



Placemaking Strategic Plan

Montgomery Planning

Placemaking is the act of improving a common space to make it welcoming and attractive, so it better serves the needs of the people who use it.

Purpose

The vision, goals, and strategies outlined in this Placemaking Strategic Plan will guide planning staff over time as they decide how and where to execute placemaking projects, define Montgomery Planning's role in such efforts, allocate budget and resources, form partnerships, and build capacity in others to do placemaking in the county. These placemaking efforts will improve the quality of life of our residents by making vibrant and welcoming common spaces accessible to all of Montgomery County's residents and visitors.

How to Use this Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan is a part of a toolkit created to guide Montgomery Planning's placemaking efforts. It defines a vision for placemaking in the county, outlines achievable goals, and identifies strategies to make the vision a reality. A separate Action Document will maintain an updated list of one-time efforts/projects that can be undertaken to implement the identified strategies. Each year, Montgomery Planning staff will consult the Strategic Plan and the Action Document to craft our Annual Work Program for placemaking. A catalog of precedent projects and lessons learned from benchmarking and research exercises will also be made available to inspire Planning staff and others to help define the scope and approach for specific projects.





Strategic Plan:

Defines a vision for placemaking in the county, outlines goals, and identifies strategies to make the vision a reality.

Action Document:

Maintains an updated list of one-time efforts/projects that can be undertaken to implement the identified strategies.

Annual Work Program:

List of placemaking-related efforts of varying scales to be undertaken by Montgomery Planning each year, wearing different hats.





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An aerial photograph of a cityscape. In the background, a vast, dense forest with trees in various shades of green and yellow stretches across the horizon. In the foreground and middle ground, several modern buildings are visible. On the left, a large, curved, multi-story building with a blue-tinted facade. To its right, another tall building with a similar blue tint. Further right, a long, low building with a grey roof and a red-tinted section. The buildings are interspersed with trees and smaller structures. The overall scene is a mix of urban development and natural landscape.

Montgomery County Planning Department Mission:

"To improve quality of life in Montgomery County by planning the natural and built environments for current and future generations."

An aerial photograph of a city landscape. The foreground shows several multi-story brick apartment buildings with balconies. Behind them is a large area of green trees, some with autumn-colored foliage. In the far background, more city buildings are visible under a clear sky. A semi-transparent blue rectangular box is overlaid on the middle-left portion of the image, containing white text.

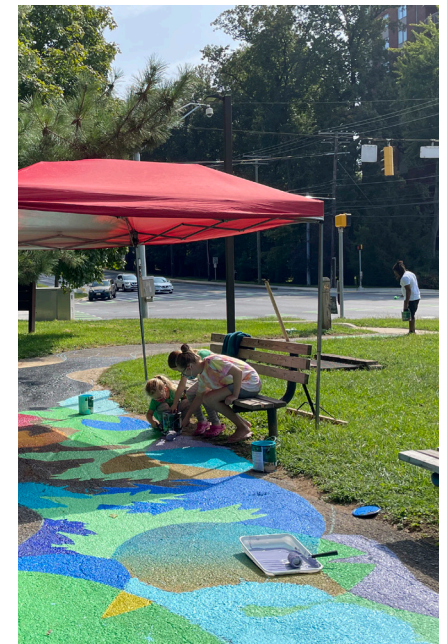
Use placemaking as a tool to make
vibrant and welcoming common spaces
that are accessible to everyone.

The Placemaking Strategic Plan's mission fits within our organization's overarching goal to be responsible stewards of the natural and built environments and equitably serve the residents of our county.

DEFINING PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is the act of improving a common space to make it welcoming and attractive, so it better serves the needs of the people who use it.

- Placemaking efforts can be temporary improvements or permanent changes that are most effective when done repeatedly over time to renew and enhance a common space.
- Placemaking projects can be direct interventions—both physical site modifications and programmed activities—ranging from simple installations like sidewalk chalk art to significant transformations of parking lots into community gathering places.
- Placemaking projects can also be indirect capacity-building efforts to encourage other public agencies and private groups to do more placemaking in the county.
- Placemaking projects can provide supportive skills and resources for projects that residents, business/property owners and government agencies undertake.





WHY DOES PLACEMAKING MATTER?

Placemaking enables people to reimagine their streets, public spaces, and underutilized areas as welcoming venues for community life.

- Placemaking enhances the connection between people and the places around them to foster a deeper appreciation for the built environment.
- The impact is long-lasting. In other words, a community can envision the potential of an improved space, planners and developers can test ideas, and elements of a project often remain in place in an evolved form.
- Placemaking enables the Planning Department to equitably engage diverse communities and showcase the benefits of great public spaces across the county.

Vision For Placemaking

Successful placemaking improves the quality of life of all communities by creating common spaces that celebrate diverse cultures, support the local economy, encourage social interaction, enhance connections to nature, and make walking, rolling, and exercising fun and convenient.

Together, these placemaking efforts advance the three overarching objectives of the county's General Plan, Thrive Montgomery 2050: Racial Equity & Social Justice, Economic Competitiveness, and Environmental Resilience.





MONTGOMERY PLANNING'S ROLE IN Placemaking

Placemaking covers a broad range of projects that require different levels of participation, resources, and support. To effectively engage in placemaking activities, Montgomery Planning must wear multiple hats, strategically maximizing the positive impact of our efforts. Some projects will require our direct leadership while others may involve our staff in supporting roles. The decisions to engage in specific projects or capacity-building efforts should be evaluated annually, accounting for Montgomery Planning's overall work program, available budget and resources, as well as opportunities created by external initiatives.

Lead



Lead placemaking projects that align with ongoing master plans and countywide initiatives to engage communities and demonstrate the potential of planning recommendations and test their feasibility. Projects range from small placemaking efforts embedded within our community engagement to larger transformations of underutilized spaces.

Support



Support community and business groups in their efforts to enhance the built environment of their neighborhoods by strategically providing design services and contributing small amounts to support project needs directly and through grants.

Collaborate



Collaborate with county agencies to maximize the impact of placemaking projects across county programs by pursuing joint funding opportunities and leveraging each organization's technical skills.

Champion



Champion placemaking by hosting lectures and presentations, organizing capacity-building workshops, and raising awareness about the benefits of placemaking.

Streamline



Streamline permitting processes through partner agencies and reduce barriers for people working on placemaking in the county.



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ENGAGING IN PLACEMAKING?

Placemaking amplifies Montgomery Planning's work and helps us engage with and better serve the public.

- Placemaking projects bring communities into the planning process, allowing them to participate directly in shaping their neighborhoods. This participation leads to a greater understanding of the importance of Montgomery Planning's work.
- Placemaking outcomes support Montgomery Planning's overall policy goals—including sustainable development, smart growth, Vision Zero, and design excellence—and our placemaking efforts are strongly supported by the Planning Board and County Council.
- Interim placemaking projects enable us to fast-track public-space improvements in communities with the greatest need, supporting equitable outcomes from planning efforts.
- The county greatly values its multiculturalism and placemaking projects provide a platform to showcase it.
- Placemaking projects provide opportunities to showcase and implement ideas from Thrive Montgomery 2050.

WHAT ARE THE CONSTRAINTS OF ENGAGING IN PLACEMAKING?

Montgomery Planning has limited resources and lacks direct control over the public realm.

Montgomery Planning:

- Does not have direct ownership of the public realm.
- Has a limited role in on-the-ground implementation of policies and plan recommendations.
- Has a limited budget and staff resources that can be devoted to Placemaking projects.



Incorporating Thrive Montgomery 2050 Guidance into Placemaking.



The county's General Plan, *Thrive Montgomery 2050*, envisions tight-knit communities that are economically competitive, socially equitable, and environmentally resilient. *Thrive* highlights the role well-designed buildings, welcoming public spaces and streets enlivened with art and cultural activities play in making such great places a reality. The Placemaking Strategic Plan is aligned with *Thrive's* objectives and placemaking projects will provide small-scale opportunities to demonstrate *Thrive's* vision to community members. A few key ideas from *Thrive*, along with an explanation of how placemaking can bring these ideas to life are highlighted on the following pages.

Economic Competitiveness



Great places are magnets for people, businesses, and jobs. To attract and retain today's highly mobile workforce, the county must offer authentic and vibrant places to live and work.

Placemaking enhances the built environment and accentuates the character of a place, making it more attractive for residents, workers, visitors, and businesses.

Racial Equity & Social Justice



Everyone should have access to a variety of reliable transportation and affordable housing options that are convenient to activity centers and job centers, creating Complete Communities.

Placemaking energizes the public realm, emphasizing local, small-scale improvements that enhance the "staying power" of communities, reduces the need to travel long distances, and promotes walking, cycling, and transit use as a part of daily life.

Environmental Health & Resilience



Everyone should have access to a variety of reliable transportation and affordable housing options that are convenient to activity centers and job centers, creating Complete Communities.

Placemaking energizes the public realm, emphasizing local, small-scale improvements that enhance the “staying power” of communities, reduces the need to travel long distances, and promotes walking, cycling, and transit use as a part of daily life.

Healthy Communities



Places beyond home and work must encourage social interaction and physical activity to promote the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Placemaking projects foster social interaction, and their successful implementation builds social capital among residents. Placemaking showcases active transportation, contemplation, sports, exercise, and play across generations.

Diversity & Pride of Place



Design, arts, and cultural programming should celebrate our diversity, strengthen pride of place, and make the county more attractive and interesting.

Placemaking creates a platform to showcase the arts and cultural programming at the neighborhood scale and exposes residents to the beauty around them that they can experience daily.

Goals & Strategies

The goals and strategies outlined in this section are intended to realize the vision of the Strategic Plan and advance the overarching objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050. Goals define the outcomes we desire while strategies outline continued efforts that must be undertaken over time to realize our goals. Specific actions further identify one-time tasks that can be completed under specific strategies. These actions will be generated periodically and maintained in a separate Action Document. The goals and strategies outlined in the following pages are not solely intended for Montgomery Planning to pursue. Instead, they provide broad guidance that could be implemented independently, through partnerships with residents, property owners and other government agencies, and even achieved through building capacity in other groups.





Goal **ONE:**

Use placemaking projects to support a competitive local economy.

- Improve the public realm around existing businesses to make them attractive and inviting.
- Transform underutilized areas and parking lots into public spaces that can host temporary and local businesses periodically.
- Use placemaking events to attract first-time and returning visitors to various activity centers within the county.
- Use place-based programming to extend the time people spend near shops, markets, and retail centers.
- Support place-based goals and projects of entities like urban partnerships and arts and entertainment districts.
- Generate placemaking guides for employment districts in consultation with property owners, regional services centers, urban partnerships, arts and entertainment districts, and the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation.

Goal **TWO:**

Equitably distribute placemaking projects to provide access to high-quality outdoor space for everyone.

- Transform underutilized areas into community gathering spaces through placemaking initiatives in Equity Focus Areas.
 - Create temporary public spaces in areas that have high concentrations of residents and limited access to outdoor public space.
 - Undertake placemaking projects within and near transit stops.
 - Use placemaking interventions as pilot projects with MCDOT and SHA to make our streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists.
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Goal **THREE:**

Use placemaking projects to help achieve the county's Climate Action Plan goals.

- Use placemaking projects to make destinations accessible by walking or bicycling and reduce reliance on cars for short trips.
- Use placemaking projects to create community gardens to encourage local food production and use of native plantings at the neighborhood scale.
- Coordinate placemaking efforts with ongoing sustainability initiatives at Montgomery Planning and county agencies





Goal **FOUR:**

Improve the mental and physical health of individuals and communities through placemaking.

- Enhance new and existing streetscapes through placemaking to make walking and rolling convenient, stress-free, and even fun!
 - Incorporate biophilic elements into placemaking projects to increase connections to nature for residents and workers.
 - Use placemaking to create safe, accessible linkages to local parks, school playgrounds, and recreational facilities for community members of all ages.
 - Introduce elements like seating, programming, and interactive art into existing public spaces to make communities more welcoming to everyone and encourage social interaction in beautiful settings.
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Goal **FIVE:**

Use placemaking to foster pride of place throughout the county.

- Incorporate local cultures and history of communities into placemaking installations and programming.
- Create tools and platforms for residents to share their stories, oral histories and memorabilia showcasing the unique aspects of their communities.
- Use place-based community engagement strategies to learn about communities during the master-planning process.



Goal **SIX:**

Encourage public entities with ownership of the public realm to prioritize placemaking.

- Convene recurring discussions with leadership from Montgomery Planning, Montgomery Parks, public schools, and the county's departments of permitting and transportation to explore placemaking opportunities within each group's purview.
- Partner with the Montgomery County Department of Transportation to pursue grants for implementing placemaking projects within public rights-of-ways.
- Create and share placemaking ideas in advance of Capital Improvement Projects undertaken by partner agencies.



Goal **SEVEN:**

Minimize barriers for residents, property owners, and developers to encourage more placemaking projects in the county.

- Collaborate with the county Department of Permitting Services to create streamlined permitting processes for placemaking-related projects.
- Utilize the regulatory review process to encourage private developers to incorporate temporary and permanent placemaking projects within their developments.
- Provide design services and small funds/grants for resident groups pursuing placemaking projects within their communities.
- Create guidelines in partnerships with county agencies to encourage placemaking within rights-of-ways, parkland, and school sites.



Goal **EIGHT:**

Maximize the impact of Montgomery Planning's annual investment in placemaking projects.

- Strategically distribute our annual placemaking budget across multiple projects ranging in size and complexity.
- Allocate a small portion of the annual placemaking budget for fund-matching opportunities for placemaking projects.
- Pursue placemaking grants at the county, state, and federal levels in collaboration with partner agencies, when appropriate.
- Regularly pursue funding requests for our annual placemaking efforts.





Implementation

As a high-level guidance document, the Placemaking Strategic Plan sets the course for Montgomery Planning to undertake a range of placemaking-related activities. Each year, Planning staff will objectively evaluate potential projects and select those that most closely align with the goals of this plan and effectively implement its vision within our annual budget and resources. Projects that can be combined with ongoing planning efforts and those that advance equitable planning outcomes will be prioritized. Lessons learned from each effort will be documented to inform future projects. This plan is intended to be a living document and will be updated periodically so that it remains relevant and impactful.



Montgomery Planning

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