

## Parkwood Residents Association Meeting

Fall 2021

### Meeting Notes:

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by President Kira Lueders, who welcomed the Zoom meeting attendees and our two guest speakers: Delegate Al Carr and Councilmember Andrew Friedson. She pointed out that both of the speakers and their staff have been helpful in addressing issues and concerns that residents have raised in the past.

Vice President Jeff Griffith presented a list of questions submitted by residents and members of the Executive Committee which had been sent to the speakers in advance. **A COPY OF THE QUESTIONS ARE AT THE END OF THESE NOTES.**

Many of the questions focused on the attainable/affordable housing aspects of the THRIVE 2050 plan currently under discussion by the County Council. Other aspects of the THRIVE plan may be discussed at future PRA meetings. **Jeff asked Councilmember Friedson to address the THRIVE Plan.**

Councilmember Friedson (CMF) acknowledged that many county residents are confused, frustrated and angry about issues referenced in the THRIVE plan. He stated that THRIVE is a **general plan** which is supposed to be a broad-based vision of greater diversity of housing types and myriad other issues, such as economic equity, social justice, and diversity.

He related this THRIVE plan to the Corridor Area Growth Plan used as a roadmap by previous Councils and gave a short summary of the motivation for that plan, which was related to development of housing, transportation, and public facilities. He stated that while THRIVE needs to remain as a high-level general plan, some possible specific actions which are listed in the appendix have become the focus of most of the current discussion.

The THRIVE process has been ongoing for two years and he stated that transparency and consistency matter in this document. The plan does not legislate or re-zone anything and requires a separate implementation plan.

Councilmember Friedson referenced the General Plan of 1964, which, with updates, is still being followed to a large degree in the County. That general plan eventually resulted in focusing on growth areas, the County agricultural reserve legislation (1980's), and mixed income communities, using Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDUs) as one means of achieving that goal.

He summarized Thrive in this way:

- A Broad Vision, not designed to implement specific changes
- The Thrive plan needs to be completed, then work on specifics
- The where, how, when, and what need to be determined by Policy
- "No Net Loss" is a policy included in the Plan
- The idea of market rate affordable housing is not a new idea; however, we have not been building new stock. Most affordable housing in Mont. Co. is OLD. We must renovate/preserve what we have, but we must build more.
- The issue of attainable housing is before the Planning Board, not yet before the County Council

Jeff invited Del. Carr to comment.

Del. Carr reiterated that Mont. Co. is set up so that Zoning is a Council matter, not State legislated. He repeated Councilmember Friedson's reminder that if more housing in a variety of options is not built there will be no more market rate housing in our future.

Question to CMF: Will the Council work on THRIVE first and then tackle the Zoning Text Amendment and other specifics?

CMF: In his opinion, that is what the Council should do. The Council sent the issue of attainable housing to the Planning Board to work on. The Council PHED (Planning, Housing, and Economic Development) Committee and the Council President intend to finish the THRIVE plan by the end of 2021. The ZTAs will happen later.

Jeff- This is an extraordinarily complex issue. Is there any reason we, the Council and community, cannot take as much time as needed for a plan that will eventually take years to implement, so that the entire community can understand the complexity of this?

CMF- We have slowed down the process considerably. There have been public hearings in June, extensive member and staff work over July going over chapter by chapter, item by item. I believe in the process, and it is unprecedented to take nine months at Council to hear from the community. We owe it to everyone to get this right. There will be battles over details because this is extremely nuanced and complicated.

Jeff moved to the next question/issue: **Preservation of the Environment: How do we convert environmental studies into legislation?**

Del. Carr responded that there is a strong desire at the state level to take on **Environmental issues** and the Md. General Assembly understands the impact on climate, waterways, and the ocean. Although major actions on this issue did not advance in the MD House of Delegates and the Senate in the last legislative session, there was progress on smaller bills regarding tree planting, electricity purchasing buying power, electrifying the transportation sector, and regulations on the impact of utilities on climate.

Regarding a state Bottle Deposit effort. Del. Carr reported that most state jurisdictions are not supportive, due to local efforts to support recycling programs that they have invested in. Mont. Co. has a bottle return legislation which is limited by the existing language in that law. Perhaps there will be greater interest in the future.

CMF reported on what he and other Council members are doing and planning in terms of important local efforts: electric transportation, MCPS electric fleet, solar energy, green buildings, energy tax credits related to consumption, and "Building Energy Performance Standards" based on international green building standards.

Also, "Zero Waste", the county's current **compost** program could be expanded in the future to include individual homes. CMF is hoping for additional support from the EPA on this issue.

The County **Climate Action Plan** is extremely ambitious: It is a menu, more than a manual. The options need to be prioritized for the greatest impact and possible implementation.

Question from Liz Brennan to CMF: You support Attainable, Affordable Housing in your district. I cannot understand how there are thoughts that replacing one home with four would make housing more affordable. How does that make sense? It is location in high school districts which greatly impacts housing cost.

CMF- Attainable housing is only one aspect of the Thrive recommendations. There is no single strategy to address housing. We have not built enough new housing over the last 20-30 years. That's one reason housing prices have skyrocketed; attainable housing is only a small part of affordable housing and will not solve affordable housing.

Jeff asked Del. Carr to address state level action on the **495/ 270 expansion plan**.

Del. Carr addressed the issue of 495/270 construction as proposed by the Governor. There are serious complex issues related to traffic, environment, and cost. Del. Carr is skeptical of the plan to widen 495 from the 270 split northward. Less controversial is the widening of the **American Legion Bridge**. The Montgomery and Prince Georges County delegations are not supportive of the planned public/private partnership plan and would like to slow the launch of the plan. Gov. Hogan is hoping to get this project done sooner rather than later.

Barbara Coufal posed this question to CMF: The supplemental environmental impact statement of the 495/270 toll road plan listed issues of environmental concerns and cost and noted that toll lanes will not improve traffic speeds. Why did you endorse this plan?

CMF responded that his response was misunderstood due to confusion in the process for considering the plan. He feels that the Transportation Planning Board is not the appropriate venue for this plan and that he and other /council members have and do support the American Legion Bridge replacement, which has always been a Council position. The Council has advocated for an analysis of the fiscal issues because there continue to be severe challenges to the entire 495/270 project.

Del. Carr then thanked CMF for his advocacy on behalf of a **Kensington Community Center**. In 2020, Del. Carr attained approval by the state legislature to earmark funds to evaluate and develop plans for converting the current HOC headquarters (after it vacates the building in 2023), into a community center. He applauded Liz Brennan's efforts to make the current gymnasium open to the public via the Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF). The gym will soon be available for reservation by community groups.

Del. Carr addressed the issue of **Safety on Connecticut Ave.** through Kensington. The state has been working since 2002 and improvements have been made. Currently under consideration are more speed cameras and a sidewalk safety study. An enhanced traffic light at Saul Road and Conn. Ave. will be installed. He will continue to push the state highway agency to make it safer for cars, walkers, and bikers.

Next Jeff assigned an impossible task to CMF- respond to the four remaining items on the list of questions, in the ten remaining minutes.

Claire Murphy raised the concern that the **Planning Board** does not listen to community input in a respectful way. Planning staff do not make efforts to communicate with residents associations which are impacted by their actions. We need more standing to get information in a timely manner.

CMF stated that he will look at due process parity for community associations vs. incorporated entities regarding communication, notice, etc. He reminded the members that there is currently a vacancy on the Planning Board and encouraged feedback to the Council.

**Business development.** a very high priority because we must generate revenue for any action we want to take. There must be an economic impact study for every piece of County legislation and budget. This County needs to grow via a streamlined economic development plan and strategies.

He has supported growth of the biohealth/biotech and hospitality industries. The County needs to diversify the economy and increase the range of available jobs.

**Redistricting Plan.** The Commission will be meeting this week and will send a final report to Council by Nov. 15<sup>th</sup>. The Council has 90 days to act and hopes to finish by 12/31/21. Substantive changes are proposed, and community members need to weigh in with feedback as soon as possible.

**Issue of 5G** The County is limited by legislation as to actions it can take. He has worked on issues of pole placement, pole proliferation and set back requirements. This is a very complex and emotional issue, and the Council has tried to be proactive in the narrow framework permitted by law.

**Abandoned Housing.** CMF applauded the efforts of the PRA Safety committee, Jill Lipton and Gabrielle Prandoni, in raising the issue to the housing code enforcement agency. They have been impactful and appreciated by his staff. Please continue to bring such issues to the attention of the County.

Jeff thanked both guests for their willingness to work with the PRA and support issues we have raised.

Kira repeated her words of thanks for this meeting and all the assistance that Del. Carr and Councilmember Friedson have provided.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Mary Ellen Savarese, PRA Secretary

(See questions on next two pages)

## Questions for the Fall Meeting of the Parkwood Residents Associations

October 18, 2021

- Thrive: The draft Thrive plan has evoked considerable discussion on the PRA listserv. There have been many concerns expressed about the current plan, especially the possible changes in zoning that may result from it, both among those opposed to the plan and among those who support its underlying goals and principles. Some of these include:
  - Not enough time for citizens to understand and weigh in on this very complex plan
  - Impact on property values and taxes
  - Environmental concerns such as storm water management/flooding/parking
  - Effect on school populations
  - Increased density – positive and negative results
  - Zoning changes that could result in changes in the “character” of neighborhoods, especially those zoned as single family, such as ours.
  - Restrictions that might accompany such zoning changes and how they would be enforced.
  - A possible increase in absentee landlords if multiplexes are allowed to be built on small lots.
  - Ensuring a policy of no net loss of naturally occurring affordable housing rather than promoting solely new development, which could prevent or at least limit the result of small, affordable homes in Parkwood becoming megaplexes.

**Perhaps the most fundamental question about Thrive is how can the county create more affordable housing for its current and future residents that has the support of the citizens who live here?**

- Our environment
  - How will the State and the County convert their studies and plans into legislation that will enable us to meet the goals established for reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions [GGE]?
  - What are the chances for a comprehensive state bill that failed in last year’s legislative session?
  - What are the prospects for a state bottle deposit bill?
- Transportation – What are your views on 495/270 expansion?
  - Some in our community support it; some oppose it for reasons of cost, environmental impact, and the need for more public transit.
  - And a more specific question for Councilmember Friedson: “An October 1 report by the Maryland Dept. of Transportation shows that the toll lanes won't improve traffic speed during the evening rush hour from the American Legion Bridge all the way up I-270. The State Treasurer's report says there are "significant uncertainties around the costs, risks and ultimate benefits," of the private toll

lanes. Given that the toll lanes won't work and are financially risky, why did you endorse the I-495/I-270 project this summer?"

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- Business development -why are so few new businesses locating in Montgomery County compared other jurisdictions? Is there a role for the state here as well as the County?
- Planning Board -When we have testified before the Planning Board at public hearings or even submitted questions by email, we often get the feeling that the Planning Board does not care about or consider our opinions and have already made up their minds. The Council appoints the members of the Planning Board. Can the Council do anything about this?
- Internet access – Many want more access to higher bandwidths, but how can we achieve this without some of the attendant ecological effects, e.g., possible health hazards of 5G and the proliferation of 5G boxes with little control by neighborhoods?
- Abandoned houses – these are a health and safety issue. How can we get faster corrective action?
- Flooding from construction next door – what can homeowners do when their yards and homes are flooded from runoff caused by adjacent construction?
- What is the status of the plan to assess the feasibility of a community center in the building currently occupied by the HOC?
- How can Connecticut Avenue be made safer?
- County and State redistricting – when and how will it be implemented and by whom?

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