



Seniors Won't Thrive Under "Thrive" "By 2040, one in five residents in Montgomery County will be 65 and older, and one in three will be 55 or older" noted a County Planning Board study in 2018. Yet seniors are barely mentioned in the Thrive Montgomery 2050 plan. How can a 150-page "vision" for our County ignore a population that will comprise one-fifth of the population in 20 years?

The 2018 study's findings include: About 15.5 percent of households headed by seniors (55 and up) spend more than half their incomes on housing. More seniors are likely to become renters because of

changing economic circumstances. The vast majority of county assisted-living facilities are not targeted to adults with limited incomes. Most older adults would prefer to age in place while living independently.

But how would seniors, especially the economically vulnerable, manage under Thrive? From the text, it is impossible to tell. Thrive mentions seniors once (P. 54), noting that there will be new residents who are seniors or persons with disabilities. “Elderly” is mentioned once in the introduction, in relation to social isolation, and aging is mentioned twice, one in connection with missing middle housing for “aging in place” on p. 58 and p. 10 in Appendix A.

Appendix A sounds the alarm about increased “pressure on the tax base” by the “aging workforce” and increasing numbers of retirees in the County. Such statements overlook the property and income taxes of older workers, who tend to have higher salaries and strongly contribute to the County tax base. The taxes of retirees, whose households are usually childless, continue supporting the County budget (roughly half of which is allocated for schools). As Thrive acknowledges, this “elder adult dependency ratio” would shrink if the County were more successful in attracting business investment and jobs.

Not only that, but key features of Thrive planning would reduce the tools seniors need to age in place. Instead of exploring senior-specific transportation, for example, Thrive emphasizes public transit, walking, and biking for all transportation needs. However practical for young urban dwellers, such measures ignore how seniors in our 500-square-mile County would reach grocery shopping, doctors' offices, or places to socialize, especially in off hours and inclement weather. Thrive appears to suggest that for transportation, seniors will be on their own.

The push to cut residential parking requirements would disproportionately hurt seniors, who need places to park near their destinations and homes. Buyers of new multi-family units without parking will simply park their cars on the streets, adding to congestion and narrowing access, especially for large emergency vehicles seniors often need. This crucial public safety priority seems to be ignored.

The vast majority of seniors (75 to 90 percent) prefer to age in place, remaining in their homes and neighborhoods. Thrive provides few clues on how the County can support these preferences. How can seniors who want to "downsize" remain in their neighborhoods, given the rising cost of even smaller housing and the fierce competition for desirable real estate? How will the County compensate for falling fed-

eral funding for housing programs that serve seniors? How will the County use master planning to accommodate seniors, given the repeated misuse of zoning text amendments to circumvent master planning requirements to meet residents' needs?

The stunning omission of seniors from Thrive Montgomery 2050 makes these questions unanswerable. But Thrive's blindness to such a large and important population shows why this deeply flawed plan should not be approved.

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We Won't Thrive with Thrive

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