



MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE


Marc Elrich  
County Executive

Scott E. Goldstein  
Fire Chief

MEMORANDUM

July 11, 2020

TO: Meredith Wellington  
Policy Analyst, Office of the County Executive

FROM: Scott E. Goldstein   
Fire Chief

SUBJECT: Thrive Montgomery 2050

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide comments on the *Thrive Montgomery 2050 Draft Work Product for Planning Board Review on June 11, 2020*. Although I have no specific revisions to offer, there are policies and actions that may have an impact on fire and rescue services over the course of the next thirty years and will require additional planning and consideration by FRS leadership and staff.

- The policy recommendations for housing development in the County are important factors to consider, not only to ensure an adequate number or supply of available homes for the anticipated growth, but also because inadequate and/or substandard housing can be a major public health issue. Poor housing conditions are associated with a wide range of chronic and infectious health conditions and affect mental health. Disparities in housing and the social dimensions of neighborhoods can contribute to health disparities, which could result in increased service demands for MCFRS.
- Additionally, construction and development, whether new and modern or old and revitalized, is always a concern for the fire service. Although the number of fire incidents in Montgomery County has been declining, it is still important for planners to understand the fire environment and conditions that personnel could face during an active incident. Zoning changes (i.e., increase the number of high-rise buildings affect the level of risk and the resources required (hoses, ladders, apparatus, etc.).

Office of the Fire Chief

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- The policy recommendations to co-locate services to create “complete communities” is also an important consideration. Of the 37 existing fire stations, only 14 are county-owned. Redevelopment of any of the existing station properties could have a negative impact on the LFRD-owned stations and the MCFRS. MCFRS has previously identified the need for new stations and we constantly review and analyze operational response and the magnitude of risk that exists within any given part of the county. The availability of land to build on impacts the cost and the size of a new station, which can also impact the types of apparatus that can be located at that station. The MCFRS is open to design ideas, contests, and incentives for co-location, but cannot afford to overlook the many factors that determine location and placement of stations and resources.
- The policy recommendations for realignment and reconfiguration of roadways to accommodate increased pedestrian and bicycle traffic may negatively impact fire-rescue response times by inadvertently increasing vehicular traffic and congestion, while the narrowing of roadways will make turns more difficult for large fire-rescue apparatus. Similarly, the proposal for “a grid of streets and alleys” and smaller blocks with more crosswalks could also hinder response times.
- I appreciate *Action 8.2.6.b*, which refers to public safety vehicles and ensuring that public safety is not compromised by urban design and street safety improvements. The MCFRS has already started to employ strategies to improve apparatus maneuverability and safety to the public; for example, the new generation of fire engines is shorter, has a narrower body, and is designed to allow for a tighter turning radius. The MCFRS will continue to research and replace apparatus that have these improvements. This includes looking at technological enhancements to reduce emissions in apparatus (e.g., large batteries that can be added to apparatus to power warning lights, radios, and HVAC while parked, electric apparatus, etc.). However, differences in geography, land use, and hydrants do affect the minimum size of our apparatus, so we will continue to monitor these factors and reassess the risks, as needed.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the revised general plan. The MCFRS Planning Manager, Melissa Schulze, will continue to be available to the workgroup and will monitor and review any subsequent revisions to the County master plans and provide more specific feedback and impact statements, as needed.

cc: Melissa Schulze, Planning Section Manager, MCFRS

