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SUBJECT: Public Outreach and Engagement for Montco 2050

Montgomery County Planning Commission intends to do significant public and stakeholder outreach to inform the development of Montco 2050, the new comprehensive plan. This document summarizes what has been done so far and what is planned for the future.

The Kickoff event on October 17, 2022 was a hybrid meeting that introduced the comprehensive planning process and invited residents to get involved. Following that event, our first phase of outreach was focused on issue identification – asking residents about the topics that concern them and their priorities for the future. This outreach included an online survey using SurveyMonkey available in English, Spanish, and Korean. We also created a Padlet for general comments and questions from the public. A [website](#) and [map hub](#) were developed which provided a way for residents to learn more about the process and dive into some of the background data, without specifically asking for input.

In May 2024, we started using [Engage Montco](#) for input. This platform is where we are asking our key questions that arose from the issue identification and background research phase. Answers to these questions will help us make policy recommendations on important topics in the plan.

We have participated in many community events with posters and given presentations to community groups and municipalities where we were invited. We plan to continue doing pop-ups and presentations throughout the comp plan process. We have now shifted to asking our key questions at pop-up events, to get in-person feedback on the most important issues we have to address in the plan.

Below are some of the results we have received so far from these outreach activities.

SurveyMonkey Survey

An online survey was open from October 2022 through May 2024. We received a total of 889 responses. Note that these responses are not a representative sample of county residents.

Top Issue

Respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question about their top concern. Some respondents mentioned multiple items in their answers. While the top concern mentioned was opposition to development, housing affordability was also widely mentioned as a major issue (#3), along with

concerns about the costs of living (#5). Concerns about emergency services such as police, fire, and ambulance, along with concerns about crime and public safety also ranked very highly (#4). Concerns about traffic volumes (#2), a need for bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure (#5), and concerns about transit improvements (#14) transportation safety (#16) all were mentioned frequently. Interest in preserving open space was also highly important to respondents (#7).

rank	What is the top issue facing your community today?	Number of mentions
1	too much development	83
2	too much traffic	73
3	housing affordability	67
4	public safety/public services	61
5	active transportation (bicycling and walking)	56
5	cost of living/inflation/economic inequality	56
7	preservation of open space/access to open space or recreation	52
8	Infrastructure	40
9	taxes	39
10	climate change/energy/pollution/emissions	38
10	too much new housing	38
12	economic development	35
13	schools/youth	34
14	community	29
14	public transportation	29
16	transportation safety	23
17	diversity/equity/inclusion	22
17	stormwater/flooding/hazards	22
19	government/planning	21
20	Main Streets	17
21	seniors	16
22	new residents	12
23	health/healthcare	10
23	homelessness	10
25	history	5
26	childcare	3

Issues to Address

Respondents were asked to rate 28 items as essential, very important, somewhat important, or not important to address in the comprehensive plan. The issues are listed below, along with a weighted average of the responses for each. A higher weighted average means the issue was rated as more important to address by a larger number of respondents.

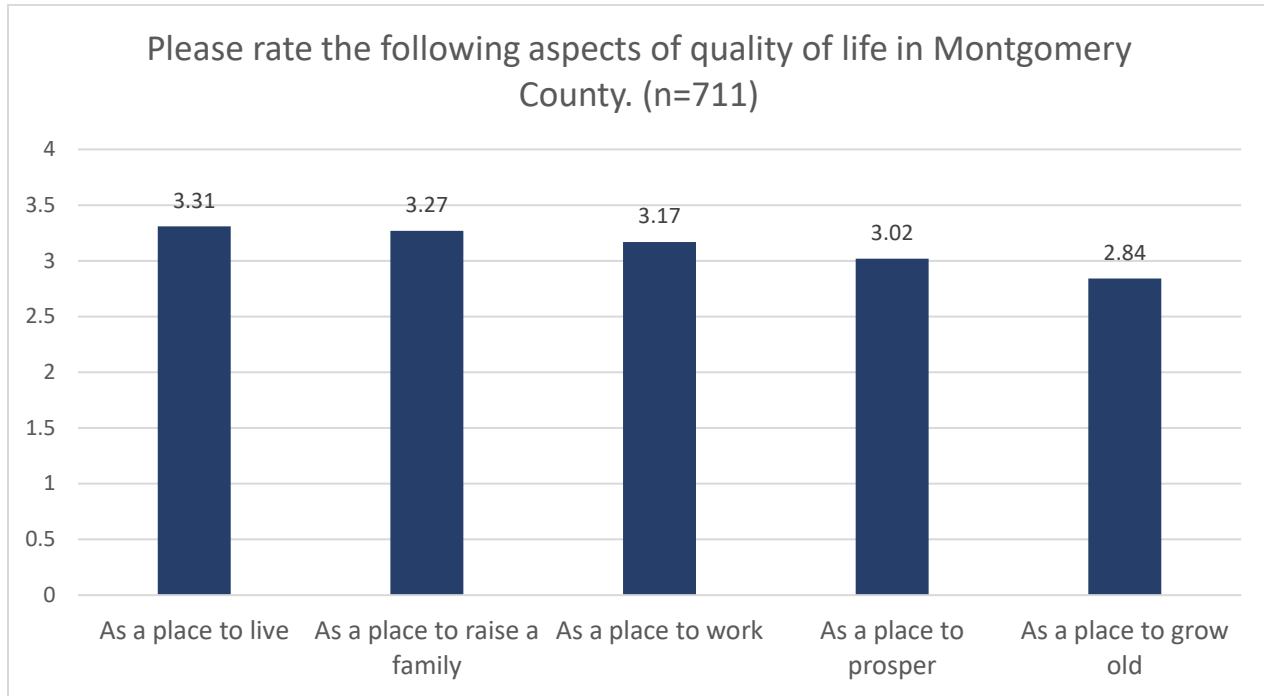
Many of the items that were ranked most important of these items were similar to the open-ended responses. Note that concerns about flooding were in the top three of these ranked issues, though they were not mentioned as often in the open ended question. Retaining existing businesses had similar

results. Preserving open space and natural areas was ranked as an important issue in both questions, but higher here.

Rank	Issue	Weighted Average
1	Preserve open space and natural areas	3.4
2	Address aging water and sewer infrastructure	3.3
3	Work to prevent/mitigate flooding and other potential hazards	3.2
3	Repair local roads and bridges	3.2
5	Retain the businesses already here	3.1
6	Plan for the future on a municipal or regional level	2.9
6	Reduce traffic congestion	2.9
6	Support local agriculture	2.9
6	Preserve scenic views and historic buildings/sites	2.9
6	Improve pedestrian and/or bicyclist safety	2.9
11	Address food insecurity	2.8
11	Promote/develop alternate sources of energy (i.e. wind, solar)	2.8
11	Attract new businesses	2.8
11	Revitalize our older boroughs and downtowns	2.8
15	Expand access to public transit	2.7
15	Encourage housing affordability	2.7
15	Support public art, live performances, and cultural institutions	2.7
18	Improve emergency management response	2.6
19	Encourage a mix of uses to update older shopping centers	2.5
19	Build new trails	2.5
19	Revitalize/redevelop older industrial sites	2.5
22	Encourage a variety of housing types	2.4
22	Upgrade existing recreational facilities	2.4
24	Encourage a mix of uses in existing office parks	2.3
24	Provide more options for housing our senior citizens	2.3
24	Support new recreational facilities	2.3
24	Encourage public riverfront access	2.3
28	Encourage housing closer to employment centers	2.2

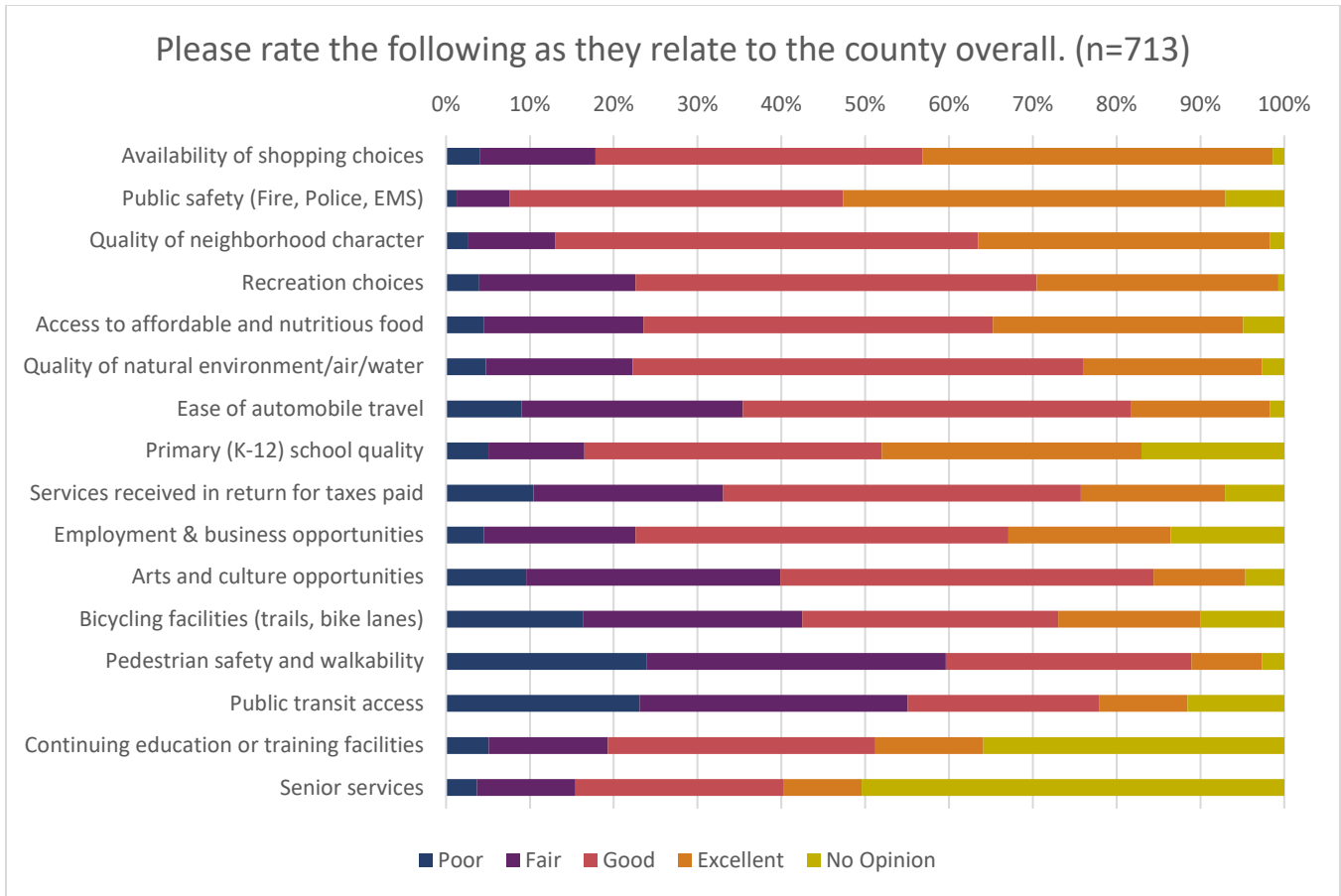
Quality of Life

Respondents were asked about how the county is as a place to live right now. The graph below shows the weighted average, where a higher number means it is ranked more highly. Most of these aspects were ranked highly by respondents, with “a place to live” and “a place to raise a family” as the highest. The lowest ranked aspect was “as a place to grow old.”



Characteristics of Life

Respondents were asked to rate the existing conditions of 16 characteristics of life in the county as excellent, good, fair, or poor. The characteristics were ranked by respondents in the following order. Availability of shopping choices was the respondents’ choice for the best characteristic of Montgomery County. Although other questions raised concerns about public safety moving forward, respondents ranked public safety as the second best characteristic of life in Montgomery County right now. Neighborhood character and recreation choices were also rated very well. Pedestrian facilities, transit access, continuing education, and senior services were ranked as the current worst characteristics of life in the county. Note that many respondents chose “no opinion” when asked about continuing education and senior services.



Padlet

We received 181 posts or comments on the Padlet. (Some respondents posted more than one comment.) Since no sign-in was required, we do not know how many individuals participated. The most popular (most “thumbs ups”) comment was related to walkability in new development. The second most popular comment was requesting transit oriented development and increased density near transit to make it easier for people to live without driving.

Pop-ups and Presentations

We have attended a number of existing community events with our materials to connect with communities and get input into the plan. These events will continue. We intend to both encourage people we meet to visit Engage Montco and to ask some of our key questions directly to participants and get responses from them in the moment.

We have made presentations to municipalities, Rotary clubs, branches of the NAACP and several municipalities. We are available to present to other groups and organizations about this planning process.



Representative Matt Bradford's Senior Fair, October 2023

Connect the Dots

We are working with a consultant, [Connect the Dots](#), to support our public outreach efforts moving forward. They have supported us in reaching demographic and geographic populations in the county that we have not heard from as much in our outreach so far. They organized four focus group and conducted eight stakeholder interviews with community leaders.

Engage Montco

So far, about 230 people have created an account and participated on Engage Montco with the Montco 2050 content. We look forward to additional participation and to incorporating this valuable feedback into our plan for 2050.