizing the exchange value of place while minimizing the negative externalities associated with the development of land and intensification of its uses.

Planners are often asked to predict the course of technological, economic, or social changes that may influence a community’s future prospects and to develop strategies for dealing with these changes. While planners must make educated guesses about future trends, the history of planning is littered with examples of predictions gone badly awry. This does not mean that planners have nothing to offer – only that they do not have a crystal ball, and to the extent that their proposals rely exclusively on assumptions about how the future will unfold, they are on shaky ground. We must consider how climate change, pandemics, or terrorist attacks might affect our future, and we need to think about the implications of autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence, and economic change. However, the foundational elements of what make places work for people have proven remarkably consistent over time, and this plan relies on those foundations to establish a framework for the next generation of our county’s development.

For Montgomery County in the early to mid-21st century, this means formulating strategies designed to strengthen economic competitiveness, reduce and reverse environmental degradation, and ensure that the benefits of development and growth are widely shared across lines of race, ethnicity, and class while countering related inequities in the spatial distribution of resources and opportunities. It also requires creating solutions for improving the depth and breadth of civic engagement, fostering a sense of place, and building strong community bonds.



**Modifications to other plans, policies, and rules**

- Master and sector plans will be updated as amendments to Thrive Montgomery 2050, providing more detailed recommendations for specific areas of the county. These more detailed plans will cover issues such as land use and zoning, transportation, environmental protection, historic and cultural resources, and public facilities.
- Functional plans will refine and implement Thrive Montgomery 2050’s recommendations with countywide scope. Functional plans address a system, such as the road and transit network, or a subject such as recreational tourism or affordable housing.
- Implementation will require changes to the zoning code, the building code, the subdivision regulations, and the adequate public facilities ordinance. These laws, which are part of the Montgomery County Code, establish setbacks, maximum heights, and parking requirements; specify which uses are permitted by right or subject to discretionary review; govern lot shapes and sizes; provide for dedication of rights-of-way and contributions of space and funds for parks and schools; and set other development standards and conditions that must be aligned with the recommendations of this plan.
- The Planning Department will develop guidelines and reference manuals on specific policies and implementation tools. Examples include the Fire Department Access Performance-Based Design Guide, a document produced by the Planning Department and the Department of Permitting Services to facilitate attractive community design while ensuring access to emergency vehicles such as fire trucks.
- The Parks Department’s policies and rules also will need to be reviewed to ensure support for the recommendations in this plan. The Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) plan, the Energized Public Spaces (EPS) plan, the Parks Department’s capital budget plans, and other key documents should be updated to reflect the direction provided in this plan and provide more detailed guidance for achieving relevant goals.



**Relationship between Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the Climate Action Plan**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 was drafted in parallel with an initiative by Montgomery County’s executive branch to develop a Climate Action Plan (CAP), which outlines ways to reduce the county’s net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2035. The CAP also recommends approaches to deal with the hazards of climate change predicted for Montgomery County: extreme heat, extreme precipitation, high winds, and drought. The Planning Department staff worked with executive branch representatives to ensure that the goals, policies, and actions recommended by Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the CAP are complementary rather than duplicative.

Thrive Montgomery 2050 is a high-level document that focuses on long-range planning and policies to guide the physical development of the county, including where and how land will be preserved or developed for housing, office buildings, parks, agriculture, recreation, and transportation infrastructure. These kinds of decisions have a major influence on greenhouse gas emissions, carbon sequestration, and adaptation to climate change.

The CAP, on the other hand, recommends specific actions to be taken in the near-term to achieve the goal of eliminating greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 and to mitigate or adapt to the effects of increased heat and flooding, high winds, and drought. Thrive Montgomery 2050 incorporates a wide range of recommendations related to climate change and its connection to land use, transportation, and parks, and the Planning and Parks Departments will implement recommendations in the CAP that are within the scope of the M-NCPPC’s responsibilities. Together these plans will create a comprehensive approach to climate change at the local level.





**Montgomery County has a lot of things going for it**

In addition to the advantages we have enjoyed by virtue of our location in the national capital region, we have benefitted from a tradition of thoughtful planning that has allowed us to develop and grow while preserving land and other resources in ways that have supported a high quality of life. The Wedges and Corridors Plan was exceptionally progressive for its time, and it helped us to build high quality park and school systems, preserved natural resources and farmland, and laid the groundwork for transit-oriented smart growth. Thrive Montgomery 2050 has attempted to provide an unflinching assessment of the Wedges and Corridors Plan but the truth is that many of the shortcomings of subsequent decisions about land use, transportation and parks were more a product of the failure to follow through on its ideas than of flaws in its general approach.

In fact, our more difficult problems stem from the very things that have helped us. The federal government’s presence has given us a foundation of good jobs and a concentration of public investment in life sciences and information technology that provide enviable opportunities. The very stability and reliability of the base of employment tied to government, however, breeds complacency about the need to compete effectively to capitalize on those opportunities.

The Montgomery County community faces far more adversity and uncertainty than in the past, leaving less room for error and requiring focus and discipline to ensure our future success. The days when our task was simply to manage growth are over. We do not have the luxury of waiting for opportunities to present themselves but instead must be prepared to respond to market forces and compete for jobs and investment.

Our past success also blinded us to the reality that Montgomery County’s prosperity has left many people out. As the demographics of our community change rapidly along dimensions of age, race and ethnicity, income and wealth, culture, and language, the need to confront inequitable practices has grown increasingly urgent. The urgency of demands for racial justice and the need to rebuild bonds of trust and community are clear.

As for environmental sustainability, Montgomery County’s past record of support for water quality protection, forest conservation, and land preservation are helpful but ultimately will not be sufficient to shield us from the effects of climate change. More creative strategies to build resilience and improve sustainability of both the built and natural environments are critical.





While these economic, social, and environmental changes will not be easy to navigate, Montgomery County is well-positioned to make the decisions and investments necessary to success. Our community is in the 99th percentile of all counties in the country in terms of household income and educational attainment, with annual economic output of almost \$100 billion and an amazingly diverse population. We can draw on tremendous human and physical resources; our assets would be the envy of almost any local jurisdiction anywhere. If we plan carefully and act decisively for change, Montgomery County can thrive well into the future.

