

#28

COMPLETE



Page 1

Q1

Contact information

Name

Nichole Gibbs Thomas

Email



Political Affiliation

Unaffiliated

Q2

Planning Board chair

What are you applying for?

Page 2: Housing Production

Q3

Montgomery County needs 60,000 homes by 2040 according to the Planning Department. Where in the county do you think density should be increased to accommodate the construction of new housing? Select all of the options that apply. If you don't think density should be increased in Montgomery County, please select "I do not think density should be increased anywhere in Montgomery County."

New housing should be concentrated within a close distance of Metro and Purple Line stations.

,

New housing should be built throughout existing residential neighborhoods in duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and small apartment buildings.

,

New housing should be built on the site of aging commercial properties, like shopping centers and office parks.

Q4

Over 100,000

How many additional units (including the aforementioned 60,000) do you think should be built here by 2040?

Q5

Yes

The recently passed Thrive 2050 plan identifies main corridors in the county as “complete communities” where more housing and mixed-use development should occur, including changing single-family zoning to allow a variety of house types. Do you support this goal?

Q6

As a Planning Board member, your role is to advise the council on strategies for increasing housing production. Please rank the following policies that would increase housing production in the order you’d advise the council to undertake them:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| Legalizing two-unit buildings countywide | 6 |
| Legalizing four-unit buildings countywide | 5 |
| Increasing the percentage of affordable housing required in new development | 1 |
| Incentivizing the conversion of older office buildings, shopping centers, etc. to residential properties | 2 |
| Reducing parking requirements in new construction | 4 |
| Legalizing and incentivizing housing above public facilities, such as libraries, recreation centers, and fire stations | 3 |
-

Q7

Yes

In 2020, the County Council—under advice from the Planning Board—eliminated the housing moratorium, in which building permits could not be issued in areas where schools were over capacity. Do you agree with this policy change?

Q8

Yes

The Planning Department is currently working on Attainable Housing Strategies, a study of ways to expand housing options (such as duplexes, townhomes, and small apartment buildings) in Montgomery County. Planning staff have draft recommendations, which include: allowing up to three homes by-right on lots currently zoned for one house (R-40, R-60, R-90, and R-200) allowing up to four homes on lots closer to transit creating a new optional method of development to encourage construction of duplexes, cottage courts, townhomes, and small apartment buildings near transit, along the Growth Corridors identified in Thrive 2050, and near activity centers. If you were a Planning Board member, would you vote to advise that the County Council pursue these recommendations as written?

Q9

If you answered yes, why would you recommend the Council make these changes? If no, what would you change?

These changes will contribute to our ability to arrive at completion of the baseline 60,000 units, as well as the 100,000 additional units needed by 2040.

Page 3: Affordable Housing

Q10

I consider affordable housing to be (check all that, in your opinion, apply):

- Means-tested or income-restricted,**
 - Rent-controlled,**
 - Costing no more than 30 percent of one's household income**
-

Q11

I consider market-rate housing to be (check all that, in your opinion, apply):

- Not means-tested or income-restricted,**
 - Not rent-controlled**
-

Q12

The Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) program requires that at least 12.5% of homes in a new residential development with at least 20 homes be set aside as affordable homes. The cost of doing so is paid by a project's developer. Because the number of MPDUs is tied to the number of total units, the larger a development is, the more MPDUs will be built. Conversely, if the initial density proposed by a developer is reduced during the approvals process, rather than maintained or increased, fewer MPDUs will be built. Planning Board commissioners are likely to hear from some constituents concerned by a project's potential impact—real or assumed—on traffic, parking, views, and property values and rents, and whether it fits the character of the neighborhood. If a development with MPDUs came before you, what would you do, given the likelihood of at least some pushback?

I would encourage developers to maximize the height and density of the project.

Q13

Montgomery County spends an estimated \$180,000 of taxpayer dollars to educate a public school student from kindergarten through 12th grade. However, many children who grow up in Montgomery County cannot afford to live there as adults. Should it be a priority for the County to ensure that a child on whose education it has invested can afford to live here as an adult?

Yes

Page 4: Affordable Housing

Q14

If you selected yes, which policies to make housing more affordable do you think the county should pursue? Select all that apply.

- Zoning for denser housing,**
- Reducing or eliminating parking requirements,**
- Down payment or closing cost assistance,**
- Rent stabilization,**
- Higher MPDU requirements,**
- Increasing the affordable housing trust fund,**
- Social housing**

Page 5: Affordable Housing

Q15

How will you ensure that the County produces housing for residents who make between 50% AMI and 80% AMI?

I am committed to ensuring that Montgomery County produces housing for residents. To produce housing for residents that earn between 50% AMI and 80% AMI, I support the creation of 60,000 units as a baseline plus 100,000+ additional units by 2040. Some of the most important policies to produce housing for the residents that earn between 50% AMI and 80% AMI include (1) rent stabilization, (2) increasing the affordable housing trust fund, (3) incentivizing the conversion of older office buildings, (4) increasing the percentage of required affordable housing in new developments, and (5) reducing parking requirements in new construction.

As a member of the planning board, I will promote strategies and policies that result in the creation of new housing units. Some of the most important strategies to produce housing for residents that earn between 80% AMI and 120% AMI include ensuring that new housing is concentrated within a close distance of Metro and Purple Line stations, given that individuals who earn between 50% AMI and 80% AMI may be more likely to rely solely on public transportation. I support changing single-family zoning in main corridors in the county to allow for a variety of house types, including duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and small apartment buildings.

Q16

How will you ensure the County produces housing for residents who make between 80% AMI and 120% AMI?

I am committed to ensuring that Montgomery County produces housing for residents. To produce housing for residents that earn between 80% AMI and 120% AMI, I support the creation of 60,000 units as a baseline plus 100,000+ additional units by 2040. Some of the most important policies to produce housing for the residents that earn between 80% AMI and 120% AMI include (1) down payment or closing cost assistance, (2) higher MPDU requirements, (3) allowing up to three homes by-right on lots currently zoned for one house, (4) allowing up to four homes on lots closer to transit, and (5) creating a method of development to encourage construction of new units (duplexes, cottage courts, townhomes, small apartment buildings) near transit along the Growth Corridors identified in Thrive 2050 and near activity centers.

As a member of the planning board, I will promote strategies and policies that result in the creation of these units. Some of the most important strategies to produce housing for residents that earn between 80% AMI and 120% AMI include ensuring that new housing is built throughout existing residential neighborhoods and on the site of aging commercial properties. New housing should be concentrated within a close distance of Metro and Purple Line stations. Also, key for this population, as well as other populations, is ensuring that single family zoning is changed in main corridors in the county to allow for a variety of house types, including duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and small apartment buildings.

Page 6: Transportation

Q17

Yes

The County's Climate Action Plan includes a target of reducing trips made by private vehicle to 60 percent of total trips (from 75 percent in 2018). Do you agree that incenting residents and visitors to drive less should be an explicit policy goal of the County?

Q18

Yes

A 12-year study, published in 2019, found that protected bike lanes drastically lowered fatal crash rates *for all road users* in Seattle (-60.6%), San Francisco (-49.3%), Denver (-40.3%) and Chicago (-38.2%), among others. Would you, as a Planning Board member, support removing single-occupancy vehicle parking and travel lanes for protected bike lanes?

Page 7: Transportation

Q19

They should repurpose whatever lane their staff believe is best on any given street.

If yes, how do you think the county and/or state of Maryland should prioritize repurposing street space to create protected bike lanes?

Q20

Yes

Do you think Montgomery Parks should expand its Open Parkways program, in which roads in County parks such as Sligo Creek Parkway, Beach Drive, and Little Falls Parkway are closed to cars?

Page 8: Transportation

Q21

Yes

The Countywide Transit Corridors Functional Master Plan, approved in 2013, recommends a network of bus lanes on major roads throughout the county. Today, buses are primarily delayed by sitting in single-occupancy vehicle traffic. Bus riders are more frequently Black and brown, and less affluent, than rail riders and drivers. Would you support removing single-occupancy vehicle parking and travel lanes for dedicated bus lanes, which make bus service faster and more reliable?

Q22

The county's climate action plan goal to be carbon-free by 2035 requires most of the reduction of its transportation emissions to come from residents turning existing single-occupancy vehicle trips into transit, walking, and biking trips. Please describe at least one trip you currently take by car (even if you, yourself, are not driving) that you can commit to taking on foot, by bus, by train, via a mobility device, or by bike instead.

I am fiercely committed to public transportation. In fact, I love public transportation. It is a good thing, an important thing, a wonderful thing. The first time I rode the metro bus alone, I was 7 years old. I needed to get to school.

I had strict instructions from my mom to sit in the front of the bus and in a place where the bus driver could see me. I had been on the bus many times before, but never by myself. I had taken the bus with my mom lots of times, maybe a hundred times or even more.

On that day, the first time I rode the metro bus alone, I got on the first bus, with my mom's instructions replaying in my head. I smiled at the bus driver, looked him in the eye, and put my change in the metal column that was just a little shorter than me. I was still smiling when the bus driver gave me a transfer. It was just a small white piece of paper, about two inches by seven inches.

With my transfer in hand, I walked down the center aisle. I didn't have far to go, just five feet. To my left and right were three seaters. Just beyond these were two seaters. I sat on one of the three seaters, facing the other passengers who sat just across from me. I looked at the faces of each person sitting in my area and at the back of the head of the bus driver.

I liked getting to see the faces of people I didn't know kind of up close. I wondered where they were going and what they were going to do when they got there. Sometimes a grown up would catch me staring at them. I noticed the bus driver eyeing me using the rear view mirror. It seemed like he was keeping an eye on me like adults sometimes do.

About five minutes into the ride, I reached up to pull on the line that would ring a bell. That let the bus driver know that I needed to get off at the next stop. I got up and walked to the front of the bus as it was moving. I could feel the vibrations of the engine underneath my feet. I smiled at the bus driver as we approached my stop. I exited the front of the bus and was standing at the 4-way intersection of Vermont Avenue and U Street.

There was an arcade across the street, but I wasn't going there this morning. There was a corner store too. I could buy some salt-and-vinegar potato chips there, but that was not in the plan. The plan was for me to take two trips, first one of the 90 buses and then the 60 bus, with no excursions.

So, I followed the plan. I had one more bus to catch. I went straight to the bus stop and waited for the second bus, the 60. I replayed my mom's instructions in my head. I wanted to get it right. It was riding the bus, the form of public transportation that we used most of the time since my small private school didn't have a bus to send to our house and we didn't have a car at that time.

The bus came, and when I got on it, I looked the second bus driver in the eye and showed him my transfer. I sat in the front again with an excited smile on my face. Riding the bus was exciting and empowering. I had a way to get to school, whether we had a car or not.

About 10 minutes later, I stood at the front of the bus, holding the metal handrail so I wouldn't fall as the bus maneuvered. The bus stopped. We had arrived at my stop, the corner of Sherman Avenue and Park Road.

I smiled at the bus driver, grateful for the ride. He had done a good job getting me to school. Bus drivers tended to be friendly, always smiling at me when I smiled at them when I rode the bus with my mom. Today, even when I was alone, they were still friendly.

It took me less than a minute to walk to my school, even though I walked at a leisurely pace. My school was right at the corner, where the bus stopped. It was a good day. I had a great experience on my first bus ride alone! Using public transportation, taking the bus, was easy, pleasant, and safe. Public transportation was full of people just like me, people who had someplace they needed to go.

2023 Greater Greater Washington Montgomery County Planning Board Questionnaire

These days in the morning the place I need to go is work, not elementary school. Instead of taking the bus, I take my car. On some days, instead of taking the car, I can commit to taking the bus.

The 5 bus will take me part of the way, and then I can transfer to a second bus, the 101. I will smile no doubt smile at the bus driver. I still have the habit of smiling. When I get off at my stop, I will walk to work. This is one way that I can reduce my contribution to emissions that come from single-occupancy trips. This will help us to reach the county's climate action plan goal to be carbon-free by 2035.

Safe affordable public transportation is vital for the residents of Montgomery County. We need safe affordable public transportation to reduce emissions that come from single-occupancy trips. I said it before, and I am saying it again. I am fiercely committed to public transportation. In fact, I love public transportation. It is a good thing, an important thing, a wonderful thing.

Q23

Reducing traffic fatalities and injuries will not only require incentives for people to drive less and nudges to make them drive better. It will also require policies that actively reshape the County's transportation systems and its landscape to decrease single-occupancy vehicle trips, and to slow down the speed of those trips when people do make them. Please rank the following policies in the order that you would advise the Council to pursue them. If you would not advise that the Council pursue a specific policy, please select N/A.

Removing minimum parking requirements in new developments near transit	2
Implementing road diets on arterial streets	3
Making some streets, especially residential streets, car-free	4
Building more housing and affordable housing in the County near transit and job centers	1

Q24

Keep both highways as they are

Governor Wes Moore's administration will revisit plans to add four high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes to I-270 and I-495, including whether to move forward with the project and whether or not to institute tolls on part or all of the road. Please select which of the following configurations you would support. If you would not support a specific option, please select "none of the above."

Q25

The Planning Department has started to expand its toolbox of outreach methods in order to hear from a broader variety of community members, in addition to traditional outreach formats. The following is a list of potential sources of feedback for a hypothetical project coming before the board. Rank how important each of these sources would be to your decision-making process. If this source would not be important to you, please select N/A.

Comments from residents at a Planning Department presentation to a civic association	3
Door-knocking in an apartment complex	1
Online survey of 500 residents	2
Pop-up event at a community festival	4
Booth at a farmer's market	6
Letters, emails, and calls from neighbors adjacent to the site	5

Q26

In your own words, could you describe what this data means for the Planning Board as it makes decisions in the future?

I offer an explanation that is useful for the planning board to consider when making decisions in the future. The results of the survey research study on likely democratic voters in Montgomery County reveal that among individuals surveyed there are nearly twice as many individuals who support (61%) than those who oppose (32%) the construction of new homes, including duplexes, townhomes, and/or apartments in their own neighborhoods.

Very strong support was found for multiple subpopulations including under 45-year olds and renters with 74% and 70% respectively indicating that they support construction of new homes, including duplexes, townhomes, and/or apartments in their own neighborhoods. Further, majority support was also found in 100% of 10 surveyed subpopulations, which include residents with College (67%), males (67%), White residents (62%), Black residents (59%), residents who own (57%), females (56%), over 45-year olds (55%), and residents without College (51%).

It's important for Planning Board members to be aware that there was no subpopulation among the 10 surveyed for which there was not majority support for the construction of new homes in their own neighborhood. This is clear and compelling evidence that for the individuals surveyed representing key subpopulations of Montgomery County residents, who are likely democratic voters, there is overwhelming support for the construction of new homes in their own neighborhoods. Majority (greater than 50%) support was found in 100% of key subpopulations. Opposition to the construction of new homes did not reach 40% for any of the 10 subpopulations and was as low as 18%.

Opposition (39%) for all subpopulations was greatest for residents without College. Interestingly, this subpopulation also has the largest percentage (10%) of individuals indicating that they do not know whether they support or oppose construction of new homes. This means that the greatest opportunity to increase education and awareness of the benefits of new construction among the noted subpopulations may be with likely democratic voters without College, given that in the study's sample one in 10 in this group had not yet formed an opinion.

For 50% of the 10 subpopulations, there was relatively low (less than a third of people) opposition to construction of new homes in their own neighborhoods. Specifically, in addition to the 18% of under 45-year olds, 22% of renters, 28% of males, 28% of residents with college, and 33% of Blacks expressed opposition. There was moderate opposition, less than less than 40%, in the other 5 subpopulations (residents without College, over 45-year olds, residents who own, female residents, and White residents). Again, even for the ladder subpopulations the majority expressed support for construction of new homes in their own neighborhoods.

These data reported by Data for Progress in July 2022 provide (A) clear and compelling evidence that overall the majority of likely democratic voters in Montgomery County surveyed, including females, males, under 45-year olds, over 45-year olds, residents without College, residents with College, Blacks, Whites, residents who own, and residents who rent, support the construction of new homes in their own neighborhoods, (B) there is relatively low opposition in likely democratic voters surveyed in Montgomery County to the construction of new homes in their own neighborhoods for many major subpopulations, and (C) there is relatively low or moderate opposition to the construction of new homes in their own neighborhoods for Montgomery County for all 10 subpopulations surveyed who are likely democratic voters.
