

Focus Group Meeting: Montgomery Village Foundation and Montgomery Planning September 28, 2020

<u>MVF:</u> Dave Humpton	<u>Mont. Co. Planning:</u> Patrick Butler Jessica McVary Luis Estrada Troy Leftwich	<u>City Staff:</u> Planning CMO (Econ. Dev)
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This focus group centered on input from Montgomery Village Foundation and Montgomery Planning including the future of Lakeforest Mall in relation to the County adopted Montgomery Village Master Plan. Representatives from both agencies participated. The session lasted for an hour and a half. The following are highlighted points from the discussion:

- Housing is a priority, including affordable housing
- Mixed use is desirable
- Connection to Asbury may be challenging, so connection to Montgomery Village may be more important
- Montgomery Village expressed interest in establishing an active center
- Montgomery Planning included additional development opportunities along Lost Knife Rd, to help create synergy with any mall redevelopment
- Neither commercial property in the county are interested in near-term (10) redevelopment (Off-Price Center, Montgomery Village Plaza)
- MVF indicated that Housing Opportunity Commission (HOC) may be interested in redeveloping some of the Cider Mill Apts near Contour Rd and Southlake ES, to create a more mixed-income community – but this is long-term
- MVF mentioned crime is an issue around the Cider Mill Apts area
- It was noted the East/West divide in the City and further noted that MCPS appears to be investing more in the schools east of I-270 in recent years, which is a change from the past
- MVF expressed concern that there is too much affordable housing in the Lakeforest area and additional affordable housing is probably not needed and may not help with the marketability and redevelopment
- Montgomery Planning stressed that their mixed use recommendations encourage a mix of housing unit types and an improvement in housing stock
- Gentrification is not the primary goal, though improved property values and condition/maintenance and mix of housing units are goals
- Montgomery Planning asked whether a redevelopment would include connectivity that could create a central square
- MVF supports keeping the transit center closer to Asbury, to continue serving those residents
- The Montgomery Village plan noted that the current transit center location is beneficial to the surrounding community
- MVF noted the golf course redevelopment in the Village is about 25 detached houses, about 500 townhouses (with 25% MPDU), no multifamily (They put the following in the chat: Montgomery Village Center - 115 units (49 THs, 34 two-over-two, 32 multi-family condos))

- Montgomery Planning encouraged a mix of housing, some retail, and some office, with some jobs, but housing may be difficult in this area due to market conditions
- Montgomery Planning noted that the initial redevelopment may be primarily residential, and it would be desirable to have the redevelopment begin in the next 5 years or so
- Montgomery Planning noted that the redevelopment of Lakeforest Mall could help spur other redevelopment in the immediate area
- Montgomery Planning noted that during the MV Master Plan, participants discussed the desire to have a destination in this area, where people can go and shop, meet, live, and feel safe
- Montgomery Planning noted that during the MV Master Plan, many participants felt that most of the amenities in the neighborhood were passive green areas, and an alternative active, more urban-type space would be nice, especially if it could be used by the surrounding communities and could be accessed by walking
- Montgomery Planning noted that destination retail would be an appropriate use at Lakeforest, assuming the market could support it
- Montgomery Planning noted that more useable outdoor spaces are needed, to add another level of sustainability; flexible spaces are also desirable
- Montgomery Planning suggested having Lakeforest serve as a model for sustainable redevelopment, turning the sea of asphalt in to a more environmental friendly community
- Montgomery Planning noted that a fire station was identified as a need in the MV area, but closer to Goshen Rd at Wightman Rd
- Montgomery Planning suggested exploring an “urban model” type school that is more integrated into the buildings that form a mixed-use redevelopment (if a school is needed)
- MVF noted that MCPS has some school sites in nearby areas (such as Centerway Park), so suggested that Lakeforest Mall should not include a school site, unless it is leased (like the “urban model”), to protect the City’s tax base
- MVF noted that if redevelopment takes too long, it may have a negative impact on the surrounding area if the land sits idle for a number of years
- MVF supported the “destination center” idea for Lakeforest Mall
- Montgomery Planning noted that the only development in the area is the golf course redevelopment and the Montgomery Village Center infill (115 units: 49 townhomes, 34 2/2 condos, and 32 MF units)
- Montgomery Planning mentioned the Thrive Montgomery 2050 Plan:
 - Complete communities/15-minute living (but need to include flexible spaces/building that can be used differently over time)
 - “missing middle” housing
 - More walkable/bikeable/transit-oriented communities
- Montgomery Planning noted that Lakeforest presents an opportunity to create an urban, walkable, transit-oriented mixed-use development offering amenities comparable to those found in downcounty CBDs, and could serve as the “center” for the surrounding suburban and rural areas of the County; could provide services such as healthcare and recreation to upcounty residents
- Montgomery Planning suggested a hybrid mix of dense, urban development and less dense development at Lakeforest, rather than all high-density; make sure to still tie in to surrounding area; should higher density be closer to MD 355?
- Montgomery Planning noted that high density that is reliant on cars is not desirable, but a dense, walkable “complete community” that has jobs and amenities integrated, is desirable

- MVF recommended flexibility for density and noted that density could happen if the BRT and transit center are utilized
- Montgomery Planning suggested not looking at the mall property in isolation (like a shiny city on a hill), and make sure that connections to the surrounding area happen
- Montgomery Planning noted that there may be pushback against reducing vehicular connectivity/dominance at the property as part of a redevelopment, and having a pedestrian and bike-friendly new community with a grid of streets that slows/impedes vehicular traffic
- Montgomery Planning suggested that engaging people who are traditionally underrepresented in the planning process is critical, yet challenging
- Montgomery Planning noted that rebranding and phasing are additional challenges, as is making sure that an early phase doesn't complicate or change the core vision for a later phase
- Montgomery Planning noted that the Master Plan language should be flexible enough to account for all of the uncertainty that is happening now and in the near future, and be able to allow/respond to a changing world