

Testimony of Cheryl Gannon
President, Montgomery County Civic Federation
on
University Boulevard Corridor Plan
September 16, 2025

Good afternoon, my name is Cheryl Gannon, and I am the President of the Montgomery County Civic Federation. The Civic Federation is a not for profit, county-wide umbrella group of civic, homeowner and community associations in Montgomery County. Through our members, we now reach over 40,000 households. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.

The Civic Federation has a strong commitment to a transparent and inclusive planning process, including master planning with resident community voices in the future of their neighborhoods. Our members have expressed profound concerns about the University Blvd Corridor plan, and these concerns are shared by residents both inside and outside of the plan area as this appears to be a prototype for future corridor plans across the county.

- This University Blvd Corridor Plan jettisons the master plan process that has been in place for decades and which allows growth and development to be implemented on a scale tailored to individual neighborhoods. Under the UBC corridor plan neighborhoods are not treated as individual suburban residential communities but are treated simply as parts of larger land masses for upzoning for development opportunities. Ignoring the master plan process as outlined in Thrive 2050 invites problems from inadequate infrastructure, school space, traffic problems, transportation, public amenities like parks and loss of naturally occurring affordable housing. The plan ignores the promises in Thrive that growth would be implemented through master plans and sector plans.
- The plan ignores the fact that the Council of Governments has said there is already enough zoned capacity in Montgomery County to meet future needs.
- The plan upzones over 500 homes that are priced more moderately than many areas of the county and seeks to replace those homes with market rate multi-family housing. The Council must answer the question of how this helps us to remove over 500 moderately priced homes from the inventory of available homes for purchase if some or most are replaced with more expensive housing or rental housing. Some of these areas are the most diverse neighborhoods in the county and this study needs more careful analysis about displacement, racial equity and loss of moderately priced homes that average families can purchase.
- There is no racial equity study on potential displacement and no measures to prevent displacement. The Council should request such a study from the Office of Legislative Oversight immediately. The Racial Equity and Social Justice review requirements should also be amended to include master plans on an ongoing basis.
- The plan places apartment buildings, some up to 100 feet tall, and commercial spaces near established, stable residential neighborhoods. The plan also expands denser development inside the corridors into single family neighborhoods. Why is this necessary or desirable to disrupt these neighborhoods?
- The plan conflicts with the pending More Housing NOW proposal, and reneges on promises made by the Council to residents during that discussion that corridor development would not extend into neighborhoods.
- The plan assumes a functioning BRT system, when in fact, the BRT is not expected to be implemented within the 20-year horizon for the plan.

- The plan will remove several lanes for car traffic, in an area that already experiences serious traffic congestion, without a BRT option, and without a study of the impacts on traffic and parking. Changes in traffic patterns may result in increased cut-through traffic in neighborhoods, and the immediate environment for those who chose homes on quiet streets.
- Many residents support the call for wider sidewalks and more tree canopy and green space, but these amenities will not be provided concurrently with the developments but perhaps at some later date under CIP funding which is scarce in this budget environment and may not happen at all.
- The County has no plan or tools to encourage home ownership and the wealth building and equity opportunity that homeownership brings. About 95% of the multi-family housing built in downtown Silver Spring and Bethesda from 2017-2024 is rental housing. What is the plan to promote home ownership.? Many of our members are concerned that developments of this type invites investors to buy what was or could have been a home ownership opportunity. What is the plan to prevent investors from buying homes or to save naturally occurring affordable homes?
- The formula for calculating school space has been flawed for a very long time. What is the plan for school space needed for this expansion?

Overall, Civic Federation members have expressed frustration with the lack of meaningful engagement, feeling dictated to about how they should live, and planning fatigue as the Council and Planning Board flood the zone with multiple and sometimes conflicting housing proposals, forcing residents to devote precious free time and family time to attending neighborhood meetings, hearings and other time-consuming work to evaluate proposed changes to neighborhoods that the neighborhoods aren't asking for. Residents don't have lobbyists and PACs that the interest groups have and asking them to navigate one plan after another is unfair.

We urge the Council to reject this plan and allow the recently passed More Housing NOW proposal to proceed without implementing new or contradicting plans. The Council should refocus on high yield housing prospects like White Flint, Pike and Rose, and significant opportunity sites in downtown Silver for example, work with developers to foster development with approved plans across the county and explore strategies to reduce land banking by developers. We also recommend working to improve data and analysis on projections, housing costs and projected future needs. We strongly recommend returning to the master plan process.

Thank you.