

**Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee Draft**

**COMPACT GROWTH: Corridor-Focused Development**

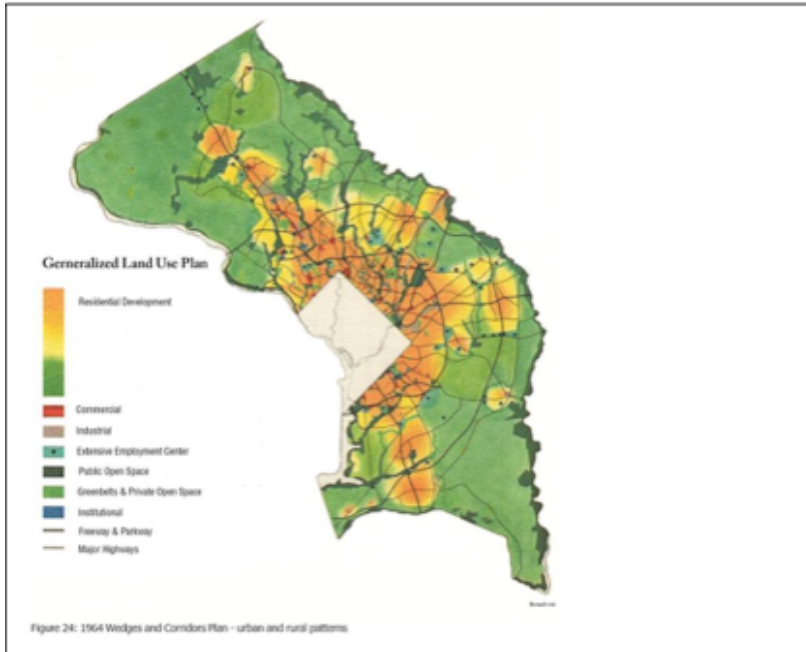
**Introduction: Compact Footprints along Multiple Corridors are Central to Future Growth**

When the Wedges and Corridors Plan was adopted much of Montgomery County was undeveloped. The plan recognized, however, that what seemed to be abundant available land must be used wisely:

“Land should be treated as one of our most precious possessions, using efficiently what we need for accommodating expected urban growth, and conserving the rest for the unforeseeable future. Land is too valuable an asset to be heedlessly wasted by allowing it to be developed aimlessly in a scattered pattern.”

Accordingly, the Wedges and Corridors Plan recommended two distinct patterns of growth: the urban pattern and the rural pattern. The urban pattern was envisioned as a compact form of urban development, concentrated in the existing urban ring and proposed corridor cities along significant transportation corridors within the region, including the I-95/Route 29 corridor as well as the I-270/Route 355 corridor. The rural pattern, by contrast, was envisioned as serving four broad purposes:

“1) to help mold the urban pattern into an efficient and pleasant one; 2) to provide and protect large open spaces for the “change of pace” and recreational opportunities needed by present and future generations; 3) to provide a favorable rural environment in which farming, mineral extraction, hunting, fishing and other natural resource activities can be carried on without disruption; and 4) to conserve natural resources and protect the public water supply.”



**What is the problem we are trying to solve? Focusing Growth, Connecting Communities, and Reinvigorating East County**

While the Wedges and Corridors Plan was visionary in recognizing the consequences of sprawl and the value of land preservation, subsequent land use and transportation planning decisions did not always adhere to the 1964 plan's guidance, illustrating the political economy of sprawl. On one hand, resistance to the kinds of dense infill and development in areas within the growth footprint identified by the 1964 plan left the urban form unrealized in many areas, with – for example – only a few Metrorail station areas developed with high density. On the other hand, the desire of property owners to maximize the value of their land in some cases led to more development in outlying areas than contemplated in 1964, with a proliferation of garden apartments and townhouses in places like Aspen Hill. The absence of tighter limits allowed development to disperse, consuming large amounts of land and increasing the cost of roads, water, sewer, and other public infrastructure by limiting economies of scale. This pattern of development also limited opportunities to offer cost-effective transit service.

Conversely, the 1964 plan envisioned corridor cities along I-270, I-95, and Route 29, yet subsequent planning decisions, including the 1993 Refinement, disregarded and ultimately removed the growth corridor along Route 29 and I-95 in the eastern portion of the county. The excision of the Route 29 corridor

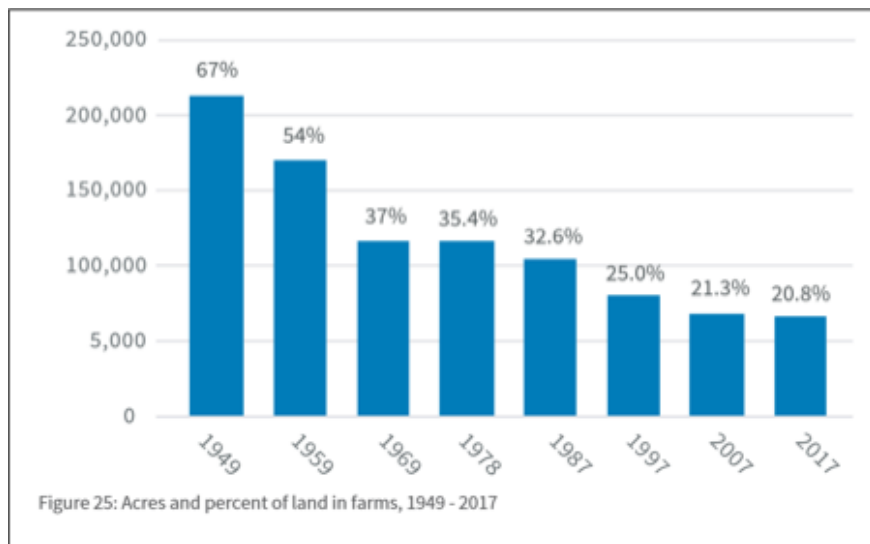
**Commented [A1]:** What does this mean?

**Commented [A2]:** This ignores the challenges to development on Metro sites, a fact emphasized by the fact that tax incentives have not appreciably increased development there.

**Commented [A3]:** Why are garden apartments and townhouses in Aspen Hill being cited as undesirable sprawl when that housing is multi-family housing now being promoted in Thrive. Wouldn't the large houses built in Potomac or in other HOA subdivisions in the county be better examples?

**Commented [A4]:** Presumably market forces and zoning decisions were also at work here or high rises might have been built

contributed to effectively directing new public and private investment away from the East County and toward the established urban ring and I-270 corridor. As a result, the I-270 corridor has benefited from successive cycles of investment and reinvestment, even as other corridors – including Georgia Avenue, where Metrorail’s Red Line was built – were largely left behind. This recurring pattern aggravated the racial and economic disparities between the eastern and western parts of the county that remain today.



Moreover, the Wedges and Corridors plan ~~neglected to fully~~~~did not~~ articulate how the broader public should expect to benefit from maintaining a rural pattern over much of the county’s land area. The plan explained that land preservation is important to recreation, agriculture and conservation of natural resources but did not describe how people living in urban parts of the county would access these opportunities. The result is that many people who live outside what became the Agricultural Reserve are unfamiliar with it and do not take full advantage of opportunities to visit, enjoy and develop an appreciation for the value of continued preservation of land for farming, recreation, and environmental stewardship. Awareness of -- and access to -- the Agricultural Reserve should be improved by providing ways for people throughout the county to experience and take full advantage of this unique resource. Our residents and visitors should not miss out on opportunities to learn about the county’s rural heritage, eat and drink locally produced food and beverages, and participate in outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, camping, and fishing.

If we fail to make efficient use of land, the available space for growth, outdoor recreation, agriculture and natural resource conservation will ~~rapidly~~ diminish. The cost of building and maintaining ~~water and sewer infrastructure~~, roads, and public services will become harder to manage. Problems such as traffic congestion and climate change will be exacerbated.

**Commented [A5]:** 1964 plan states in “The Rural Pattern” chapter: “The rural pattern recommended here has four broad purposes: 1) to help mold the urban pattern into an efficient and pleasant one, 2) to provide and protect large open spaces for the ‘change of pace’ and recreational opportunities needed by present and future generations, 3) to provide a favorable rural environment in which farming, mineral extraction, hunting, fishing and other natural resource activities can be carried on without disruption, and 4) to conserve natural resources and protect the public water supply.” These are considerable and important public benefits.

**Commented [A6]:** Please add a sentence (or a clause in parentheses) that says what percent of the county is contained in the Ag Reserve.

**Commented [A7]:** Activity centers in areas without sewer/water infrastructure?

**What policies will help solve the problem? Refining – and Recommitting to - a Compact Footprint**

Thrive Montgomery 2050 proposes redoubling and refining efforts to concentrate growth in downtowns, town centers, rural villages, and intensively developed centers of activity, ~~or nodes~~, and a new commitment to promoting growth along major transportation corridors to maximize the efficient use of land and create Complete Communities. These transportation corridors can establish build a web, connecting residents to existing and future centers of activity and Complete Communities. These corridors should also either have robust transit service in place or planned or be are located close to existing concentrations of jobs, services, and infrastructure in ways that lend themselves to support ing more intensive development to produce the kinds of Complete Communities described later in this plan.

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The intensity of development along these corridors should be aligned through master plans with the urban, suburban, and rural context of the surrounding areas and calibrated to account for existing or planned transit and other transportation infrastructure. Detailed analysis of each area will come through future planning efforts that includes extensive public engagement. Some corridors, such as Rockville Pike, even now connect several centers of activity, making these corridors appropriate for more intensive development where appropriate. Other corridors will-should have less intensive development due to their context and level of transit service.

Outside of these corridors, limited, organic growth should be allowed via local plans to meet localized needs for services and provide a balanced, diverse, and appropriate range of housing choices; increase racial and socioeconomic integration; and achieve more Complete Communities in all parts of the county. This limited development must-should be managed in ways that help to form more Complete Communities without expanding established development footprints or encouraging significant intensification of land uses outside of Complete Communities. Preservation of land for recreation, agriculture and environmental management must be ensured for the benefit of the entire county.

Commented [A9]: This seems to imply adding commercial uses to residential areas, which should only be done with master/sector plans.

Figure 26: Georgia Avenue looking south from Evans Parkway Neighborhood Park— today

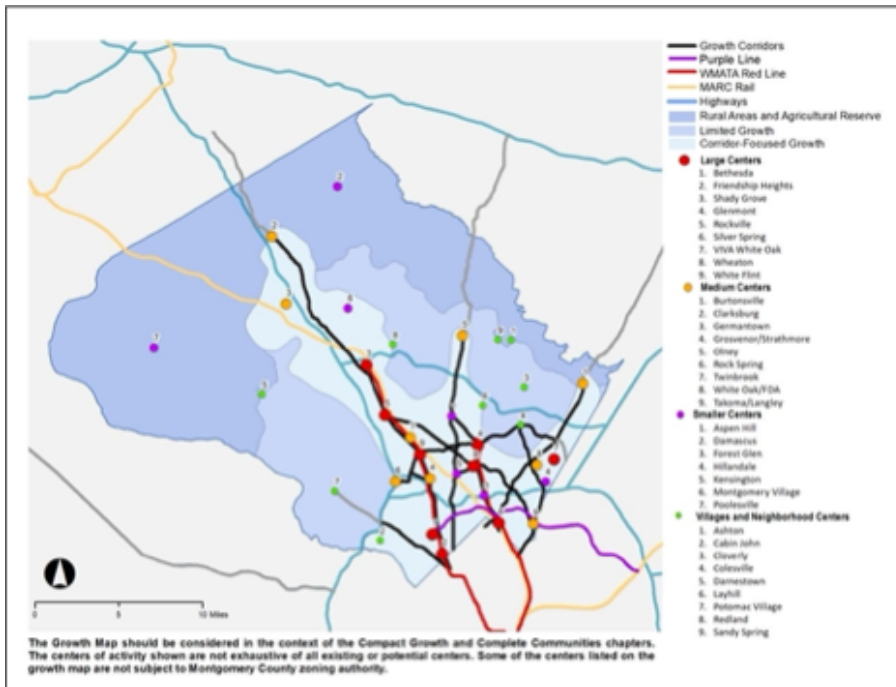
Figure 27: Georgia Avenue looking south from Evans Parkway Neighborhood Park— possible future

The concept of corridor-focused growth is a fundamental organizing element for Thrive Montgomery 2050, as it recognizes not only that intensively developed centers of activity and preservation of land both play a vital role in our quality of life but that neither pattern can exist without the other. By identifying-describing the types of places where growth should be encouraged, this chapter aims to establishes the foundation for Complete Communities, which depend on a compact footprint to give them the coherence, focus, and mix of activities necessary to succeed. The scale of development, building types, and diversity of uses envisioned within this footprint are discussed in greater detail in the Complete Communities chapter. In turn, the

design elements that might complement and reinforce Complete Communities are discussed in the Design, Arts, and Culture chapter.



Figure 28: Major transit corridors can be transformed from existing unsafe traffic arteries to a series of Complete Communities with a variety of housing and other uses.



**Commented [A10]:** It is unclear how this can be done on state roads and how it will mesh with people's need to get to jobs by car. Also consider evacuation routes used by residents of MD and DC as well during Continuity of Government events (natural disasters, attacks, other national security events).

**Commented [A11]:** This map needs to be associated with the map of water/sewer facilities, so that it's clear some of the envisioned centers will require that additional infrastructure. Also, Chevy Chase Lake and other purple line stations don't seem to be on here.

The Corridor-Focused Growth area (lightest blue) should have the largest share of new growth. It encompasses the most developed part of the county with highest-density population and employment centers, ~~and the~~ ~~although aging~~ infrastructure and public facilities may not be able to support existing ~~and~~ new development without additional investment. The Limited Growth area (medium blue) contains the mainly suburban residential communities where limited, organic growth is envisioned to meet localized needs for services, provide a diverse range of housing choices, and increase racial and socioeconomic integration to achieve Complete Communities. Rural Areas and the Agricultural Reserve\* (in dark blue) will continue to be dedicated primarily to agriculture, rural open space, and environmental preservation. It can absorb some growth as agriculture evolves and existing residential communities' needs change over time.

Commented [A12]: Does the light blue area include the eastern part of the county where we want more development to occur? Can't tell from the drawing. If not, an edit is needed here to make that clear.

Commented [A13]: Why no mention of complete communities for these areas? Complete communities only mentioned for limited growth areas in next sentence.

The Growth Map identifies several existing and potential centers of activity at a variety of scales, including Large, Medium, and Small as well as Villages and Neighborhood Centers. The centers identified are not exhaustive of all existing or potential centers, but rather are included to demonstrate that centers of activity, where existing and future compact growth should be concentrated, occur within the county's urban, suburban, and rural areas. While future growth should occur in these centers, the amount of growth and intensity of development should be commensurate with the center's location and context as determined by the master planning process.

The Growth Map reflects current land use and is representative of the location and types of growth expected through 2050; however, the corridors and centers shown on the map or fitting the descriptions provided below may evolve over time through future approved and adopted master plans and functional master plans.

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**Large Centers** are envisioned as the highest intensity areas generally characterized by significant residential and/or commercial density either existing or planned and are typically close to high quality transit. They include the county's Central Business Districts, existing and future employment centers, the municipalities of Gaithersburg and Rockville, and most of the Metrorail stations which provide an opportunity for significant redevelopment.

**Medium Centers** would be less intense and cover a smaller geography than Large Centers. The Medium Centers could include significant clusters of existing or planned residential density, as well as clusters of commercial density, including large shopping centers and office campuses. Medium Centers are likely to be close to transit.

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**Smaller Centers** are generally characterized by low- to medium-density residential neighborhoods, with clusters of commercial activity, including shopping centers and neighborhood-serving retail.

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**Villages and Neighborhood Centers** are the lowest intensity centers containing a small number of neighborhood-serving uses and located in rural areas and low-density residential neighborhoods.

Commented [A17]: Examples?

\* The Rural Areas and Agricultural Reserve are areas of the county substantially zoned for rural or agricultural land use under the Rural, Rural Cluster, Rural Neighborhood Cluster, or Agricultural Reserve zone.

More specifically, the following policies and practices should be ~~considered adopted~~ in order to maximize the efficiency of land use and public investment and establish the building blocks for development of vibrant centers of activity while preserving land for recreation, resource conservation, and agriculture:

**Concentrate growth in centers of activity and along corridors through compact, infill development and redevelopment to maximize efficient use of land.**

- Focus future land use and public infrastructure planning on growth corridors so as to direct development in ways that facilitate the emergence of Complete Communities. Using master planning with full public engagement, -eEvaluate appropriate land uses, transportation facilities, and community design that will encourage and enable full use of centers of activity and creation of Complete Communities. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Consider, with the participation of citizen advisory panels and the master plan process, aAmending land use, design, and zoning regulations, including the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations, to support corridor-focused compact development. Appropriate densities will vary but should be sufficient to support, at a minimum, the efficient provision of transit service along these corridors. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Improve the environmental sustainability of growth by encouraging infill and redevelopment to curb sprawl and bring areas built out in an era with little or no environmental regulations up to robust standards for stormwater management and other state-of-the-practice environmental standards. Infill development must be undertaken carefully though as it can result in reduced green space, reduced tree canopy, and increased stormwater run-off.(Env)

**Promote and prioritize public investment in infrastructure along growth corridors and leverage it to attract future private investment in a compact form.**

- Consider new methods of financing public infrastructure, such as value capture, tax increment financing, and other mechanisms to facilitate investment and provision of appropriate infrastructure in areas identified as appropriate for more intensive development. (Ec)
- Establish high-quality transit infrastructure along growth corridors through capital investment and ensure reliable, frequent, affordable service through operational investment. (Ec, Env, Eq)
- Leverage federal, state and local incentive programs, publicly owned land and land investment opportunities for corridor infill development and redevelopment. (Ec, Env, Eq)

**Limit growth beyond corridors to compact, infill development and redevelopment in Complete Communities to prevent sprawl. Apply principles of urbanism at an appropriate scale along a rural-to-urban transect as outlined in the Complete Communities chapter.**

- Sustainably manage land outside growth corridors and Complete Communities to increase biodiversity, improve the health of natural habitats, preserve privately owned forests, protect watersheds and aquifers, and improve water quality while providing expanded opportunities for outdoor recreation, including vigorous physical activity. (Env, Eq)
- Support alternative clean energy generation, distributed energy, battery storage and grid modernization; and better facilitate composting/food waste recovery and other circular economy initiatives. (Env, Eq)

**Preserve and enhance the Agricultural Reserve and manage it to maintain a rural pattern of development for the benefit of the entire county.**

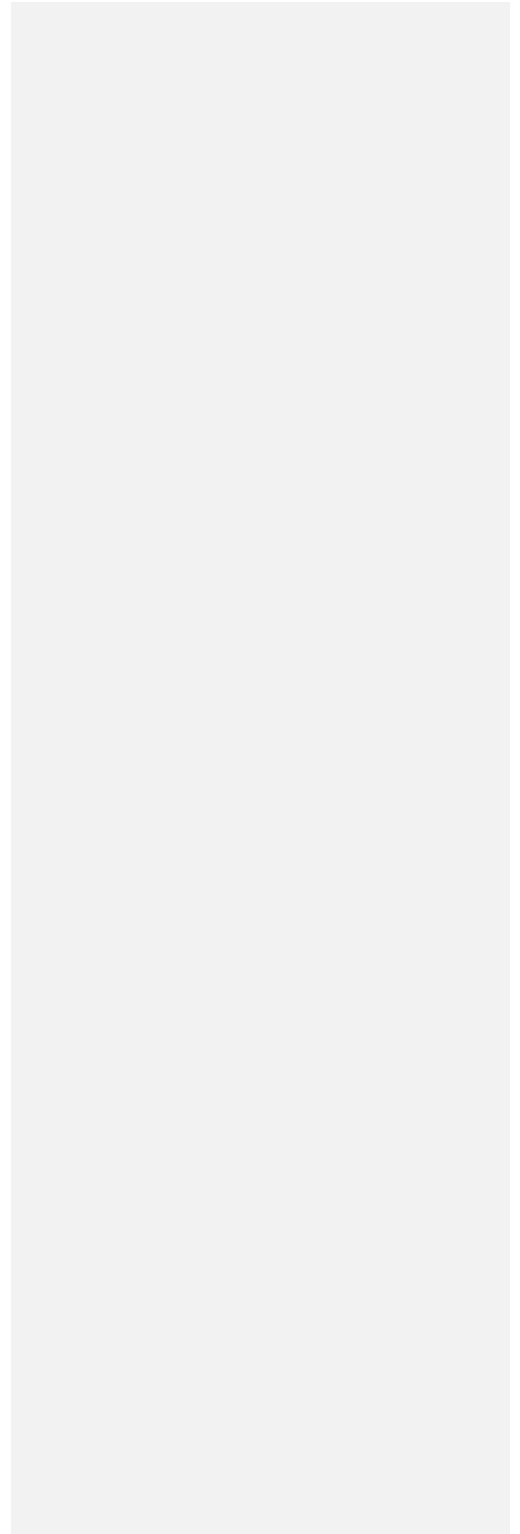
- Maintain agriculture as the primary land use in the Agricultural Reserve through policies, regulations, easements, and incentives, including those that maintain a critical mass of contiguous farmland. (Ec, Env)

Commented [A18]: But the chapter on Complete Communities does not do this.

- Maximize the benefits of the Agricultural Reserve through policies designed to ensure the continued viability of farming as an economically productive and sustainable activity, discourage sprawl, facilitate a broad range of outdoor recreation and tourism activities, conserve land and natural resources, and promote practices that advance environmental quality. (Ec, Env)
- Improve awareness of and access to the Agricultural Reserve for the public to experience and directly benefit from this valuable resource for locally grown food, outdoor recreation, and tourism. (Ec, Eq)



Figure 30: Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve.





## How will these policies further the key objectives of Thrive Montgomery 2050?

### Compact Development to Support Vibrant, Diverse, and Sustainable Places

Montgomery County's population is projected to grow by approximately 200,000 people over the next 30 years, with 75% of these new households eligible for regulated affordable housing according to the Council of Governments. ~~And~~ these policies and practices ~~are may be~~ critical to ~~not only~~ accommodating this growth but also to achieving Thrive Montgomery 2050's key objectives, including combating and adapting to climate change. Nearly 85 percent of the county's land is already developed or otherwise constrained. If we fail to maintain effective barriers to sprawl, we will likely paint ourselves into a corner where space for farming, recreation, and resource management is exhausted along with space for additional growth.

We ~~must should~~ encourage compact, infill development and redevelopment to accommodate anticipated population growth in a way that supports appropriately dense, ~~vibrant, energized~~ communities. The strategy of concentrating growth within centers of activity nodes along corridors ~~will~~ aims to direct population and employment to locations served by infrastructure, services, and amenities – including transit – and create focused centers of activity. This focus ~~will should~~ in turn reduce the cost of public infrastructure and deliver more favorable returns on both public and private investment. Compact, infill development and redevelopment also align with the increasing desire of some residents, businesses and employers seeking walkable, transit-oriented communities, as demonstrated by transit-oriented areas across the region and country.

### Economic Health: Compact Form as the Foundation for More Appealing Places

Keeping the county's development footprint and growth in a compact form along corridors will help to create the kind of places that are attractive to employers and attract new investment. Studies of trends in office development show that major employers are looking for amenity-rich, walkable areas near transit. Traditional, low-density office parks are no longer in favor. The related ideas of Compact Form, Complete Communities and Design Excellence will ~~result in~~ encourage places that attract both businesses and residents.

Compact development footprint is an important tool in creating the kind of centers that support a strong economy. The lack of large tracts of vacant, unconstrained land does not mean that Montgomery County cannot grow its economy. However, ~~we need~~ the focus needs to switch to thinking differently about where growth happens and compactly developing ing areas that have not been considered in the past, such as surface parking lots and colocation of facilities. Even though the county is running out of greenfields to accommodate sprawling employment centers or new residential neighborhoods, this plan does not recommend expanding our development footprint well-much beyond the Corridor-Focused Growth area. Instead, it emphasizes that the current supply of redevelopable land – if developed compactly and

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creatively – is sufficient to attract and retain a variety of employers, especially advanced knowledge-based industries looking for vibrant centers and a highly trained, diverse workforce.

It is important to note that form alone will not create more jobs. ~~Increased Adequate~~ density, ~~great extensive~~ transit options and a regulatory environment that supports investment are all required. Other changes are needed in terms of financial incentives, tax reform and investment in infrastructure.

### Racial Equity and Rebalancing the Geographic Distribution of Opportunity

The identification of growth corridors in the East County – particularly along Route 29 and the Georgia Avenue corridor along Metrorail’s Red Line – is vital to reversing decades of no growth and ensuring that the benefits of growth are more equitably distributed across lines of geography, class, and race. These areas also offer the opportunity for greater return on investment, financially and in terms of Thrive Montgomery 2050’s goals. Previous political opposition to development in the East County – most clearly expressed by the removal of the I-95/Route 29 corridor in the 1993 Refinement of the Wedges and Corridors Plan from the areas identified as appropriate for growth – pushed public and private investment to the west. Subsequent public and private investment was focused along the I-270 corridor because this area appeared to offer the best prospects for growth and success. Meanwhile, the East County became relatively less attractive for employers and residents, feeding a cycle of stagnation.

This pattern is consistent with what real estate developer and scholar Christopher B. Leinberger has described as the phenomenon of the “favored quarter.” Leinberger observes that in many metropolitan areas, decisions about the geographic allocation of resources made decades in the past are reinforced and repeated. Once an area receives resources and attention from the government and private sector, Leinberger argues, future investment tends to follow in the same location, reinforcing its head start and leaving other areas farther behind.

Figure 31: Colesville Road/Columbia Pike (Route 29) looking east from its intersection with New Hampshire Avenue—today

Figure 31: Colesville Road/Columbia Pike (Route 29) looking east from its intersection with New Hampshire Avenue—possible future

The evolution of the I-270 corridor as the “favored quarter” and accompanying limits on development in the East County were not the sole – or even the most important – cause of the racial and economic divide between the eastern and western part of the county. The logic of the favored quarter, however, was and is a significant factor in reinforcing disparities in access to investment, infrastructure, and services as well as the concentration of poverty and diminished access to opportunity. While the potential for displacement must always be considered – and ~~this plan calls for~~ monitoring and addressing dislocation caused by rising real estate values must be part of this plan – by the same token public and private investment are essential to expanding economic opportunity for people and communities that have been left behind or economically and socially isolated. By focusing investment and encouraging development along corridors in the East

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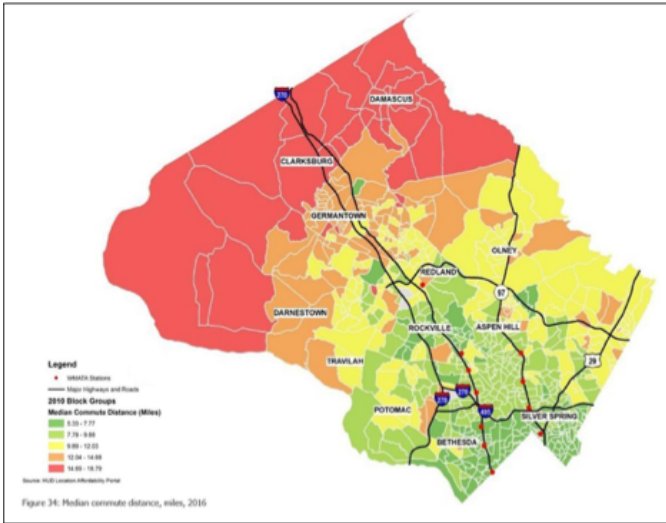
County, this plan will [help to](#) establish ~~the foundation for Complete Communities that will create~~ a more prosperous and equitable future in all parts of the county.

**Compact Growth and Environmental Performance: Improved Air and Water Quality with More Efficient Use of Land**

Among the most clear-cut benefits of the efficient use of land, including compact corridor-focused growth together with reinforcement of the rural pattern outside of the corridors, is to make development more environmentally sustainable in general and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in particular. By concentrating development in a limited footprint, corridor-centered growth [can](#) facilitate walking, biking, and transit use and ~~reduced~~s emissions from motor vehicles. A compact form of development reduces driving even among people who continue to rely on cars, because trip distances [are likely to](#) decline as a wider range of needs can be met within a short distance, reducing vehicle miles traveled.



Figure 33: Lining corridors with appropriate densities provides housing options (Before and after of Georgia Avenue north of Silver Spring)



Compact growth can also improve the environmental performance of both sites and buildings, as it allows the redevelopment of areas developed prior to the adoption of modern stormwater controls and often characterized by high proportions of impervious surface cover. A compact form of infill development or redevelopment can reduce stormwater runoff and heat island effect by using green infrastructure, green roofs, and other green cover, as well as building design and orientation to reduce urban temperatures.

Finally, compact, corridor-focused development is likely to be essential to the continued protection of the Agricultural Reserve and preservation of land for environmental stewardship and recreation. As our population grows and the region continues to develop, pressure on rural areas and natural systems will may increase. The preservation of the Agricultural Reserve reinforces the concentration of growth and maximizes the land available for farming, recreation and natural resource conservation.



While farming should-must remain the primary use in the Agricultural Reserve, the area set aside for the rural pattern also provides opportunities for recreation, tourism and natural resource conservation, uses that must be acknowledged and supported. The Agricultural Reserve improves the attractiveness and livability of the county because it provides opportunities for locally grown food, outdoor recreation, education, and tourism. The continued preservation of the Agricultural Reserve, along with the county's park system, also protects the county's forests, wetlands, meadows and streams, supports biodiversity and natural habitats, and protects watersheds, aquifers, and water quality.

**How will we evaluate progress?**

In assessing future plans, projects, and proposals related to the efficient use of land and measuring the success or failure of the approaches recommended in this plan, relevant measures may include:

- Amount of infill development/redevelopment along major corridors.
- Proportion of new population, employment and housing within a mile (or half-mile) of priority corridors.
- Non-auto driver mode share (walking, biking, transit use) and corresponding reduction in VMT.
- Amount of public and private investment in infrastructure, services, and amenities along corridors, overall and by area of county.
- Acres of farmland, natural habitats, forests and environmentally sensitive areas protected.
- Economic productivity of farming.
- Amount of space for outdoor recreation and variety of activities supported.
- Percentage increase in environmental performance of buildings and sites, overall and by area of county.
- Number of visitors from outside the Agricultural Reserve for recreation, commerce, and tourism.
- Maintenance and improvement in measures of stream water quality.
- Reduction in impervious cover and increase in area of impervious cover treated.
- Increase in tree canopy.
- Increase in alternative clean energy generation and composting/food waste recovery.

**Commented [A21]:** These sections in each relevant chapter are not metrics, as they do not indicate goals or interim goals and they contain no qualitative elements – infill development of what kind of units – studios or family size? For example, the proportion of new population, employment, housing within 1 or ½ mile is meaningless by itself if transit cannot accommodate the growth.