

**COMPLETE COMMUNITIES: Mix of Uses and Forms
Wedges and Corridors and the Separation of Uses – and People**

While the Wedges and Corridors Plan was extraordinarily progressive in advocating a transit-oriented, compact form of development, it rejected the idea of mixed commercial and residential uses. The plan said the spaces designated for different uses should ultimately work together to achieve a “pleasant and economically feasible whole” but that these uses should be physically separated. It recommended Euclidean zoning, with areas set aside for multifamily, townhouse, and single-family housing along with isolated commercial and industrial zones, saying:

“[C]ommercial and industrial zones should exclude residences both because good residential neighborhoods cannot be maintained in such areas, and because business and industry can function more effectively where space allotted them is uninterrupted by housing.”

In addition to a rigid separation of uses, the plan insisted on the desirability of barriers, buffers and transitions between land uses to achieve harmony and compatibility:

“[L]ong established commercial centers expand into nearby residential neighborhoods, causing more transitional problems. The end result is a disease known as urban blight. This disease is contagious and is almost sure to spread where preventative measures are not taken.”

What is the problem we are trying to solve? A Mixed Record with Mixed Use

While the polycentric urbanism embodied by the 1964 plan’s corridor cities concept was fundamentally sound, its approach to the separation of uses and emphasis on transitions and buffers was at best not entirely successful in producing pleasant and economically vibrant commercial districts and at worst served to justify land use decisions that reinforced racial and socioeconomic segregation. Other shortcomings have become increasingly obvious, namely:

- The separate-and-buffer approach failed to anticipate – much less meet – the demand for housing in mixed-use centers of activity. For the most part, the corridor cities neither achieved the densities nor provided for the variety of uses, building types and services necessary to maximize their value in attracting residents and workers looking for **more vibrant and appealing** places to **both** live and work.
- A handful of locations in Montgomery County have attracted investment in office, retail, and residential uses, but most lack the combination of elements – including a compact form with diverse housing types, commercial uses, transit, and a walkable public realm – **that likely to** support the kinds of human interaction common to **the most successful** places **with a successful office, retail, and residential mix**. Meanwhile, the areas surrounding our most eclectic centers of activity largely remain characterized by a separation of land uses and **uniform lot sizes, lot coverage, and building forms**.

Commented [A1]: This whole concept would completely alter existing residential communities. This is not viable except in greenfield or grayfield/brownfield redevelopment, or where sizeable parcels can be assembled. As well, this section contains multiple assertions that are not well-supported by the research.

Commented [A2]: This may be what the old general plan says, but it hasn't been followed for a long time. The county has been mixing commercial and residential uses in the CR zones for some time now, and that should be mentioned. As written, it sounds like separated commercial and residential zones are still the norm for new development/redevelopment.

Commented [A3]: Any evidence of this? If so, then it should be described here and cited. If not, it ought to be removed.

Commented [A4]: Downtown Bethesda at its best in the 1990s. SS still recovering from the 1960s. Isn't all this section hindsight?

Commented [A5]: Because many smaller lots in older neighborhoods were grandfathered in and because of topography which often resulted in larger lots, lot sizes there are not uniform. So this is not accurate for many neighborhoods. As well, this is what the Planning Board has been approving for decades.

The separation of uses and associated homogeneity in lot sizes, development standards and building forms, coupled with the commitment to barriers, buffers and transitions had the effect – whether intentional or not – of discouraging connections among people and places and sharpening racial, social and economic divisions between neighborhoods and parts of the county.

The implementation of these approaches also made access to the full range of economic, educational and cultural opportunities (as well as services, amenities, and infrastructure) far too dependent on access to cars. By separating uses and investing heavily in roads, we have historically made driving the only practical way for many residents and workers to meet their daily needs – including trips that should be feasible on foot, on a bicycle, or on a train or bus, including for those with disabilities and those with young children.

The preservation and protection of neighborhoods dedicated exclusively to detached single-family houses has left residents disconnected from retail and other services, encouraged the construction of stand-alone public facilities, and perpetuated the inefficient use of land.

Our land use policies have evolved in recent years to reflect a changing social and demographic context as well as changing preferences and planning approaches. The county also has evolved from a bedroom community to the District of Columbia to a county with several distinct employment centers. These changes have coincided with the emergence of increasingly strong market preferences for transit-oriented, mixed-use communities with a unique sense of place. Our plans have been responsive to these trends, but implementation of transit-oriented, mixed-use development has been limited due to economic and regulatory constraints and limited developer interest. The basic underlying pattern persists in much of the county despite the 1993 refinement’s endorsement of mixed uses and subsequent changes to the zoning code. Of course, some suburban and rural areas may not achieve the mix of uses or support the kinds of transit service that should be expected in more urban areas. Thrive Montgomery 2050 envisions increasing the variety of uses and achieving a people-oriented public realm within the corridor-focused growth areas and centers discussed in the Compact Growth chapter at scales appropriate to their context, so as to provide people in all parts of the county access to a wider range of services and amenities in closer proximity to their homes and workplaces.

Beyond Transit-Oriented Development: Complete Communities and 15-Minute Living

Thrive Montgomery 2050 recognizes the benefits of transit-oriented development, which often uses mixed use zoning as a complement to high-quality transit service, but it updates and recalibrates ideas about the role of mixed uses by adding “complete communities” and “15-minute living” as organizing principles for thinking about planning of neighborhoods and districts.

Complete Communities are places that include the range of land uses, infrastructure, services and amenities that allow them to meet a wide range of needs for a variety of people. They include housing suitable for different household types, income levels, and preferences, helping to support racial and socioeconomic integration, encourage an active lifestyle, increase social interaction, and reduce our carbon footprint. The specific mix of uses, amenities, (parks and public facilities) and housing building types in Complete Communities vary depending on factors such as the size and location of the neighborhood or district; proximity to transit, parks and public facilities; variation in physical features such as topography and environmental resources; and other factors unique to the history and context of each place. unique history and building form of each neighborhood.

Commented [A6]: Are we more segregated/less integrated now? Planning theory changes with the times. Again, cite evidence that separation of uses, homogeneity of lot sizes (which as noted above actually is a fallacy), buffers, etc. contributes to divisions among people. Evidence please!

Commented [A7]: We suggest removing this paragraph. What evidence shows that buffers between CBDs and surrounding neighborhoods lead to inequity or shut down interactions between people across the county?

Commented [A8]: This was national policy going back to the 1950s, when Eisenhower created the interstate system, designed largely to move goods. An important use of roads. Today many roads in Montgomery County are also part of evacuation routes not just for the County but also for DC – this is a national security issue as egress from DC is part of the Continuity of Government plans for dealing with a major crisis.

Commented [A9]: Clearly there has been and continues to be a market for single-family housing; see various data reported in news media. The Wall St. Journal reported in December 2021 that “millennials are supercharging the housing market” https://www.wsj.com/articles/millennials-are-supercharging-the-housing-market-11639496815?st=53lxtvfoowuef2y&reflink=article_email_sh are

Commented [A10]: At the same time, developers will tell you, people still want their cars, no matter how close to transit their homes or offices may be. The Planning Board has approved a project 600’ from a metro stop that provides a garage for residents. This has been overstated.

Commented [A11]: As noted above, the Planning Board has not always conformed to aspects of the plans it creates.

Commented [A12]: These two sentences as originally included ignored the limited developer interest, which contradicts the claim in the first sentence about strong market preferences. We question the assertion that regulatory constraints have affected this.

Commented [A13]: There are repeated references to increasing uses in residential areas, which has not been subject to public discussion. Such changes – if done at all – should only be done via master planning and this should be acknowledged in Thrive..

Commented [A14]: Schools, libraries, recreation centers, DMV, medical services, religious institutions, every type of retail (food, drugs, clothes, housewares, office supplies etc etc) – what about competition?

Commented [A15]: The staff draft of Thrive spelled out some of the amenities that would be available for complete communities of different types (urban, suburban, rural) -- much more detail needed here.

The related concept of “15-minute living” has emerged as a way of reimagining existing communities to maximize their attractiveness and efficiency by mixing housing, offices, and retail ~~uses in each neighborhood or district~~ so services, infrastructure, facilities, and amenities to serve the daily needs of people who live or work there are within walking distance. While a literal or rigid application of 15-minute living may not be practical outside of the corridor focused growth areas and centers, and needs refinement to serve seniors, the disabled, and families with small children, the concept is a useful way to generate concrete recommendations to make communities more complete and help them succeed.

Commented [A16]: The phrase “in each neighborhood or district” was deleted because it will not work in every neighborhood or district, and neither neighborhood nor district is defined.

Different Ingredients for Different Communities

The combination of strategies that can help create a more Complete Community in any particular place depends heavily on context. The scale (village vs. town center vs. downtown), location (inside vs. outside the growth footprint, within one of the State’s four growth tiers as defined by The Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012, Senate Bill 236) and type ~~of district or neighborhood~~ (office park vs. central business district vs. residential neighborhood vs. suburban shopping center) all influence which elements should be incorporated and how they should be tailored. Despite the varying needs and conditions of different parts of the county, however, the concept of encouraging more diversity of use and form is relevant in almost every location. For example:

Commented [A17]: This concept assumes retail and office buildings, as well as government/education/religious institutions will be integrated/imposed on existing residential communities. That should be done only through master plans and this should be acknowledged here..

- Existing suburban office parks in locations such as Rock Spring or Clarksburg’s COMSAT site have large existing buildings that can accommodate employment but lack the integration of uses, services, and amenities necessary to succeed in an increasingly competitive office market. Complete community strategies can help reposition these employment centers through infill and redevelopment to incorporate a variety of housing, retail/restaurants, public facilities, and parks and public spaces along with better transit service, making them more attractive to both residents and employers.
- Likewise, for places the county hopes to see emerge as important centers for office employment, such as White Flint, White Oak, or Germantown, the integration of additional housing and retail options, parks and public facilities can help to encourage activity beyond regular business hours, creating the sense of energy and activity during the evening and on weekends.

Commented [A18]: Based on the Planning Department’s White Flint study, adding housing alone is not enough to attract businesses and employment, and developers are not interested in building housing unless there are jobs. If the jobs are there, retail, amenities like parks, and public facilities are necessary.

Commercial c~~Centers of activity~~ in suburban and rural areas, which range from large retail shopping centers such as Aspen Hill, to clusters of commercial and neighborhood serving retail uses like the shopping areas in Potomac Village or Four Corners, offer convenience retail for surrounding subdivisions but ~~usually often~~ lack safe pedestrian accommodations, good transit connections, public facilities, or high-quality parks and public spaces. In some places, new kinds of commercial development, such as medical offices, will be viable even where office space or other employment-related uses are difficult to attract. The recommendations in this chapter and elsewhere in the plan can help make these developing centers of activity neighborhoods more walkable and livable.

Commented [A19]: Often more expensive, so may not be economically viable/sustainable.

The Connection Between Complete Communities and Corridor- Focused Growth

As explained in the chapter on Compact Growth, development of new or substantially expanded centers of activity ~~should could~~ be focused along growth corridors to avoid sprawl and achieve the critical mass required for each center to be economically sustainable. Limited, organic development beyond the corridors and defined growth areas ~~should may~~ be allowed to increase the diversity of housing types in existing residential

neighborhoods and make these areas more complete, particularly near existing centers of activity or development. Opportunities for increased housing diversity outside the defined growth areas will allow neighborhoods to evolve over time to address current and future housing needs and become more racially and socioeconomically integrated.

Commented [A20]: This is a strong assertion. Evidence is not provided that this is possible

Implementation will be ~~organic and~~ incremental, best achieved via local master planning, through infill and redevelopment within centers of activity along corridors as well as within existing downtowns, town centers and rural villages. This implementation ~~will~~ should be primarily market driven, using the development review process to funnel contributions from private developers to streetscape improvements, dedication and construction of parks and public spaces, and the addition of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Specific strategies will be needed and implemented to recognize and minimize the negative impacts of gentrification on communities and businesses at risk of displacement, including the recommendations described in the chapter on housing together with policies outside the scope of this plan, such as direct assistance to small and minority-owned businesses and housing subsidies. Specific strategies also will be needed to ensure that the infill and redevelopment does not have negative environmental consequences such as expanding urban heat islands and increasing stormwater run-off problems.

What policies ~~will~~ are most likely to solve the problem?

~~To~~ ensure that demand for future development in Montgomery County may be encouraged ~~is~~ harnessed to embrace Complete Communities and 15-minute living – both by building new centers of activity along corridors and by making existing ones more complete – using the county should pursue a number of with a variety of policies, which ~~must~~ should be suitable designed for all to be adaptable for all areas of the county and implemented through local area planning with extensive citizen participation through advisory panels, charrettes, or similar means. The specific policies and practices recommended to further Complete Communities and 15-minute living include:

Identify and integrate elements needed to complete centers of housing, retail, and office development and plan to make 15-minute living a reality for as many people as possible.

- Prioritize neighborhood-level land use planning, through the master plan process, as a tool to enhance overall quality of community life and avoid reinforcing outdated land use patterns. (EQ)
- Consider ~~p~~ romoting zoning allocations and standards to encourage the integration of varied uses, building types and lot sizes. (Ec, Env, EQ)
- Apply flexible approaches through neighborhood-level land use planning to accommodate infill and redevelopment that help to improve access to amenities, active ~~t~~ better transit services ~~portation~~, parks, and open spaces, and a broader range of housing types at the neighborhood scale without adding to stormwater run-off, loss of tree canopy, expansion of urban heat islands, and other negative environmental consequences (Ec, Env, EQ)
- ~~Prioritize neighborhood-level land use planning as a tool to enhance overall quality of community life and avoid reinforcing outdated land use patterns. (EQ)~~
- Allow sufficient densities through neighborhood-level land use planning to make a wide range of uses economically viable in Complete Communities. Where appropriate within the context of the history and building form of the neighborhood, e ncourage densities sufficient to support convenience retail and other local-serving amenities at the neighborhood level. Provide guidance for accommodating additional density in a context-sensitive manner. (Ec, Env, EQ)
- Ensure that Complete Communities are integrated into their surroundings and supported by a public realm that encourages walking, biking and rolling, accessible for all, as well as social interaction through the configuration of sidewalks, paths, landmarks, parks, and gathering spaces. (Ec, Env, EQ)

- Adopt planning approaches that prioritize providing more Complete Communities in service to improving the quality of community life throughout the county. (EQ)
- Apply proven environmental technology to avoid creating heat islands, to mitigate stormwater runoff and flooding, and in construction methods (Env)

Encourage co-location and adjacency of **all** essential and public services, especially along growth corridors and in Complete Communities, as part of the master planning process.

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- Maximize the accessibility/utility of public facilities by locating them in places that promote integration with other public and private uses and infrastructure. (Env, EQ)
- Promote active transportation improvements that prioritize walking, biking, rolling, and transit services/use to enhance public access to these co-located facilities, including access for seniors and those with disabilities. (Env, EQ)
- Develop standards for colocation of public facilities that promote mixing of uses or services and compact development strategies. Encourage public-private partnerships and ensure they promote social interaction and physical activity. (Ec, Env, EQ)

Retrofit centers of activity and large-scale older facilities such as shopping centers, abandoned federal campuses, office parks, and other single-use developments to include a mixture of uses and diversity of housing types, parks and public spaces, and to provide a critical mass of housing, jobs, services, and amenities necessary for vibrant, dynamic Complete Communities.

- Ensure employment uses in economic clusters develop in a mixed-use format along with housing, retail, parks and public spaces, amenities, and transit, and ensure they are integrated into the surrounding communities in a context sensitive manner. (Ec, Env, EQ)
- Allow creation of co-located housing, discussed further in the Affordable and Attainable Housing Chapter, including for industries that employ large numbers of employees (permanent or seasonal). (Ec, Env, EQ)
- As part of complete communities, encourage as appropriate and through the master planning process higher density economic and housing cooperatives (live/work areas such as home occupations, artist villages, farmers’ market/villages, tech/life-science startup incubators). (Ec, Env, EQ)

Commented [A22]: Some of these may not be compatible with infill development, particularly at higher densities.

Commented [A23]: Not clear how this relates to complete communities. Shouldn't diverse housing types, amenities etc. also be mentioned here?

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

Economic Health: Complete Communities as Magnets for a Variety of People, Businesses, and Jobs

Montgomery County has reached a stage where greenfield opportunities largely have been exhausted and the general locations of business districts, residential neighborhoods, and farmland have been established, or are at least planned. For example, the downtowns of Silver Spring and Bethesda; the new life sciences hubs anticipated in the Great Seneca Science Corridor and White Oak; and the emerging town centers in Germantown and White Flint have zoning capacity as well as physical space for tens of millions of square feet of development. Those areas already planned and emerging are likely to offer the most bang for the buck and should be addressed first.

The task of this plan, therefore, is less about identifying new locations for large government or corporate tenants and more about making parts of the county that already have been developed or planned more attractive to residents and workers, which in turn will help attract employers. The central premise is that making individual neighborhoods and districts centers of activity more complete is among the most effective ways to accomplish this goal. Combined with a compact development footprint, clear standards to ensure quality

Commented [A24]: This is an astonishing statement. Many “parts of the county” are already attractive to residents and workers. This implies changing them and says nothing about areas that have not been attractive – like the eastern part of the county that Thrive elsewhere says it would focus on. And again, the White Flint study indicated that jobs must be there before developers build housing.

of design; complementary transportation infrastructure to support walking, rolling, and riding; and appealing parks and recreation offerings for active lifestyles; more complete communities are essential to our competitiveness.

Planning for Complete Communities, with a true integration of context appropriate uses, diversity of building types, and provision of parks, public spaces, public facilities and amenities variety of lot sizes, represents a departure from the automobile-oriented land use planning of the last several decades and the embrace of a planning paradigm that is far more likely to help attract employers, workers, and residents by offering convenience, walkability and a quality of place only available when the needs of people are considered ahead of the needs of cars.

As previously discussed explained, the creation of vibrant, dynamic Complete Communities that include housing, a diversity of jobs, retail services, amenities, parks and public spaces, and opportunities for social gathering and interaction will can attract employment, advancing our economic performance and competitiveness. This approach will not be sufficient standing alone and it is not intended as a substitute for other elements of a comprehensive economic development strategy. In an era with limited demand for new office construction and a strong market preference for locating businesses in high-quality, mixed- use, walkable and transit-oriented areas, however, it is currently considered to be one of the best strategies available to local government to attract and retain employers.

“Completeness” and Equity: Diverse Places to Support Diverse People

In addition, flexible use and development standards that allow variety in lot sizes, building types, and building placement may offer an opportunity to increase commercial and residential diversity within Complete Communities neighborhood. A broad assortment of retail, office, and live-work spaces designed to fit the needs of individual businesses can support different kinds of work and employment arrangements. The diversity of housing and employment types may provides a means for renters, first-time homebuyers, or new business owners to access and participate in competitive markets.

Diversity in development is may be especially important to producing housing that matches the needs of our future. The integration of accessory dwelling units, duplexes, and multi-family buildings within the Complete Communities same community may supports a broader range of households and incomes, reduces the concentration of poverty, and increases racial and economic equity. A mixture of housing types – coupled with strategies to use the built environment to encourage social interaction – can help create integrated communities where people across the ethnic, racial, social, and economic spectrum not only live and work together but develop a sense of shared purpose and community. These elements may also create opportunities for housing suitable to every stage of life, allowing residents to stay in the same neighborhoods as they age.

The Role of Complete Communities in Environmental Resilience: Community Gap-Filling as Sustainability Strategy

Finally, Complete Communities will also have the potential to create long-term sustainability for both human and environmental health. A mixture of uses and forms, together with a built environment that facilitates active lifestyles, allows more trips to be completed by walking, biking, rolling, and transit, reducing vehicle miles traveled and dependence on cars while increasing physical fitness and opportunities for social interaction. Establishing Complete Communities in the corridor-focused growth areas and within centers

throughout the county reduces the distance that people, particularly those within suburban and rural areas, must drive to meet their daily needs, further reducing vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions. Likewise, the mixture of uses, co-location and adjacency of public services and amenities can improve sustainability by reducing building footprints and cutting energy use. Co-location can also help ~~to~~ maximize community use and social interaction. These environmental benefits of Complete Communities however, must be balanced against increased ~~in~~ urban heat islands and stormwater runoff that result from increased density.

How will we evaluate progress?

In assessing proposals related to the creation of Complete Communities and measuring the success or failure of the approaches recommended in this plan relevant measures may include:

- Population density in centers of activity along corridors as well as within existing downtowns, town centers and rural villages
- Diversity of uses and structures
- Racial, ethnic, and income diversity
- Median age/life stages concentration
- Percentage of employment growth overall and by area of the county
- Car ownership levels
- Transit usage for inter-county travel
- Weekend transit usage
- Numbers of co-located facilities/amenities
- Public investment ratios for walking, biking, rolling, transit, and automobile
- Median vehicular expense per county household
- Median housing expense per county household
- Emergence of key population and mixed-use centers
- Increasing commercial activity in otherwise residential neighborhoods