



# CITY OF TAKOMA PARK

## City Manager Comments

Report for City Council Meeting of September 20, 2017

### *Follow Up to Last Council Meeting*

#### **Traffic Light Synchronization in Vicinity of Takoma Junction**

We have heard from a number of residents about issues with the synchronization of the traffic lights in the vicinity of the Takoma Junction, which have resulted in long wait times. Staff and residents have reached out – a number of times – to SHA to request that they perform an evaluation and make adjustments as necessary to improve the flow of traffic (we made the same request when the Carroll Avenue Bridge was reopened).

Just yesterday, we finally received some information and explanation through discussions with several people at both SHA and Montgomery County. In fact, it was through these discussions that SHA was able to pinpoint the issues that need to be addressed. The short version of a complicated story is that the timing of the traffic lights was changed when the Carroll Ave Bridge was opened, but not all of the required adjustments actually occurred. As it turns out, the light traffic in only one direction was properly adjusted. Apparently this is why traffic has been backing up on Ethan Allan, but not as much on Carroll when approaching the Junction. It is also why SHA had thought they had already addressed the issue, despite requests that they re-evaluate.

SHA will be getting someone out promptly – possibly today – to reset the timing in both directions. Unfortunately, the real “fix” won't come until the new signal control boxes are installed and control of the systems is transferred to Montgomery County who can do real-time adjustments from their control room. SHA and Montgomery County are in the middle of the transition now, but were not able to give us a timeframe for completion at this point. Mayor Stewart is working with Senator Smith to see to it that the remaining work and transition can happen as expeditiously as possible.

#### **LED Lights**

At last week's Council meeting, the Mayor asked for an update on the status of the sample decorative streetlight replacement fixtures for the Old Town area. As you are aware, the City has 26 decorative lights remaining in Old Town. These fixtures have exceeded their life and need to be replaced. Staff recommended using a fixture housing that is very similar to the existing ones and replacing the light bulbs with LEDs. Staff had one of the new fixtures installed with a 3,000 Kelvin LED light as a sample back in June. When the Council was originally scheduled to vote whether to approve the purchase of the recommended replacement fixtures, the item was pulled from the agenda with a request that staff obtain a 2,700 Kelvin light from the vendor. Upon making the inquiry, we learned that 2,700 Kelvin lights are not available for the recommended fixture. We have ordered a second fixture with the minimum available 3,000 Kelvin light with the intention of placing it near the existing sample fixture. We will dim the brightness on one of the fixtures by 25 percent so we can compare the two. Unfortunately, the ship date for the second fixture is not until late October.

A few important things to note about the decorative street lights along Carroll Avenue:

- The difference in both color and brightness between a 2,700 Kelvin option vs. a 3,000 is very slight, and may not even be noticeable or discernible for most people. (For some context, the new LED lights in front of the Community Center are 3,000 Kelvin. They have been very well received by residents we have heard from.)
  - As it pertains to the debate about 3,000 vs. 2,700 Kelvin lights, it should also be noted that the International Dark-Sky Association recommends “shielded 3,000 Kelvin or less LED,” so the existing pilot is aligned with the Association’s recommended practices.
- The current fixture style has been approved by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and Historic Takoma; switching to a 2,700 Kelvin light would require finding a new fixture which would have to go through the HPC, Historic Takoma, and OTBA approval processes again. This would likely add quite a bit of time in terms of replacing the lights, meaning we'd have to spend additional funds to keep the existing streetlights functioning only to get rid of them down the road.
- We are currently planning on replacing 26 fixtures at a cost of about \$49,000; if we switched the fixtures to those that could accommodate a 2,700 Kelvin light, they would look different from the existing ones along Carroll Avenue (Takoma Junction and the 7100 block of Carroll) to the extent that we would probably want to replace all ~70 fixtures for consistency, which would cost around \$140,000.

We have considered ordering a 2,700 Kelvin fixture for comparative purposes, but because they are not available in anything resembling the existing or recommended fixtures, it would not be comparing apples-to-apples, as comparing two lights in the same fixture would. We look forward to receiving and installing the second fixture later this year so we can compare the lighting conditions between two 3,000 Kelvin lights set to different light outputs. We will let you know when the second fixture is installed so you can view the lights for yourself. In any event, I want to get the lights installed in Old Takoma as soon as possible, preferably before the dark days of winter.

### **Running Water on Poplar Sidewalk**

The Mayor noted that she had seen some running water going across the sidewalk on Poplar near the Washington-McLaughlin property. The issue was also brought up by residents who were concerned that the water may be contributing to mosquito issues in the area. Staff investigated and determined that there is an active water leak coming from a damaged pipe beneath the driveway on the Washington-McLaughlin property. Upon conferring with the property owner, we learned that she recently completed a bidding process for the necessary repairs to address the water leak, and has hired a contractor to complete the work. She did not have a date established yet, and staff encouraged her to proceed as soon as possible. That said, staff did not observe any standing water during the site visit, so it’s not clear whether the leak is contributing to mosquito issues. Staff plans to visit the site again, and periodically, to continue to observe the situation.

### ***Information to Share***

#### **Safe Grow Ordinance vis-à-vis Montgomery County Circuit Court Decision**

At their closed session held on September 13, the City Council received information and legal advice from the City Attorney regarding the potential implications that a recent Montgomery County Circuit Court decision, which struck down the County’s 2015 Safe

Lawn Act, might have on the City's Safe Grow Ordinance. The Council is considering the information and advice provided to determine a course of action moving forward.

### **911 Cell Phone Routing**

As I know you are well aware, calling 911 from a cell phone in certain parts of the City along the Prince George's County and D.C. border may result in calls from within Takoma Park being routed to Prince George's County or D.C. 911. This is directly related to the proximity of cell towers to the caller. There have been some recent changes that speed the process of responding to Takoma Park 911 callers whose first calls go to either Montgomery County or Prince George's County. If a call is for police services (as opposed to fire or ambulance service), when Montgomery County 911 operators receive it, they enter information into a dispatch system and the information populates in the Takoma Park dispatcher's computer so that lost time related to the transfer is minimal. Because of this change, the Takoma Park Police Department now urges residents to call 911 for emergency police services. (We used to tell residents to call [301-270-1100](tel:301-270-1100) for emergency police services - and that number still works - but the 911 system has greater capacity when multiple calls are being made.)

We recognize the seriousness of the routing issue and hope that it can be resolved soon. The issue is nationwide, and the City is limited in what it can do to address it. We are part of a larger, 911 system and have no control over the routing of cell phone calls. Fortunately, there is a regional effort through the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to move the region to "Next Gen 911" which will be more precise in routing 911 calls, as well as making other improvements such as text-to-911 (to accommodate those who may not be able to hear or communicate verbally) and enabling users to send pictures from their cell phone. We expect that text-to-911 will be enabled much sooner than the larger routing issues are resolved. In fact, we understand that COG and Montgomery County are currently working to identify a vendor for the software necessary to make text-to-911 a reality. Montgomery County and Takoma Park already have the technology ready to go, we just need the software and regional protocols in place in order to go live.

Among other reasons, because the text-to-911 capabilities should be available relatively soon, we are reluctant to create and publicize a new Takoma Park-only emergency text number that will not be part of the more comprehensive dispatch system.

### **Takoma Park Providers Council**

The Takoma Park Providers Council, spearheaded by Deputy City Manager Jason Damweber, is a group of representatives from area non-profits, governmental organizations, and other service providers who periodically meet to share information and resources and identify opportunities for partnering to address community issues. Group members provide services that run the gamut, including youth success and education, food insecurity, mental and physical wellness, counseling and therapy, aging and disabilities, immigrant services, job services, etc. The Providers Council had a productive meeting earlier this week where connections were made regarding after school programming, language translation services for parents with children in the local school system, and partnering to develop promotional materials and strategies for future events, to name a few.

If you know of any services providers in the area who would like to become members of the Providers Council Google Group or attend the next meeting (date still TBD, but it will likely be in early December) please have them contact Jason Damweber at [jasond@takomaparkmd.gov](mailto:jasond@takomaparkmd.gov).

## **Recreation Summer Enrollment**

The Recreation Department had a great summer providing recreation services, camps and service learning opportunities to the City's young people. There were approximately 1040 (!) youth, ages 6-17, that participated in Recreation camps.

## **DC Puppet SlamNation**

On Saturday, September 23, at 7:30pm in the Takoma Park Community Center Auditorium, Wit's End Puppets, with support from the National Capital Puppetry Guild, will bring together nine of the region's best puppet creators for a night of serious, abstract, silly and thought-provoking puppet theater. Think poetry slam but with puppets! With featured musical group, Petty Indulgences performing in between puppet pieces, the slam will bring together creative spirits for one lively evening you don't want to miss. Performances are suitable for young and old with some material aimed more at the adult crowd. The event is sponsored by We are Takoma.

## ***Kudos***

Kudos to **Susan Cheung**, Finance Director, who recently passed the third of four exams required to obtain qualification as a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). One more to go!

Kudos also to **Nima Upadhyay**, Special Projects Manager in Public Works, who earned the Project Management Professional (PMP) Credential this week. Great job, Nima!

## ***Hiring Update***

We are currently advertising for a number of positions, including Licensing Specialist, Economic Development Specialist (limited-term position), Dispatcher, Parking Enforcement Officer, Crossing Guard, Sanitation Driver, Sanitation Tech, Right-of-Way Tech, and various Recreation Specialists, Program Leaders, and Program Assistants.

We recently interviewed for the positions of Code Enforcement Officer and Arts Coordinator and will soon be making offers to the top candidates.

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