

Appendix C - Racial Equity & Social Justice



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This appendix includes an Equity Framework that summarizes how Plan recommendations address equity in Friendship Heights.

Plan Approach to Racial Equity and Social Justice

The Friendship Heights Sector Plan draws from the principles of *Thrive Montgomery 2050* and Montgomery Planning's Equity Agenda for Planning to advance equitable outcomes for all existing and future community members. In addition, all sector plans are required to consider racial equity and social justice according to Montgomery County's Code (Chapter 33A, Planning Procedures, Section 33A-14). The Plan applied an equity framework based on guidance from Montgomery Planning's internal Equity Peer Review Group. The group includes staff that stay actively abreast of equity best practices to provide feedback on master plans, studies, planning policies, and community engagement strategies. The group uses an equity tool based on recommendations from the Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE) in their review. This tool involves working through a series of steps and answering questions. The steps include an analysis and evaluation of:

- Desired Results
- Analysis of Data
- Community Engagement
- Strategies
- Implementation
- Communication and Accountability

These steps help ensure that the recommendations in the Plan will contribute to advancing equity in Friendship Heights.

Desired Results

The vision of the Friendship Heights Sector Plan is to create a welcoming community where people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities can live, work and play. An equitable community where all residents—regardless of age, race, gender, ethnicity, income or ability—can thrive is central to this vision. The recommendations below are part of the Plan's roadmap to realizing this vision:

- Increased housing, including affordable housing, to accommodate residents of all income levels.
- More diverse housing options to attract younger families and renters of all ages and to allow seniors to age-in-place.
- An improved pedestrian network that includes safer crossings and new connections between downtown Friendship Heights and the surrounding communities.

- Improved access to transit via dedicated bus rapid transit connecting Friendship Heights to destinations to the north along MD-355/Wisconsin Avenue.
- New and improved parks and public spaces throughout the Plan Area to increase access to green space, active recreation and opportunities for social gathering for all to enjoy.

Analysis of Data

Understanding the demographics of a plan area is key to determining equity gaps and needs. It also allowed staff to compare demographic exit data from engagement events to the plan area demographics to understand who was not being reached (discussed below). Friendship Heights is a demographically unique community, with a profile that is older, more educated, higher-income and less racially diverse than Montgomery County as a whole. Recent years have seen slow population growth of approximately 2% since 2000. With a relatively stagnant population that is two thirds non-Hispanic White, and over 35% seniors, the goals of the sector plan aim to increase bring more people to Friendship Heights and to increase diversity by nearly every metric. The demographics of Friendship Heights have not changed significantly since the 1998 *Friendship Heights Sector Plan*, likely due to the lack of new development since that time.

Community Engagement

The community engagement approach for the Plan was driven by the following goals:

- Reach a wide range of stakeholders
- Deliver clear and straightforward messaging
- Provide a variety of opportunities so that people of all ages and stages can participate
- Collaborate with community partners and agencies
- Meet people where they are

A component of equitable engagement in Friendship Heights meant ensuring that all stakeholders, regardless of whether they lived in the Plan Area or not, were aware of the sector plan effort and understood the major milestones of the plan process and the opportunities for public participation and input. Engagement events included in-person meetings and workshops, virtual meetings and workshops, presentations at existing community meetings and events, appearances at community happenings, in-person and virtual drop-in “office hours,” and numerous e-letters that went out to a list of over 950 community members. At larger community events both in-person and online, staff collected demographic info from participants via exit surveys to track how participants did or did not align with area demographics. After the first several months of the visioning phase (Spring

2025), staff used the exit survey data to determine what demographic groups were in need of additional outreach. During summer 2025 staff responded to that data and conducted targeted outreach and convened focus groups for business owners, renters and parents of young children. An analysis of the engagement demographics can be found in the Visioning Summary Memo in Appendix B: Engagement.

Strategies for Advancing Equity

There are many recommendations throughout the Plan that support the goal of advancing equity:

Land Use and Zoning: Rezone mixed-use properties so that future development projects can be all residential, all commercial or mixed use. This allows more flexibility for projects to respond to market conditions and allow more projects to be built in Friendship Heights.

Housing: Residential projects with more than 20 units are required to provide 15% Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs) in Friendship Heights per the zoning ordinance. The Plan recommends the creation of the Friendship Heights Overlay Zone (FHOZ) that proposes allowing certain Public Benefits to be prioritized and incentivized in order for an applicant to receive additional Floor Area Ratio (FAR) while providing much needed community benefits. The Plan recommends incentivizing all housing benefits from Section 4.7.3 in the zoning ordinance. This will provide applicants with more FAR than in other parts of the county for providing more MPDUs than required, deeply affordable units, and/or family-sized units. Bringing more affordable housing and a greater diversity of units is a key plan recommendation that supports equity.

The Plan also encourages housing that allows seniors to age-in-place, including accessible housing units and senior facilities that support individuals as they get older.

Community Amenities: The Plan recommends incentivizing (through the FHOZ) Public Benefits that support increased access to neighborhood services. The team received many comments from stakeholders about key services they would like to see in Friendship Heights, such as a pharmacy with extended hours. Staff also received feedback about a need for “third places” where people can gather and build community outside of their homes. The Plan seeks to incentive these Public Benefits to increase the likelihood of development projects including them in the future. This supports equity by increasing access to daily needs and shared spaces for residents.

Transportation: The transportation recommendations focus on increasing access to transit, bike networks and safe pedestrian routes. Currently there are no protected bike facilities in the Plan Area, and the Plan confirms the recommendations from the 2018 *Bicycle Master Plan*

that would introduce safer routes for cyclists in this area. The Plan also recommends the expansion of the proposed Bus Rapid Transit service to Friendship Heights which will increase access to transit. Additionally, the Plan recommends various pedestrian safety improvement (high-visibility crosswalks, new protected crossings) that will make it easier for people of varying abilities to safely traverse Friendship Heights. Lastly, the Plan incentivizes public parking through the FHOZ. While Friendship Heights is a downtown, it has very few public parking spaces and no public garages. Even though it is well-served by public transit, the Plan acknowledges that many individuals come to Friendship Heights to visit their doctor and may not be able to use public transit due to mobility or health issues. Publicly accessible parking also would allow people to park once and visit several locations in Friendship Heights. This will strengthen the downtown's identity as a regional destination and provide more access to amenities and services. Therefore, the Plan identifies public parking as a unique Public Benefit for Friendship Heights.

Parks and Public Spaces: The Plan aims to make the parks and public spaces in the area more equitable by improving access and offering a wider variety of experiences. The Plan recommends improvements to existing M-NCPPC parks that will help more people locate these places and enjoy them, as in this Plan Area the publicly owned parks are at the periphery of the downtown. The Plan also recommends new open spaces to be delivered through private development with a range of amenities to respond to needs expressed during public engagement.

Implementation

Plans are tools to guide future development and infrastructure improvements as implemented either by county and state agencies, or through private development.

However, the Plan can provide some tools for implementation. The primary implementation tool of the FHSP is the proposed Friendship Heights Overlay Zone (FHOZ) as discussed above. The FHOZ will prioritize the housing Public Benefits discussed above, as well as several community amenities, and public parking. The incentive approach will allow applicants to obtain more FAR than identified in the zoning ordinance for providing these benefits. There is a tiered approach to the incentive FAR that is described in detail in Chapter 5: Implementation.

The recommendations for improvements to roadways managed by the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) or the Maryland State Highway Administration (MDSHA) will be implemented by those agencies as part of their Capital Improvement Project

schedule. Recommendations for improvements to M-NCPPC parks will be implemented by Montgomery Parks as part of their Capital Improvement Project schedule.

Recommendations for open spaces or amenities to be provided via private development are likely to be realized when parcels redevelop in the future.

Communication and Accountability

The sector plan relies on systems of accountability to ensure that the goals of racial equity and social justice are advanced through planning and any future development process. Montgomery Planning does not implement the plan; however, it can play a crucial role in monitoring progress, coordinating stakeholders, and fostering transparency in any future decision making. Montgomery Planning periodically assesses how master and sector plan recommendations have or have not been realized through monitoring reports and master plan “checks.” These reports are publicly available online and can offer insight into how plans can impact equitable outcomes.

Additionally, Montgomery Planning frequently collaborates with various county agencies, private developers, and community organizations; these collaborations and relationships can be used to track progress and outcomes.