



October 3, 2022

**Written Comments on the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee Draft plan of Thrive 2050 and additional chapters<sup>1</sup>**

Submitted by: Denisse Guitarra, Maryland Conservation Advocate, Audubon Naturalist Society

Dear Montgomery County Council,

For 125 years, Audubon Naturalist Society has inspired people to enjoy, learn about and protect nature. ANS has directly engaged in the Thrive 2050 process since its inception: by hosting virtually and in person, webinars, and discussion with representatives of local government agencies, nonprofits, BIPOC groups, watershed groups and more.<sup>23</sup> We thank the County Council for the opportunity to provide additional comments on the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee Draft plan of Thrive 2050, the additional environmental chapter<sup>4</sup> and the Racial Equity and Social Justice Review Report.<sup>5</sup>

ANS recommends Council move forward and pass Thrive 2050 to allow for future and pending legislation(s) and land use policies to be updated to the new and improved standards. Some of the areas ANS has identified and suggests Council to incorporate into the final Thrive 2050 Plan version to make it even stronger are listed as follows:

- **Forests and Trees:** Forests ecosystems are critical natural infrastructure that has multiple co-benefits. Forests purify our air, water, reduce urban heat, serve as habitats for wildlife, reduce stormwater run-off, reduce stress levels, connect communities, and do so much

<sup>1</sup> Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee Draft plan of Thrive 2050. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2021/PHED-CommitteeDraftThrive2050.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> ANS's Thrive outreach, testimonies, and work since 2020. Available at: <https://conservationblog.anshome.org/tag/thrive-2050/>

<sup>3</sup> Opinion: Thrive Montgomery's vision for county's future is strong but can be improved. Bethesda Beat. Feb 2022. Available at: <https://bethesdamagazine.com/2022/02/05/opinion-thrive-montgomerys-vision-for-countys-future-is-strong-but-can-be-improved/>

<sup>4</sup> Environmental Health and Resilience Chapter. Thrive 2050. Available at: [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2022/Environmental Resilience Chapter - 9\\_13\\_22 KL Edits.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2022/Environmental%20Resilience%20Chapter-9_13_22%20KL%20Edits.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Racial Equity and Social Justice Review on Thrive 2050. Nspiregreen 2022. Available at: [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2022/Thrive Final Report.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/2022/Thrive_Final_Report.pdf)

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more. For climate change and the wellbeing of people and wildlife forests and trees need higher protections now more than ever. Thrive needs to mention the urgent need to protect existing forests and trees in the county to reach “no net loss” (no more cutting down trees) and “net gain” (planting more trees). It will also take updating our three existing forest and tree laws to provide the full protection our county’s trees and forests need.

- **Outreach to Underrepresented Communities:** As the Racial Equity and Social Justice Review on Thrive 2050 reported, the plan could have done more work on ensuring that early and meaningful outreach was conducted, that more working-class priorities were incorporated into the Plan, and ensuring more investment opportunities are available in historically underserved communities. Policies and legislations must be created post passing Thrive to ensure racial equity and social justice components in Thrive and other planning processes are expanded and improved.
- **Watershed Protection:** Thrive needs to include more language on watershed and waterways protections, especially for stormwater management and green infrastructure, to mitigate the impacts of climate change that will bring more frequent and larger storms causing more flooding in the county. Thrive needs to describe this effort as a continued collaborative between county, state, and regional agencies all focused on local and Bay-wide restoration efforts.
- **Climate Change and Environmental Justice:** The final draft of Thrive includes mention of both these critical issues but needs to incorporate more environmental justice and climate change actions front and center across the plan, not only in the environmental chapter. Thrive should mirror the top-level goals of the Climate Action Plan and incorporate check points to ensure coordination between the two plans is in place. It would also be helpful to explicitly incorporate Thrive – Climate Action Plan by references among the two plans.

On behalf of ANS and our 28,000 members and supporters, ANS asks Council to include our recommendations into the final Thrive version and then pass Thrive 2050. Without Thrive in place now, we won’t have a strong foundation from which we can build up the policies, actions, and legislations that we need to truly create a more resilient, diverse, and welcoming county now and into the future.

Sincerely,

Denisse Guitarra

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