

Seventh State

MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL, PLANNING, THRIVE 2050

RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE REVIEW SLAMS THRIVE

FEBRUARY 11, 2022 | DAVID LUBLIN

The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) has released its preliminary Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) review of Thrive 2050 (text embedded below or [click this link](#)). Its analysis attacks Thrive at its core.

Thrive leads with a vision for economic development that focuses on attracting new businesses and workers to the County who can afford to reside and/or work in mixed-use, transit-oriented town centers. Yet, this economic development approach could widen racial and social inequities as it primarily offers benefits to affluent and disproportionately White people.

That's got to hurt for Thrive 2050 proponents. They routinely tout it as an extremely progressive document and attack people who have concerns with part or all of it as racists or classists. The RESJ review suggests that Thrive supporters have been casting stones from comfortable glass houses.

The RESJ review also creates a huge procedural problem for moving forward with Thrive 2050:

OLO finds that the request to develop a RESJ impact statement for Thrive 2050 was premature as the PHED Committee draft is not yet ready for a comprehensive RESJ review. Instead, this memo offers six sets of observations and recommendations for updating Thrive, so it better aligns with best practices for advancing RESJ.

The Council adopted the RESJ review process with much fanfare and intense commitment. The Council is not supposed to move forward with the matter until it has received an RESJ review. If the Council truly believes in the importance of the process it created, its review process should halt until Thrive is updated so that OLO can undertake a proper RESJ analysis.

It's **not my preference** but it's that or they can ignore their own law.

Contrary to claims made within Thrive, the OLO believes that people of color and low-income residents have not been adequately consulted during its preparation. One of OLO's key recommendations for updating Thrive for a proper RESJ review is:

Elicit the meaningful input of residents of color from communities of color and low-income residents to co-create and update Thrive so that it reflects a consensus of land use policies and practices aimed at advancing RESJ.

This suggestion was reiterated a second time later in the document. Some who want the Council to move forward might well find fault with the ideological spin underpinning the RESJ review. But this is exactly what the Council asked for with RESJ analyses.

In short, Thrive proponents face quite a conundrum. They have sold this document precisely on racial equity and social justice grounds. Yet the RESJ review says that the process failed to conform to equity standards and that the core approach adopted by the Planning Board and the PHED Committee will worsen these problems.

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Memorandum

Date: February 9, 2022

To: County Council

From: Elaine Bonner-Tompkins, Ph.D., Senior Legislative Analyst
Office of Legislative Oversight

c: Pamela Dunn, Senior Legislative Analyst, County Council
Chris Cihlar, Ph.D., Director, Office of Legislative Oversight
Marlene Michaelson, Executive Director, County Council

Re: Initial RESJ Review of Thrive 2050

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This memorandum responds to the County Council’s request for the Office of Legislative Oversight to conduct a racial equity and social justice analysis of the Planning, Housing and Economic Development (PHED) Committee’s Draft of Thrive Montgomery 2050. The County Council assigned OLO this task on January 13, 2021.

OLO finds that the request to develop a RESJ impact statement for Thrive 2050 was premature as the PHED Committee draft is not yet ready for a comprehensive RESJ review. Instead, this memo offers six sets of observations and recommendations for updating Thrive, so it better aligns with best practices for advancing RESJ. Among these, OLO recommends prioritizing the following to update Thrive:¹

- Elicit the meaningful input of residents of color from communities of color and low-income residents to co-create and update Thrive so that it reflects a consensus of land use policies and practices aimed at advancing RESJ; and
- Describe the historic and current drivers of racial inequities in land use, housing, transportation and other policy areas that Thrive seeks to address.

This memo teases out OLO’s observations and offers recommendations for developing the next iteration of Thrive that reflects best practices for developing racially and socially

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