



The confusing and chaotic process for approving Thrive Montgomery 2050 and the subsequent Attainable Housing Strategies Initiative (AHSI) will resume with September work sessions in the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee (PHED). Councilmember Jawando wants another hearing or focus groups to ensure that a more diverse population is heard. Councilmember Friedson wants a clear process. However the Planning Board will continue

its strategic lurching toward AHS with a set of implementation strategies, as planning staff present their initial version of at least one Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) – with limited, likely unrepresentative public input.

How we got here: The October 2020 staff draft of Thrive (not the Planning Board version that was sent to the Council) proposed adding “Missing Middle Housing” (MMH - duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, live-work units, and courtyard cottages) along existing and planned rail and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridors. Typically, the key to MMH is conforming to the height, lot coverage, and footprint requirements that make these compatible within existing single-family neighborhoods. Separate from Thrive, in December 2020, Councilmember Jawando introduced a ZTA calling for multi-family housing units within 1-mile of Metro stations (planning staff recommended further discussion), and in March 2021, Councilmember Riemer and Hucker requested that planning staff prepare a ZTA for increased density along transit corridors. Now, the potential housing strategies have 3 separate implementation tracks: 2 ZTA’s sought by councilmembers, and 1 path to be pursued by the planning staff.

Lack of community involvement: As of December 2020, there was no community involvement in any

housing strategies-based processes. In February/March, planners sent invitations to a select group, chosen by them, to form the Housing Equity Advisory Team (HEAT). Of the 14 member team, 11 were developers, architects, realtors, and a lobbyist. In addition, there were only 2 people of color. HEAT was meant to provide feedback for planners. A meeting was held at the end of June, not a formal hearing, but an opportunity for the planning staff to explain their ideas and inform residents on AHS initiative. This was the only public involvement to date, and unless you watched the four HEAT sessions, you won't know what resulted; as no report was issued. Irregular revision process: In addition to the clear lack of diversity and independent community representation on HEAT, Chair Anderson often upended the staff's work. From one meeting to the next, definitions changed, maps changed, and the scope of the affected areas and zones changed. A commissioner noted that what was proposed would not address affordable housing, and suggested density bonuses if some living units were affordable. The chair objected to ensuring compatibility, a key requirement of true MMH. Planners were told to include all single-family zones - R-40, R-60, R-90, and R-200, to expand what developers could do "by right", to explore using pattern books, and to develop an optional method for larger buildings (containing more than 20 units) in certain areas. It is impossible to overstate the confu-

certain areas. It is impossible to overstate the confusion caused by this ad hoc editing process that was used for both Thrive and the Attainable Housing Strategies initiative, AHS. Are these plans well-suited to last approximately 30 years!? <https://montgomery-planning.org/planning/housing/attainable-housing-strategies-initiative/housing-equity-advisory-team/>

Greater public engagement unlikely: Moving forward, the public will not have a chance for formal input until planners actually propose at least one ZTA. How this Planning Board has handled its' Attainable Housing Strategy, as well as Thrive, stands in stark contrast to the last similar major effort: the revision of the zoning code in 2012. The Board created a Zoning Advisory Panel with 24 members, which met from 2009 through 2012. Nothing like this was created for Thrive, and HEAT met only 4 times in 2 months. Instead of creating opportunities to build toward mutual understanding and possible compromise, the Planning Board has demeaned and diminished the public's role. Thus far, the public has had too few opportunities to influence this process. Councilmember Jawando's demand for another hearing or focus groups to be held would be an opportunity for potential true public input, by residents from all demographics and areas of the County; as opposed to lobbyists, realtors, and developers who stand to benefit from this plan and non-profit organizations who rely

on the County for funding. Thrive is a 30-year plan, so what's the rush?

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