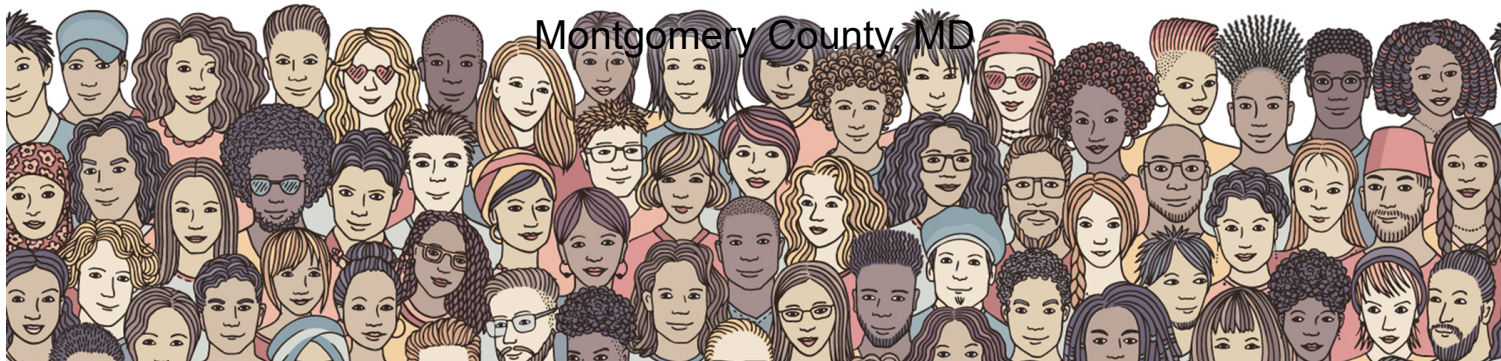


This story was made with [Esri's Story Map Cascade](#).
Read it on the web at <https://arcg.is/1yymmC>.

Equity Agenda for Planning

Equity Focus Areas



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Montgomery County, MD

WHY EQUITY?

EQUITY FOCUS AREAS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

Equity has been overlooked historically in planning, public policy, and government decision-making. In recent years, particularly as society increasingly confronts the legacy of structural and institutional racism, the topic of equity had become a key focus for policymakers and government agencies. In 2020, the Montgomery County Council enacted the [Racial Equity and Social Justice Act](#), which among its requirements directs the Planning Board to consider racial equity and social justice as part of master plans.

Montgomery Planning recognizes and acknowledges the role that our plans and policies have played in creating and perpetuating racial inequity in Montgomery County. We are committed to transforming the way we work as we seek to address, mitigate, and eliminate inequities of the past and develop planning solutions to create equitable communities in the future. While it will take time to fully develop a new methodology for equity in the planning process, we cannot delay applying an equity lens. Among the initial efforts outlined in our [Equity in Master Planning Framework](#), Montgomery Planning developed Equity Focus Areas, an analytical tool to identify marginalized populations for analysis of racial equity and social justice issues for supporting ongoing and future planning efforts.

For more information, visit Montgomery County: [Equity Agenda for Planning](#)



With a population over 1 million in 2019, 57 percent of Montgomery County residents are people of color and 32 percent are foreign-born. Montgomery County is among the most diverse counties in Maryland and nationwide and considered one of the best places to live and work. However, access to opportunities is not equally available to everyone in the county. Many communities face disadvantages in accessing jobs, quality retail, high-performing schools, parks, and other resources. Generally, these amenities are more widely available in higher income neighborhoods and transit-rich locations. The high cost of living in these places, especially housing cost, is an insurmountable barrier for low-income families, thus limiting their access to these amenities and other opportunities.

OVERVIEW



Equity Focus Areas are parts of Montgomery County characterized by high concentrations of lower-income people of color, who may also speak English less than very well. Montgomery Planning developed a data-driven tool to identify and map these areas in the county to assess potential racial and social inequities. This includes access to resources and opportunities for employment, transportation, education, health, and government services that support a good quality of life. This screening tool is based on the analysis of three core variables — income; race and Hispanic origin; and ability to speak English — to identify Equity Focus Areas.

Identifying Equity Focus Areas, communities that may not have equitable access to resources or opportunities, helps direct planning efforts to better understand existing conditions and the area's history and to identify effective ways to engage the community. This will facilitate bringing racial equity and social justice considerations into the master planning process so that Montgomery Planning can produce master plans that will foster more equitable outcomes for communities in Montgomery County.

METHODOLOGY

There is no one way to measure and analyze equity. Research and literature review for this project revealed two approaches in equity analysis: one approach typically using income and race, grounded in the history of the Environmental Justice movement; another approach that uses many variables, and is framed by several factors such as

demographics, environment, economics, transportation, and health. The Equity Focus Area analysis is tailored to Montgomery County and employs the approach of examining three specific variables —income; race and Hispanic origin; and the ability to speak English — at the U.S. Census Tract level to identify areas of the county that may experience the highest inequities in access to transportation, job opportunities and other resources supporting a high quality of life.

DEVELOPING EQUITY FOCUS AREAS

- Conduct literature review of research methods utilized in other jurisdictions
- Frame approach using income; race and Hispanic origin; and ability to speak English
- Identify variables and data sources for analysis and gather data
- Devise indexing methodology
- Calculate indices identifying Equity Focus Areas
- Map results and analyze demographic characteristics of EFAs

DATA USED TO CREATE EQUITY FOCUS AREAS



**HOUSEHOLD
INCOME**



**RACE AND
HISPANIC ORIGIN**

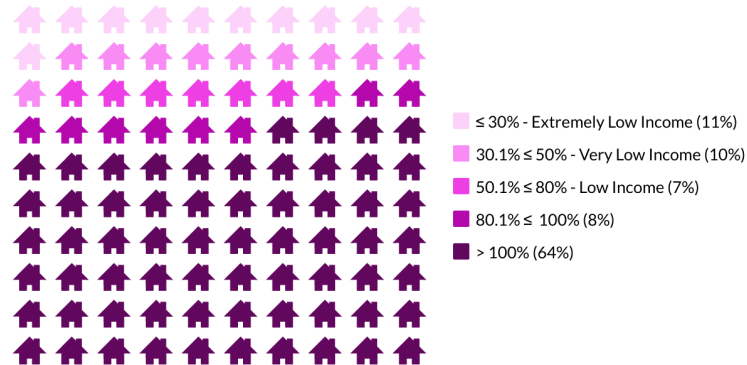


**ABILITY TO
SPEAK ENGLISH**

The Equity Focus Areas (EFA) analysis uses three characteristics associated with vulnerable populations to identify EFA:

1. Low-Income households,
2. Race and Hispanic origin,
3. Ability to speak English

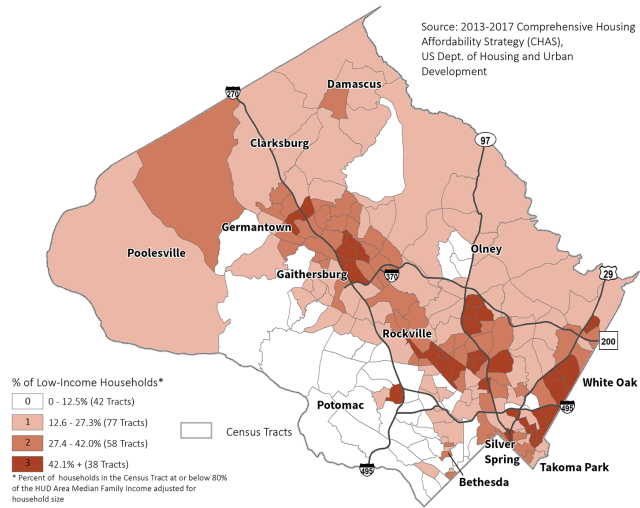
CHAS Income Thresholds



PERCENTAGE OF LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

The EFA analysis uses the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data to identify low-income households in Montgomery County. The CHAS dataset reports the number of households with income low enough to qualify for HUD’s programs based on income limits as a percentage of the area’s median family income adjusted for household size. For this reason, CHAS data was chosen for the EFA analysis as it is judged to be a more realistic capture of low-income households than a simple application of median income. More information is available on HUD’s [CHAS webpage](#).

The [CHAS income categories](#) of “Low”, “Very Low”, and “Extremely Low” specific to Montgomery County were combined in the EFA analysis to represent areas of the county with the lowest incomes. About 103,200 households, 28% of all households, qualified in this combined low-income category with incomes at or below 80% of the HUD area median family income (HAMFI) adjusted for household size.



LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

103,200 households

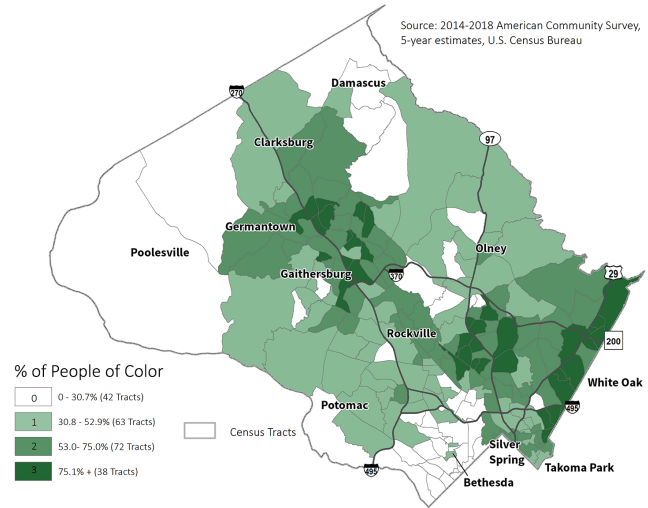
28% of the County

Race and Hispanic Origin



PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE OF COLOR

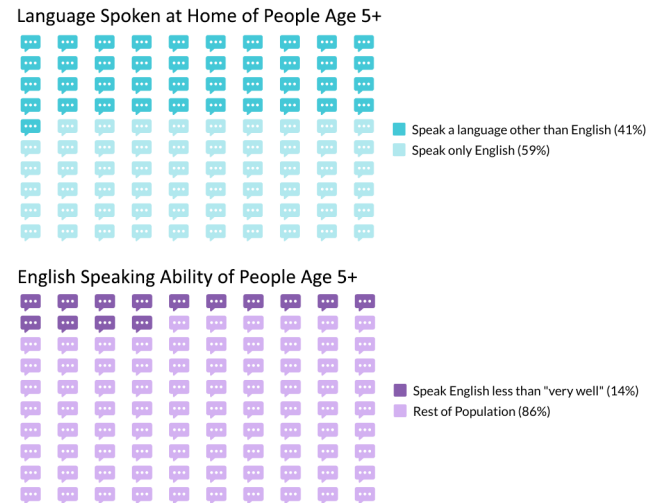
The EFA analysis includes the percentage of people of color derived from Hispanic origin by race data reported by the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates data. People of color include the U.S. Census categories of Hispanic and the non-Hispanic groups of Black or African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, American Indian and others of two or more races. In 2018, 577,715 people of color resided in Montgomery County comprising 56% of the county’s population.



PEOPLE OF COLOR

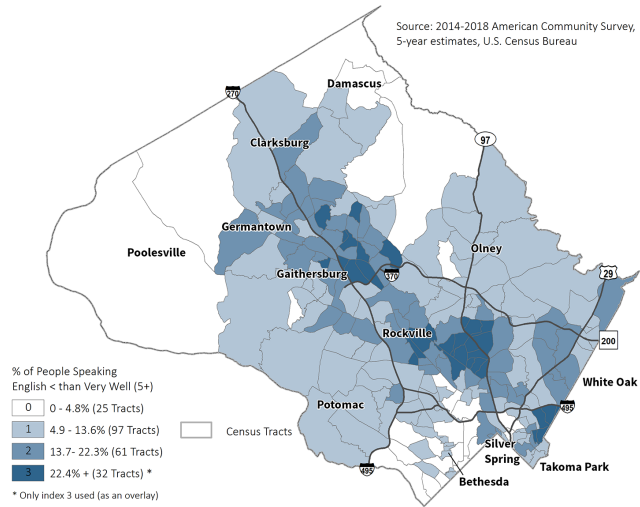
577,715 people

56% of County's population



PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO SPEAK ENGLISH LESS THAN VERY WELL

This project considered ability to speak English as a key part of the Equity Focus Areas analysis. Montgomery County is a highly diverse county with one third of the population being foreign born and a significant number of residents for whom English is not their first language. The EFA analysis recognizes that speaking English less than very well or having limited English language skills can present enormous equity issues. For this variable the project used a dataset from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates.



PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO SPEAK ENGLISH LESS THAN VERY WELL

136,654 people

14% of residents age 5+

CALCULATING INDICES TO IDENTIFY EQUITY FOCUS AREAS

Two Step Process

1. Normalize data by assigning tract level index scores to the percent distributions of low-income households and of people of color, then combine the two indices

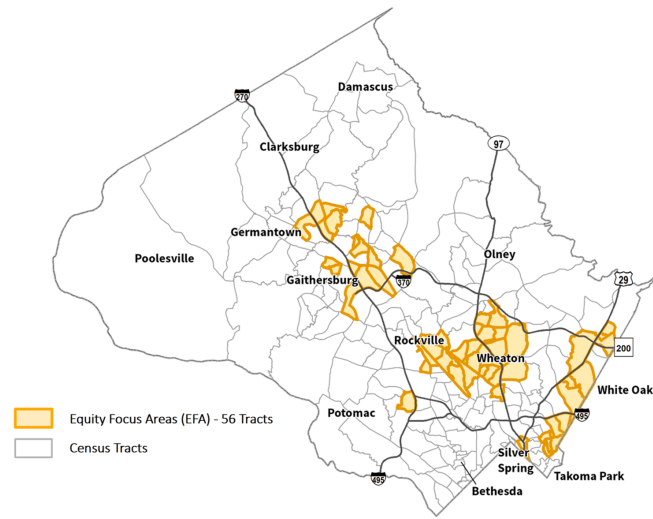
- Derive standard deviations for each percent distribution of low-income households and of people of color
- For each dataset, assign each tract an index score from 0 to 3 based on number of standard deviations from the county's average
- Sum the two index scores for each census tract; summed scores range from 0 to 6
- Tracts with combined index scores of 5 or 6 meet initial criteria for EFA designation

2. Identify tracts having the highest concentration of people age 5+ speaking English less than very well, then combine these tracts with the initial round of EFAs

- Derive standard deviations for the percent distribution of people age 5+ speaking English less than very well
- Assign each tract an index score from 0 to 3 based on the number of standard deviations from the county's average
- Tracts with a limited English-speaking index score of 3 are designated EFAs
- Overlay the limited English-speaking ability EFA tracts onto the initial round of EFAs designated by high concentrations of low-income households and people of color.



RESULTS



Equity Focus Areas total 56 out of 215 census tracts (26%) in the county. The areas are primarily located mid-county, in Aspen Hill and Wheaton areas along Route 29; near Germantown and Gaithersburg along I-270; and the eastern portion of Down-County abutting Prince George's County.

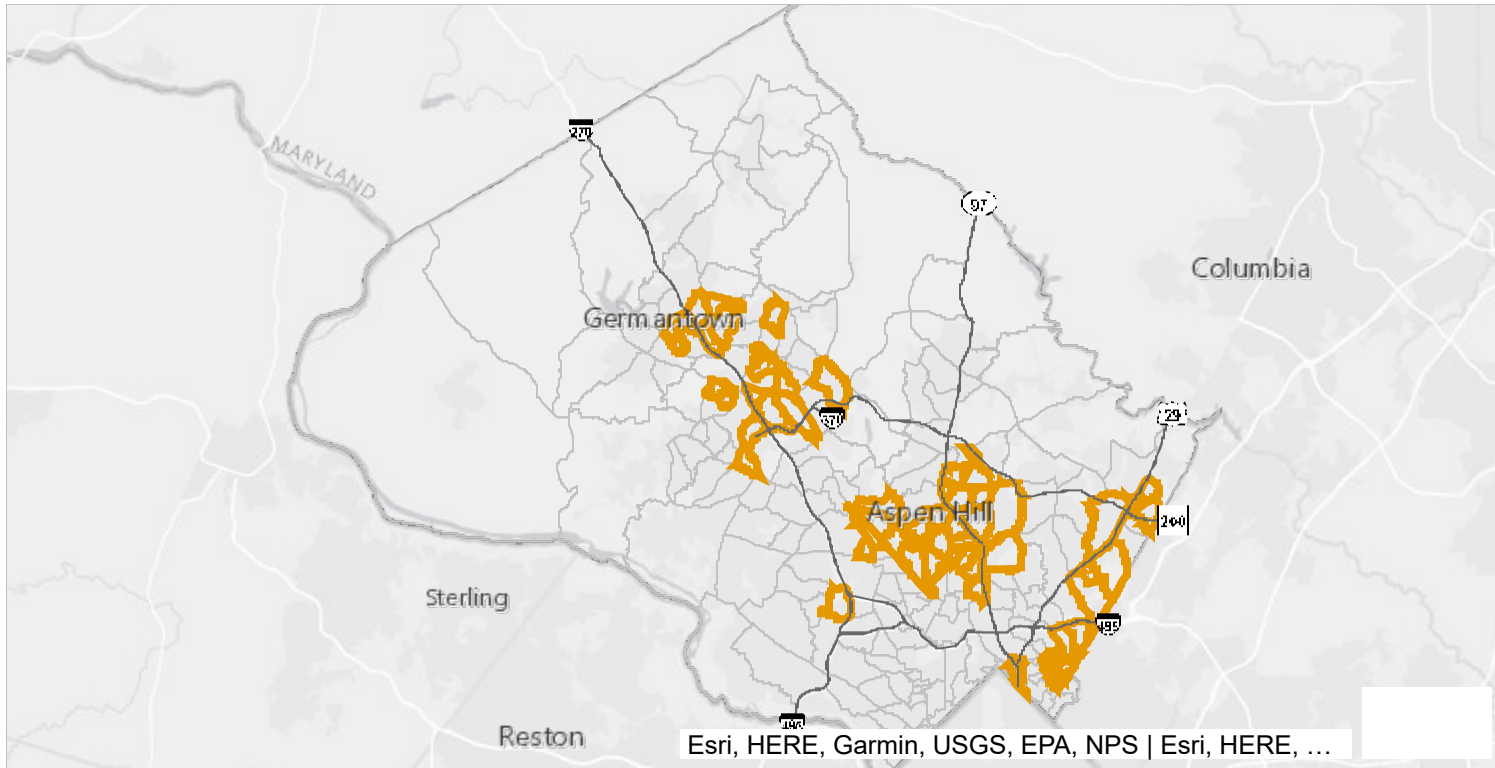
Approximately one-quarter of the county's population (275,875 people) live in EFAs. Compared to the county overall, the population in EFA tracts is younger, has a lower educational attainment level, and is more likely to be Hispanic. Income of one-third of the households is under \$50,000 making housing costs burden more likely. Households are less likely to be owner-occupied and the median housing value is two-thirds of the value countywide.

Additional characteristics are described in the [demographic profile of the Equity Focus Areas](#).

To download the EFA GIS layer, please [click here](#).

Click on an EFA tract for tract level data and index scores

EQUITY FOCUS AREAS



- Equity Focus Areas (EFA) - 56 Tracts
- Census Tracts

Note: Click on an EFA tract for tract level data and index scores

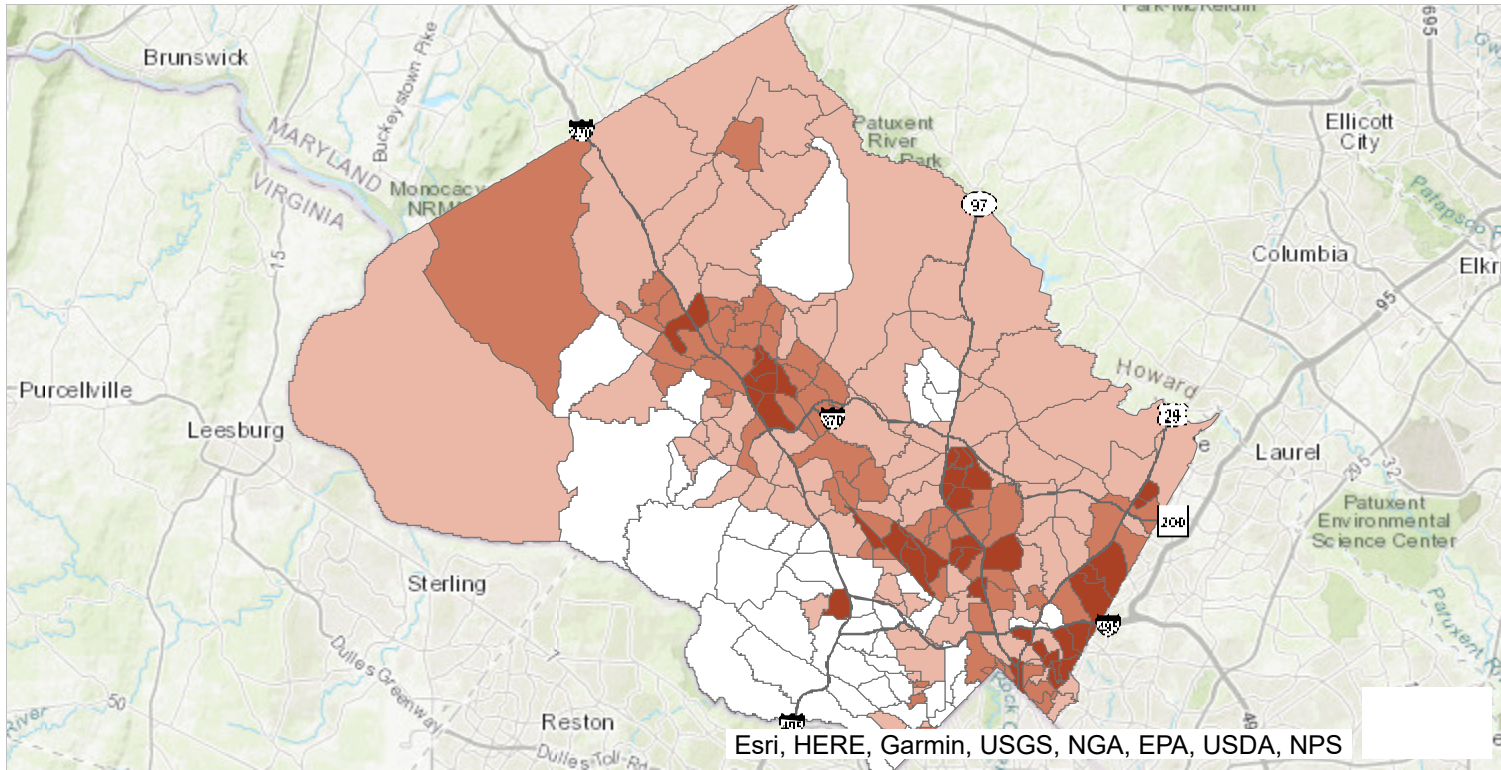
Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

Source: 2013-2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS), US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development

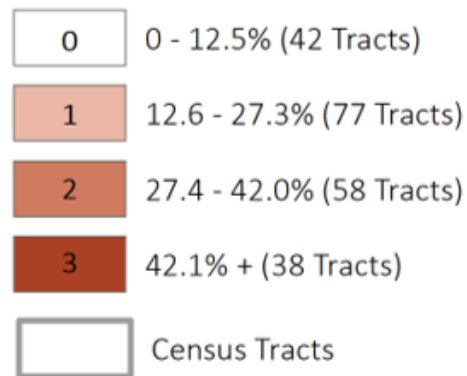
Percentage of Low-Income Households

Click on the low-income maps below to get more information about low-income data and index scores

LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS



% of Low-Income Households Index*

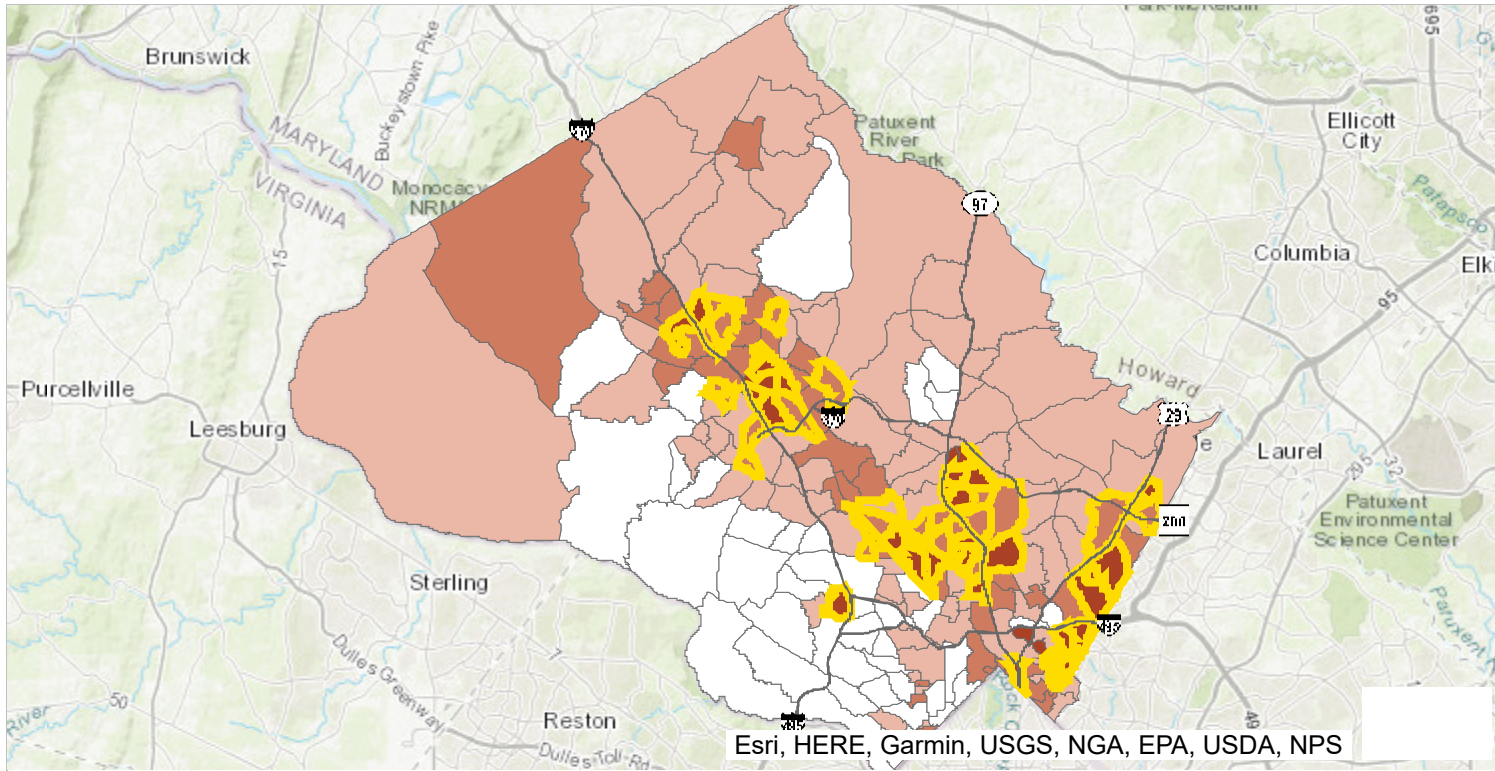


* Percent of the households in the Census Tract at or below 80% of the HUD Area Median Income adjusted for household size.

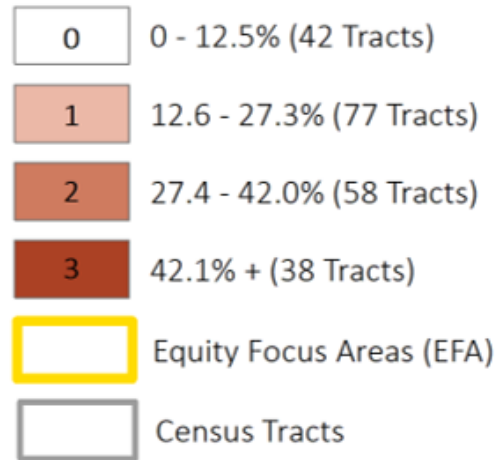
Note: Click on a tract for household income data

Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

Source: 2013-2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS), US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development



% of Low-Income Households Index*



* Percent of the households in the Census Tract at or below 80% of the HUD Area Median Income adjusted for household size.

Note: Click on a tract for household income data and index scores

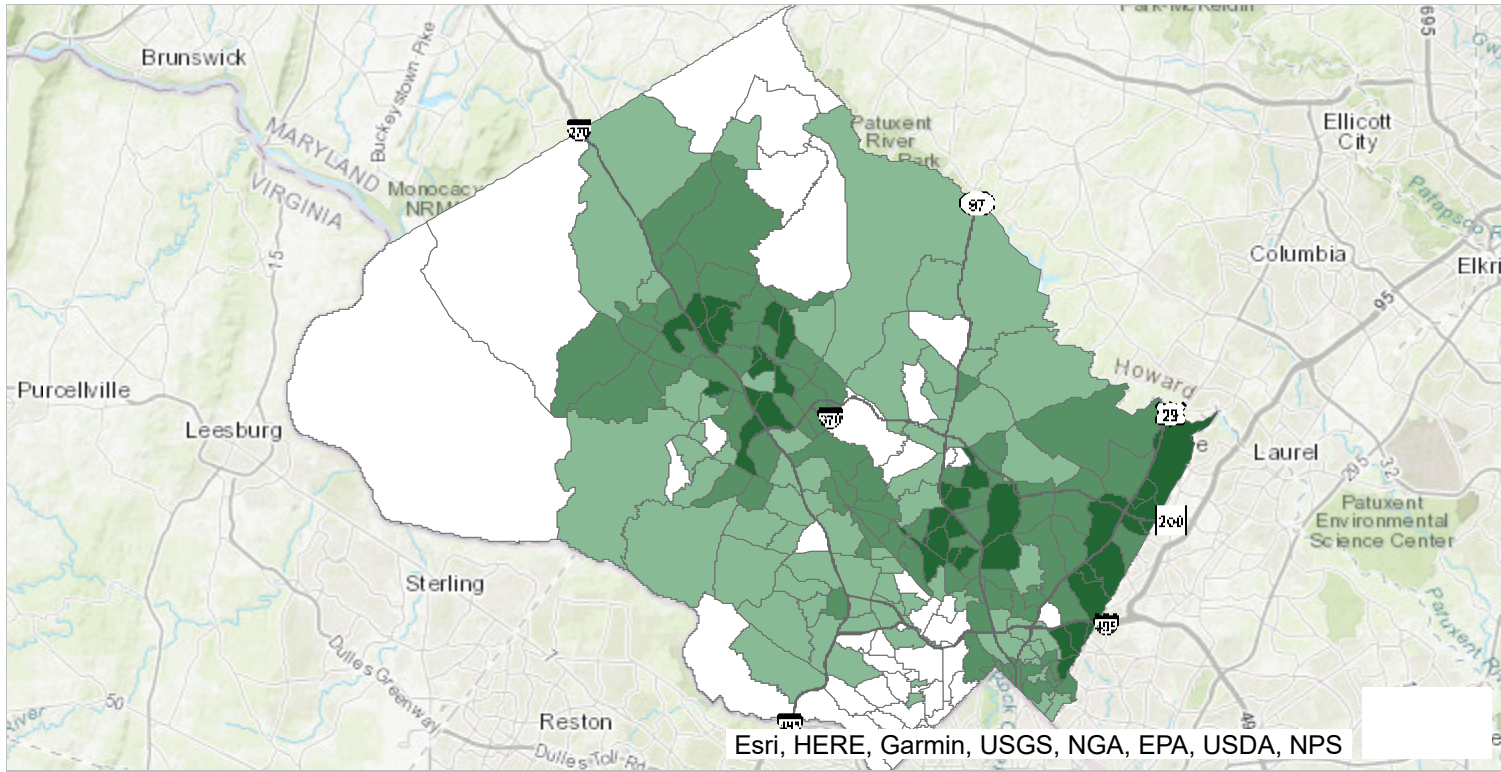
Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

Source: 2013-2017 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS), US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development

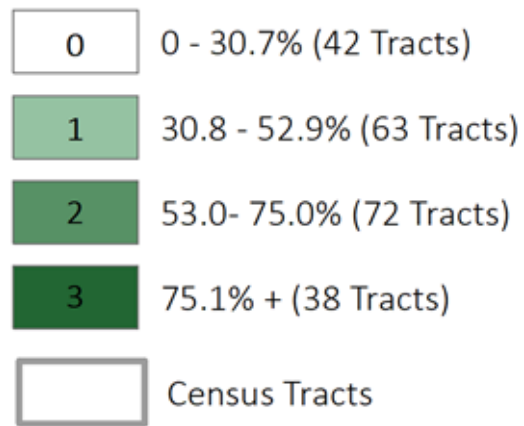
Percentage of People of Color

Click on the people of color maps below to get more information about people of color, race and Hispanic data and index scores

PEOPLE OF COLOR

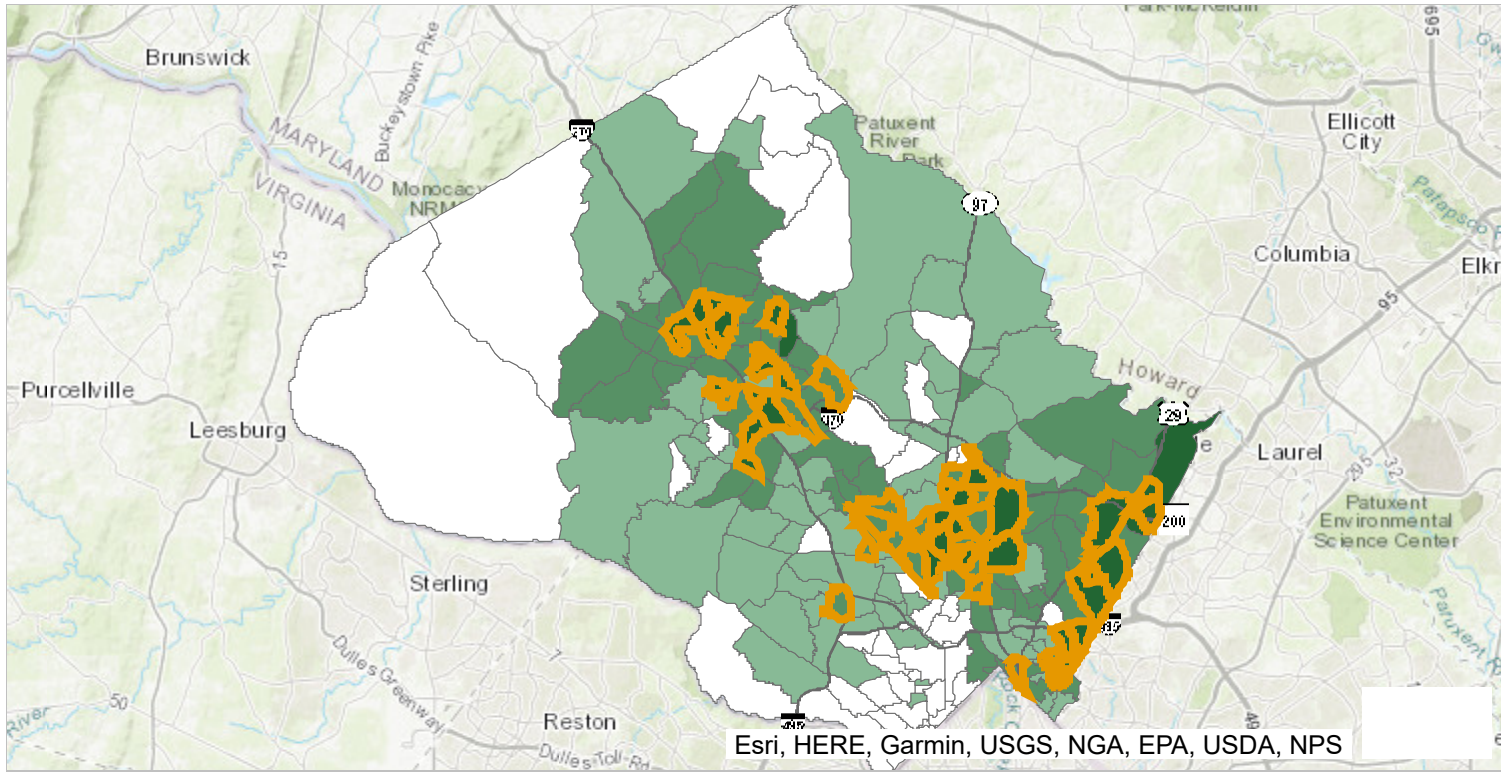


% of People of Color

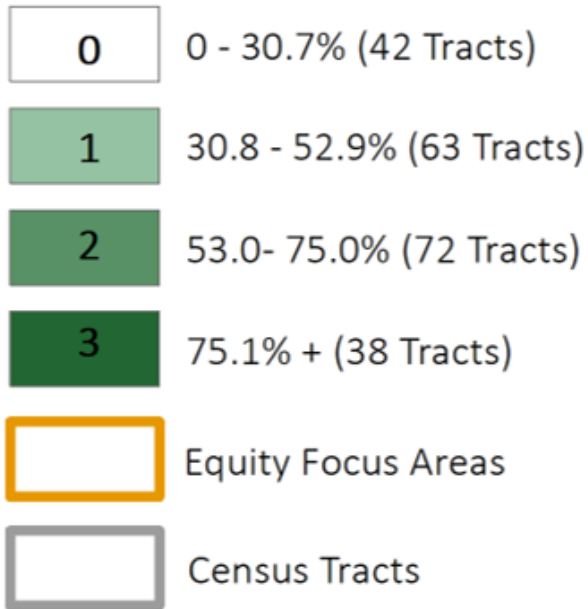


Note: Click on a tract for race and Hispanic data

Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau



% of People of Color Index



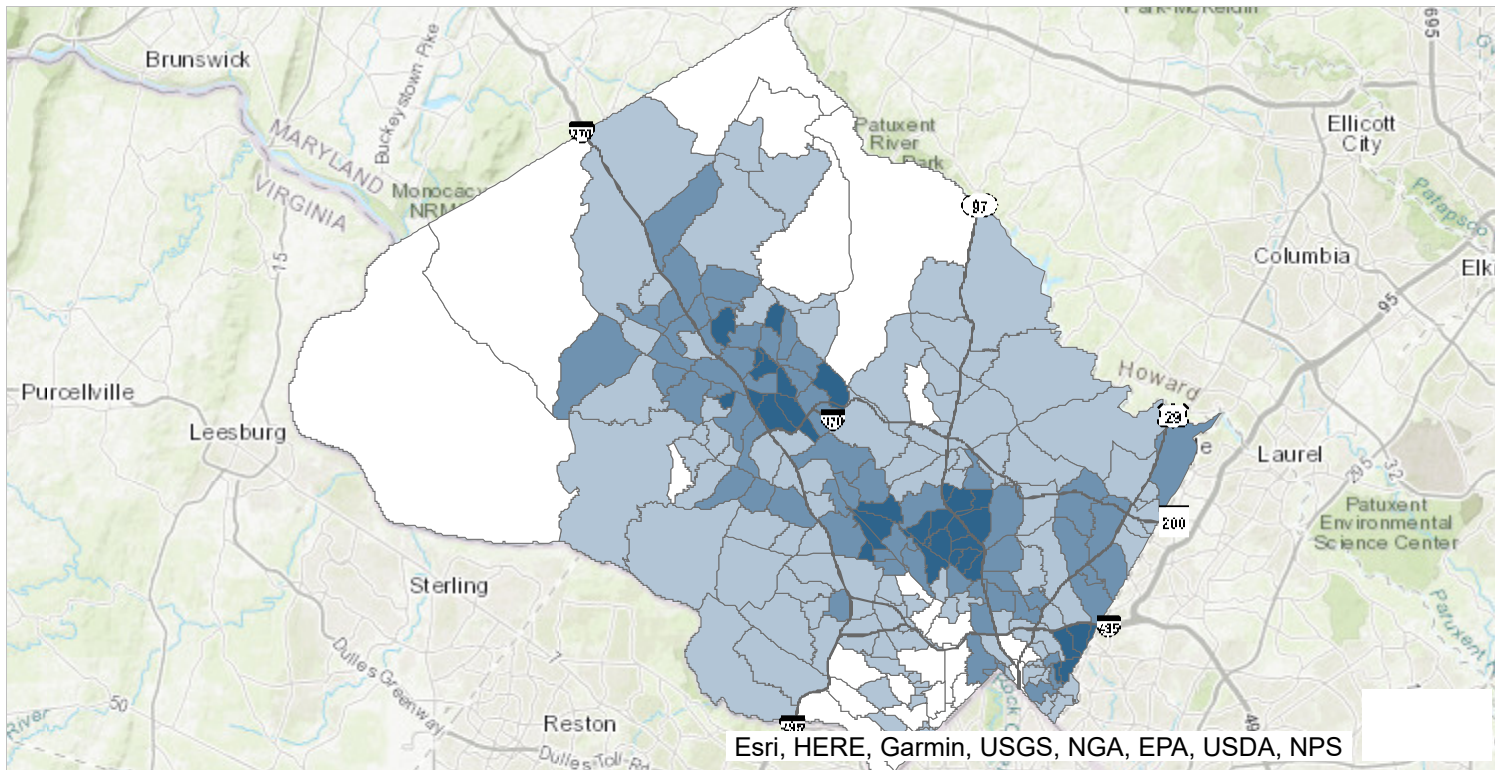
Note: Click on a tract for people of color data and index scores

Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

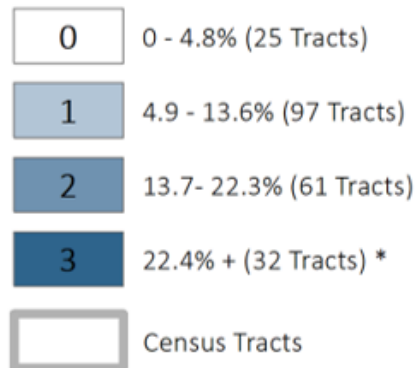
Percentage of People Speaking English Less Than Very Well (Age 5+)

Click on the ability to speak English maps below to get more information about English speaking ability data and index scores

ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH



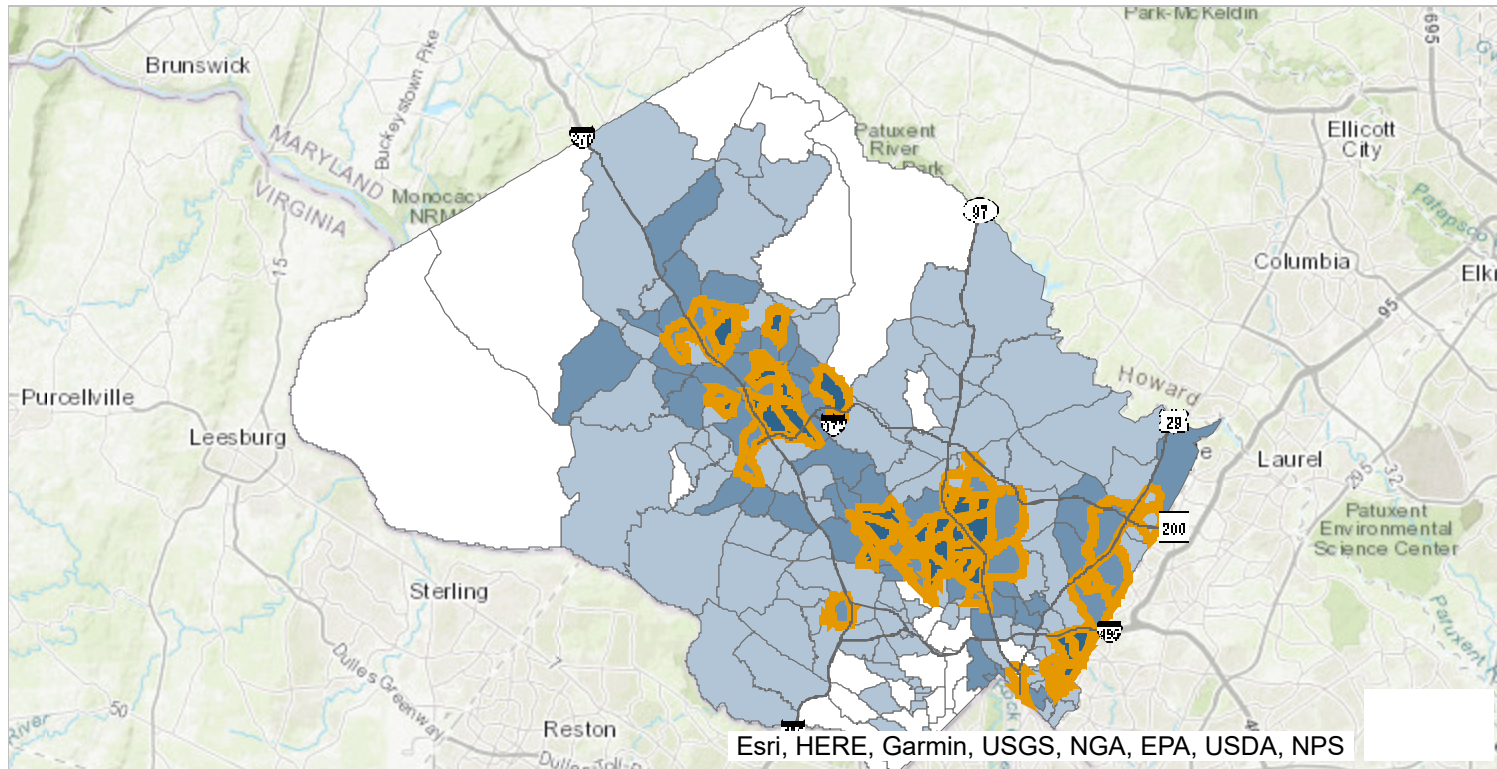
% of People Speaking English < very well (Age 5+) Index



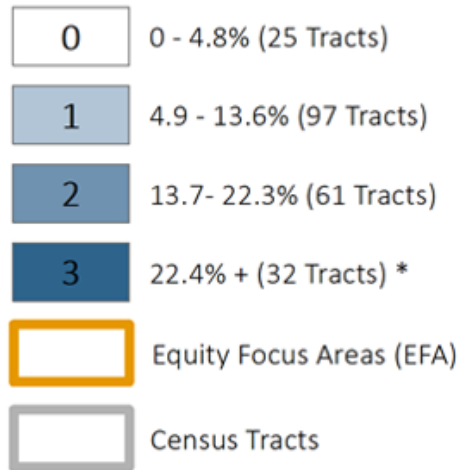
* An index value of 3 qualifies tract to be an EFA

Note: Click on a tract for ability to speak English data

Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau



% of People Speaking English < very well (Age 5+) Index



* An index value of 3 qualifies tract to be an EFA

Note: Click on a tract for ability to speak English data and index scores

Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, U.S. Census Bureau

APPLICATIONS



DEMOGRAPHICS



MASTER PLANS



ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES
AND RESOURCES



TRANSPORTATION



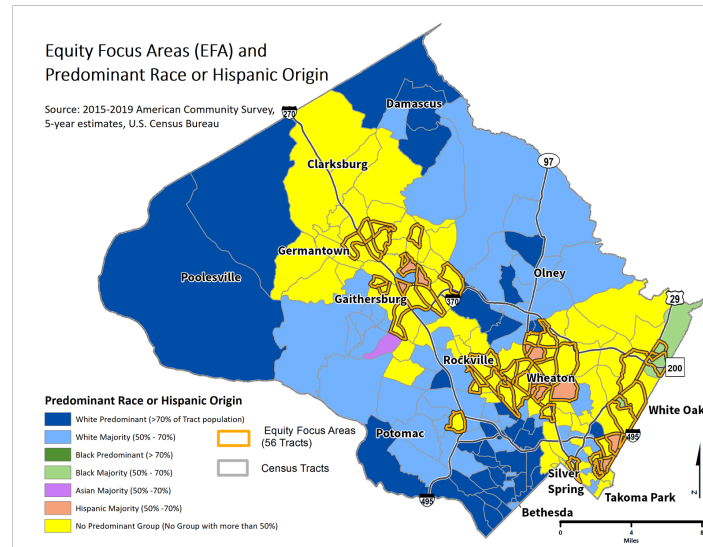
HEALTH CONDITIONS



ENVIRONMENTAL

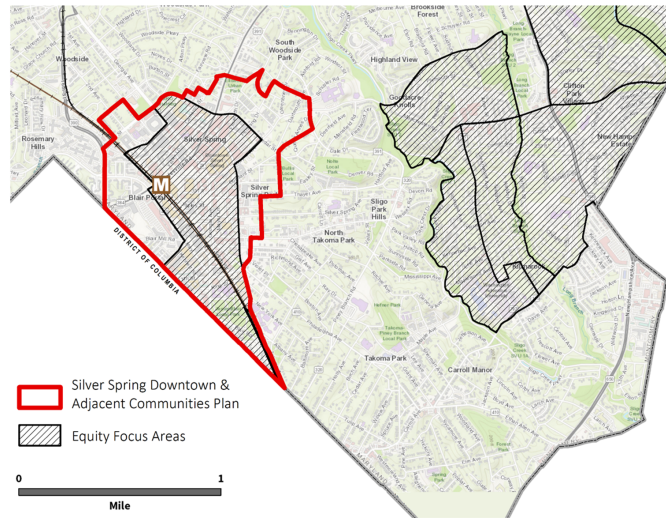
It is not enough to document racial equity and social justice issues at the county level. Improvement will take place when grounded in understanding the disparities among communities and exploring the contributing determinants leading to inequities. Scroll through this map series for examples of how Equity Focus Areas can be used for equity analysis by overlaying various topics such as demographics, land use issues explored in master plans, transportation, parks, environmental data, and health information.

The Equity Focus Areas analysis will help guide numerous projects and processes of the Montgomery County Planning Department and Montgomery County Department of Parks, both part of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Some of these efforts include the update to the county's General Plan known as "Thrive Montgomery 2050"; Montgomery Planning's Equity in Master Planning Framework and master and sector plans; Montgomery Parks' Capital Improvement Program prioritization and other parks, trails or facility-specific strategic planning efforts.



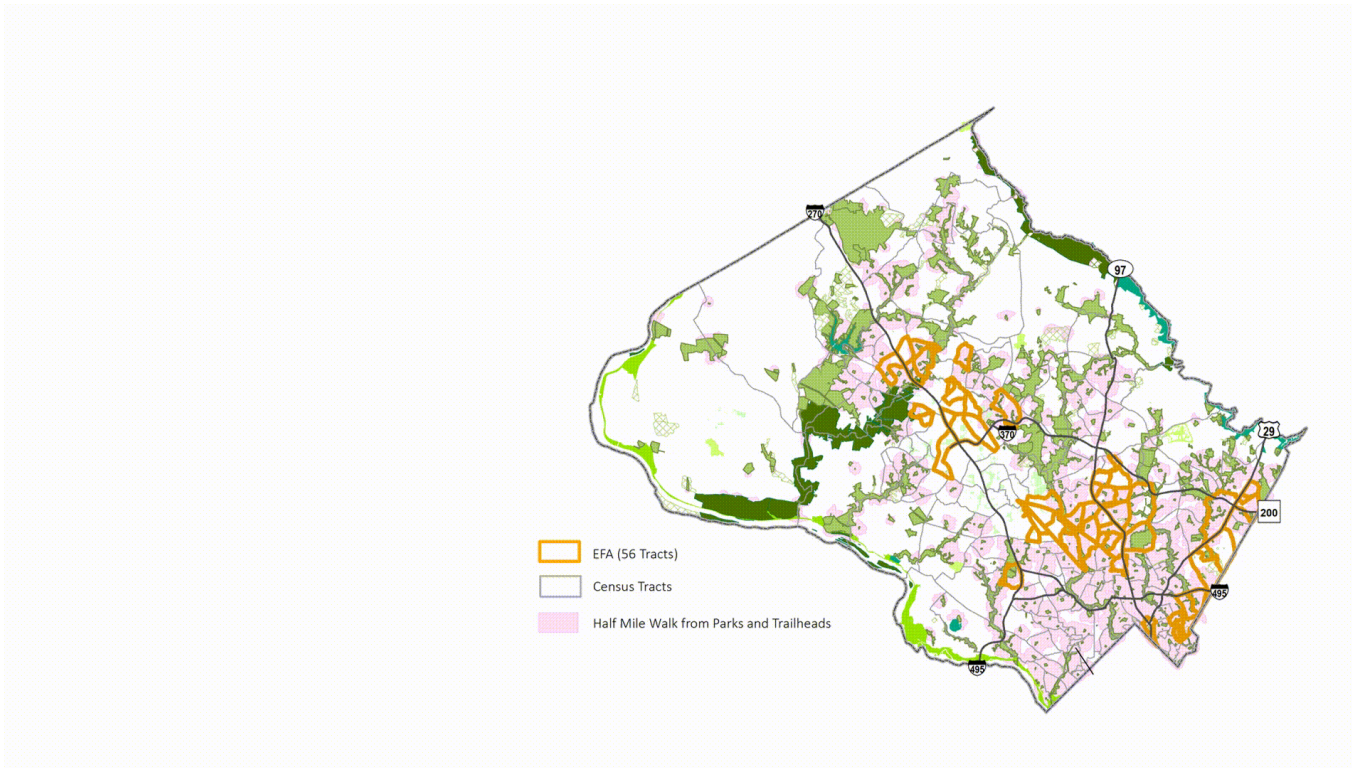
Documenting the socio-economic characteristics of Montgomery County's diverse residents portrays the broader story of the communities residing in or out of Equity Focus Areas. Numerous comparisons are possible, overlaying EFA boundaries with characteristics such as age, educational attainment, occupations, household types, and housing tenure.

On the right, the map depicting the predominant or majority racial or Hispanic group in each census tracts identifies the race or Hispanic ethnicity underlying an EFA defined by a high concentration of people of color. Most Equity Focus Areas are multi-racial (tracts in yellow), where no one group comprises more than 50% of the residents.



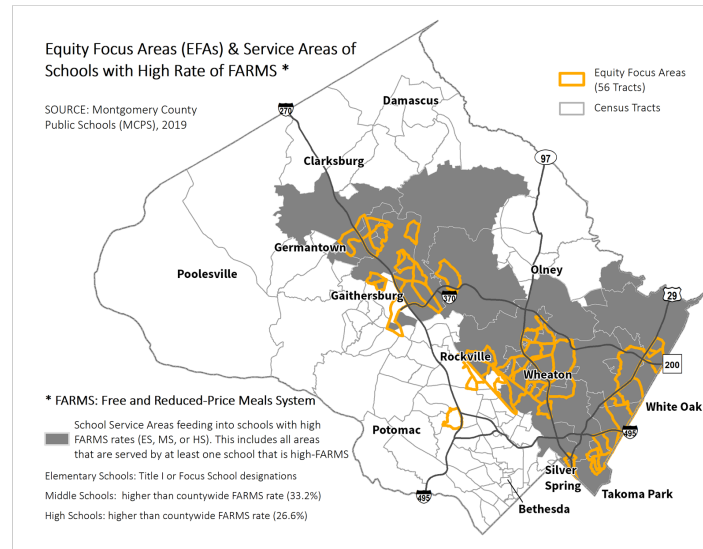
Equity Focus Area analysis will be incorporated into Montgomery County’s planning process, facilitating master plans to advance equitable outcomes for low income communities and residents of color. Identifying EFAs, potentially vulnerable to inequities in access to opportunities, directs planning efforts to examine existing and historical determinants contributing to inequities and address effective ways of engaging these communities.

Several master plans in progress are within or near EFAs, including the Silver Spring Downtown and Adjacent Communities Master Plan which lies within an EFA.



Equity Focus Area Analysis will be used for studying racial equity and social justice issues such as access to opportunity and resources for employment, transportation, health, housing and government services.

An example is Montgomery Parks' analysis of walkable access from EFAs to M-NCPPC park entrances and trailheads. The map overlaying EFA boundaries on the right illustrates possible inequities in walkable park access. Other Parks' projects incorporating EFAs include Energized Urban Parks Functional Master Plan, Capital Improvement Program prioritization and Community Partnerships.



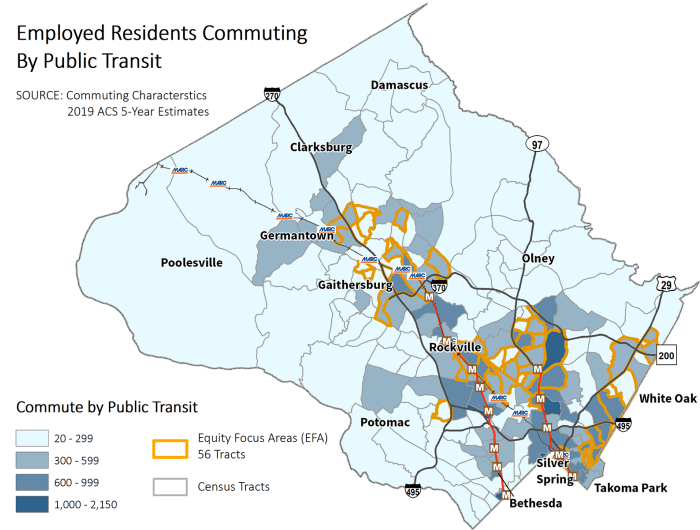
The relationship between school-level poverty and school performance is well-established. Assignment to schools with low-levels of poverty is an indicator for access to educational opportunities. An Equity Focus Area analysis of school assignments can help guide housing strategies that consider schools and complement educational initiatives.

The FARMS rate, which is the percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced-price Meals, provides a proxy measure for the concentration of low-income students within a school. At the high school and middle school level, the countywide FARMS rate for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) was used as a threshold to determine school-level poverty, while the Focus or Title I school designations by MCPS were used at the elementary school level.

For 2019, 85.7% of EFA (48 out of 56 tracts) are located in school service areas with high rates of students enrollment in FARMS, while only 5.4% (3 out of 56 tracts) of EFA are completely outside.

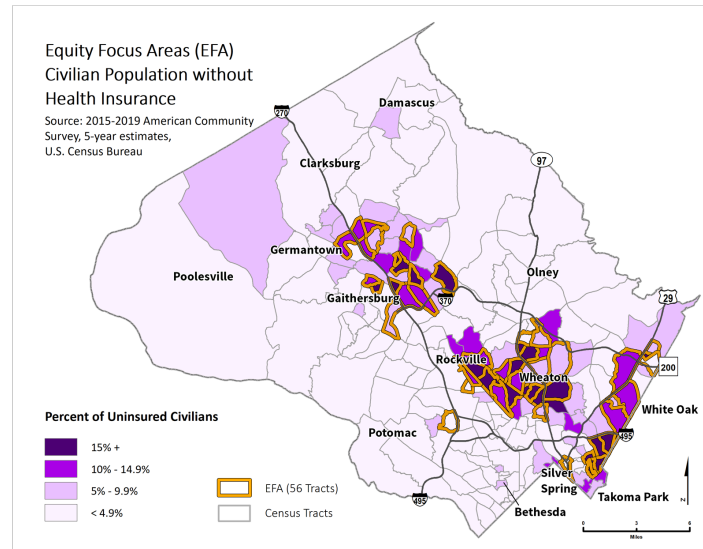
Employed Residents Commuting By Public Transit

SOURCE: Commuting Characteristics
2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates



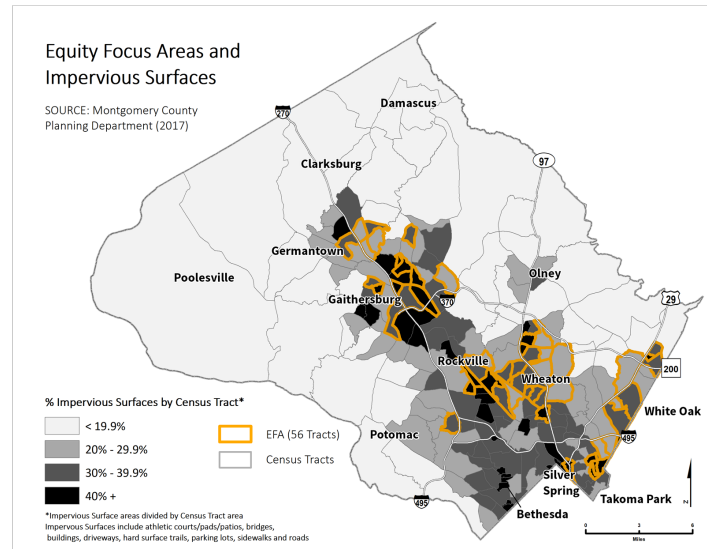
Transportation affects equity of opportunity; without adequate transport, it is difficult to access employment and it limits housing choice. Equity Focus Area analysis provides guidance for evaluating equity in transportation planning decisions.

The map shows the number of employed residents commuting by public transportation with an overlay of EFA. 18% of employed residents in EFA use public transit compared to 14% countywide. While 27% of Montgomery County's employed residents reside in EFA, they account for 33% of all public transit commuter residents.



Social determinants of health are the conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and age and they affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. Equity Focus Area analysis of health equity may be applied to a broad range of determining factors such as housing, access to services, employment, education, transportation, and characteristics of age, race, and ethnicity.

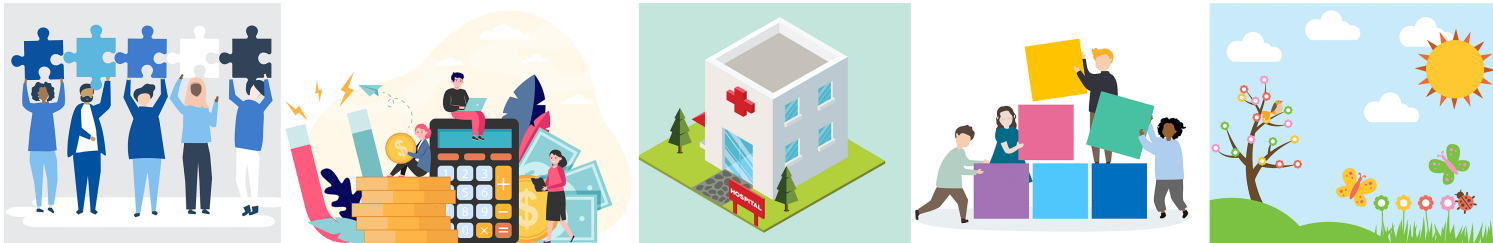
An example of health conditions analysis is overlaying EFAs onto the percentage of people without health insurance in a Census tract. The American Community Survey (ACS) reports health insurance coverage for civilian, noninstitutionalized population at the time of the interview. The 2015-2019 ACS estimates almost 74,000 people in Montgomery County did not have health insurance. Over half of the uninsured residents (53%) live in Equity Focus Areas. Of the approximately 275,000 people living in the Equity Focus Areas, 15% did not have health insurance compared to the uninsured rates of 4.3% for areas outside of EFAs and 7.3% countywide.



Numerous studies have determined impervious surfaces, areas that are covered by water resistant materials such as roads, buildings and parking lots, as having adverse effects to the environment. These surfaces allow both pollutants to flow across the landscape into our waterways and to create "heat-island effects", where temperatures are much higher than the surrounding non-impervious areas.

Impervious surface areas cover 33% of EFA, while non-EFA areas are covered by only 13% of impervious surfaces.

MAP GALLERY



Results of on-going Equity Focus Area analysis will be displayed in a map gallery covering topics such as demographics, housing, transportation, health and the environment. Brief project descriptions and results of the EFA analysis accompanies the maps. The Equity Focus Area boundaries and the associated data for deriving the areas are available for downloading.

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Montgomery County Parks Department, M-NCPPC