



## Action in Montgomery The People's Agenda 2022-2025

*If not now, when? If not you, who?*

Since October 2021, Action in Montgomery (AIM) has conducted listening sessions with over 1,500 people who reside, worship, and work in Montgomery County. This agenda was formed by issue action teams based on the stories that were shared in listening sessions. While we could not address all of the issues raised at a systems level, we consider this agenda to be a living document; if COVID has taught us anything, we know we have to be nimble and respond. AIM organizations used four criteria to evaluate whether to take on particular issues:

**RACIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE:** Does it further racial and economic justice? Does it center the voices of BIPOC leaders and leaders from low income communities?

**FEASIBILITY:** Does it line up with political opportunities on the horizon? Do we have enough power to make it happen? Are we balancing short-term as well as longer-term impact?

**LEADERSHIP:** Are there committed leaders who want to lead campaigns? Does it build power?

**NEED:** Is it deeply felt? Are other organizations working on it that could resolve it without AIM?

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### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

*Affordable housing was the most frequent issue we heard in our listening sessions. We want Montgomery County to be a place where people who work in the county can afford to live in quality housing, and where families can afford to live and settle across generations. Below is an ambitious, multi-faceted platform for long term housing equity. We have focused on transit-oriented housing because it is one of the most effective ways of moving families out of poverty and effective ways to reduce our community's carbon footprint and address climate change. It will take substantial organized people power to move the county on these initiatives, but if not now, when? If not you, who?*



## **Supply: Build New, High-density Transit-Oriented Housing and Affordable Housing**

*Supply is imperative to stabilize housing prices in our region, and make sure that housing subsidy goes to those with the most need.*

### 1. Transit Oriented Affordable Housing:

- a. Increase building density on land near transit hubs including Metro and Bus Rapid Transit.
- b. Increase density in multiple locations to avoid overconcentration of investment and gentrification.
- c. Capture more of the increased value created by increased density to develop more affordable and deeply affordable units.

### 2. Housing on Public Land—prioritizing sites near public transportation.

- a. Start with the Chevy Chase Library Site by building mixed income housing with the new library. Continue with the parcel at the corner of University and Piney Branch in Silver Spring.
- b. Pass legislation to more effectively prioritize co-location of affordable housing on public land with other facilities.

### 3. Use unprecedented Federal Funding Opportunities to buy currently existing naturally occurring affordable housing to ensure its long-term affordability.

## **Stability: Provide stability for families to continue living in Montgomery County across generations.**

*It strengthens our community when residents are able to live in the same neighborhood over years. This impacts many facets of life, including quality of education, community safety, and more.*

1. Rent Stabilization in targeted properties: Rent stabilization is one of the rare housing policies that disproportionately benefits Black and Latino residents. It can play an important role in complementing a focus on increased housing supply. Cap rent increases in “Naturally Occurring” affordable housing, particularly in highly impacted, low income areas such as New Hampshire Estates and Long Branch that are at risk of gentrification because of the Purple Line.



2. Compensate renters if the property they live in is sold for redevelopment: Require developers to significantly compensate current residents if they want to redevelop the land and find renters comparable housing in cost and size in the same school zone (if they have children) or within a certain radius if they do not.
  3. Use Right of First Refusal More Frequently to Purchase Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing: This requires the owners of buildings of four or more units to offer the County government, the Housing Opportunities Commission and the current residents an opportunity to purchase the property before selling it to private entities.
  4. Improve Inspection: No one should live in substandard, unsafe housing, yet thousands in Montgomery County do. The county needs to follow existing inspection law and:
    - a. Conducts proactive inspections not just after complaints.
    - b. Hires inspectors who are bilingual in Spanish and English.
    - c. Ensures timely follow through to make sure landlords have addressed problems identified during inspections.
  5. Respond Effectively to Tenants' Concerns: The county needs to play a proactive role in working with tenants' associations and establish a tenant hotline via 311 (the county's information line) where tenants call to know their rights in Spanish and English.
  6. **Subsidy:** *Subsidy is necessary to supplement the housing costs for our lowest income residents and to build affordable housing for the future. A main reason why families were able to keep housing during COVID was the subsidies the federal, state and local governments provided towards rent.*
    1. Continue to provide subsidies for families and individuals in need.
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## **EQUITY IN EDUCATION**

*The equity gap in education between Black and Brown students and White and Asian students and between students of high and low incomes must be addressed through a variety of strategies. Many studies show that the gap has been exacerbated during COVID when schools implemented virtual instruction. AIM will continue to work on local campaigns in schools and neighborhoods, but will focus countywide on these issues:*

**UNIVERSAL PRE-K**—Washington, D.C. and other jurisdictions provide universal pre-K for families who want it. The Blueprint for Maryland's Future will increase the number of full day preschool seats and Montgomery County's Early Childhood Initiative will increase the number of preK seats. With additional organizing we could successfully win universal preK.



1. With the increased cost of living, income requirements should be updated to serve more families.
2. Expand the number of full-day preK seats through Head Start, MCPS and Judy Centers. PreK curriculum should have a strong focus on play and social and emotional health.
3. County subsidies for child care should not require proof of employment—it is hard to look for and find a job without childcare in place.
4. Make application for subsidies less cumbersome and demeaning.
5. Offer Universal Pre-K to all four year olds in Montgomery County by 2025.

**EXPAND EXCEL BEYOND THE BELL (EBBE) AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMING**—EBBE, started by AIM in 2016, has a proven track record of improving academic achievement and reducing truancy. As of 2022, the program is in twelve Title I (those with >60% of students who qualify for Free and Reduced Meals) elementary schools. We want the program expanded to every Title I Elementary school (as of April 2022, there are 35 Title I elementary schools).

1. Expand funding to allow for competitive salaries for recreational staff as well as competitive stipends for school teachers who lead the curriculum portion of afterschool program
2. Expand EBBE by 4 schools a year, serving at least 120 students in each school. This would result in EBBE being in every Title I Elementary School in 6 years.

**EXPAND 529 PLAN FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS** - The state of Maryland provides college savings plans and will contribute either \$250 or \$500 each year for residents who contribute a minimum of \$25, depending on income. Many families do not participate in the program because of lack of knowledge and lack of access due to language.

1. Create a user-friendly and nearly automatic way for families to access the plan, including material in multiple languages and/or signing up when families apply for FARMS, register for kindergarten, etc.
2. Supplement the state's program by having Montgomery County match the current state contribution.



## **EQUITY IN HEALTHCARE**

*According to the 2020 census, 86,000 Montgomery County residents are uninsured, 71,000 live in poverty, and 36,000 are eligible for Montgomery Cares (a group of community-based health care clinics that provide health services to uninsured adults) or Care for Kids (for uninsured children). Montgomery County operates five dental clinics that receive a total of \$1.8M in County funding. The Montgomery County Primary Care Coalition gathered data showing that together they provide 8500 visits per year which is less than a quarter of the residents who are eligible.*

*Pre-pandemic, many families struggled to find affordable and timely dental care, but during the pandemic, the situation worsened. As of May 2022, there are waitlists longer than 6 months at some dental clinics and some clinics have stopped accepting patients. In listening sessions, we also heard that the services offered by the clinics are insufficient and patients with more complex cases are referred elsewhere (or providers are frustrated because there are no affordable places that could see them).*

*We also heard that even with patient consent, patient records are not shared across the clinics, thus making it so that patients have to pay twice for the same exams. Most importantly, families are going into serious debt from emergency dental and other health crises.*

### **IMPROVE AND EXPAND DENTAL CARE:**

- 1) Additional funding so that safety net clinics can provide specialized dental care (not just cleanings and extractions);
- 2) With patient consent, a file-sharing system so that safety net clinics can share patient records including exam results with other safety net clinics so that a patient does not have to pay twice for the same exams;
- 3) Establish an emergency health discretionary fund (including but not limited to dental) so that patients do not have to forgo emergency procedures because they cannot pay for it or go into terrible debt as a result
- 4) By 2024, pilot a [dental therapy program](#) in close coordination with Title 1 elementary schools in which **every adult receives a screening and cleaning twice every year**. There is a shortage of dentists and it behooves us to find some creative solutions as has been



done with use of physician assistants, and nursing assistants, etc. The pilot could make use of existing infrastructure and nonprofit providers with a proven track record and either provide transportation for residents or bring the dental services to the schools after hours.

**MENTAL HEALTH:** *During the pandemic, preexisting mental health issues worsened. Our schools have an insufficient counselor to student ratio. Waitlists are long and given the increased demand for mental health services, more providers are no longer accepting insurance, making mental health care unaffordable for many. Young people have been acutely impacted by the lack of mental health resources.*

*This is a complex issue with implications at various levels of government. Both crisis interventions and sustained preventative measures are necessary. By preventative measures we mean addressing the root causes of stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health illnesses. In addition to increasing the number of counselors and therapists at schools, incorporating wellness into the day to day curriculum, examining school policies in the context of mental health and well-being, pushing back the start time for high schools, what ideas might you have?*

Open-ended question for candidates:

1. What ideas do you have to increase equitable access to mental health care for young people? Will you work with us to explore these ideas?

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## **CLIMATE/TRANSPORTATION/FOSSIL FUELS**

*Equity in housing, equity in access to transit, and equity in environmental health impacts go hand in hand. In our listening sessions, we found that predominantly low-income and minority communities in Montgomery County lack equal access to public transportation, and are disproportionately exposed to the negative health impacts of natural gas. Taking action to expand the reach and accessibility of our transit network and to improve the safety and environmental impact of our housing stock will address existing inequities and benefit us all.*



## **TRANSPORTATION:**

1. Reevaluate current bus transportation and put in more bus lines to service the assessed needs of the community, such as the New Hampshire Estates community being connected to WMATA regional bus transit or the County's Ride On Route 16.
2. Provide free County Ride On bus service—make the county's pandemic policy of providing all Ride On Bus service free of charge. This disproportionately helps low-income community members and reduces our carbon footprint.
3. Expand Bus Rapid Transit to Georgia Ave and Connecticut Ave, and create one dedicated lane on each route, including Route 29.

**REPLACE DANGEROUS NATURAL GAS:** *There have already been two gas explosions in MoCo, and gas stoves, particularly in older housing stock, can negatively impact health, including chronic respiratory illness. Natural gas also increases our region's carbon footprint. One of the first steps toward reducing carbon pollution is to reduce our dependency on "natural gas" (as it's marketed) and switch to sustainable electric alternatives.*

*Gas and utility lobbyists argue electrification is inequitable as the burden would fall heaviest on low-income residents. However, those same residents are the ones who predominantly experience the negative health effects of natural gas and will likely miss out on the benefits of converting to electricity if it only happens in wealthier communities first.*

1. Replace dangerous natural gas in apartments, starting with housing that is affordable either through subsidy or naturally occurring market-rate apartments.
2. Ensure that low and moderate income residents receive subsidies so their housing costs do not increase.
  - a. Subsidy could come from rate payer fees that go to Washington Gas.