



City of Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission



TAKOMA PARK
ARTS

2019-2020

ANNUAL REPORT

TAKOMA PARK ARTS

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TAKOMA PARK ARTS AND HUMANITIES COMMISSION

2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Established by the City Council in 2003, the Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission (Commission) serves in an official advisory role to the City Council on all matters related to the arts and humanities, including the submission of an annual report with budget recommendations to support the arts.

Takoma Park has gained a national reputation as an arts-friendly city that supports the arts and the creative economy for local residents and our larger community. That reputation has been enhanced by the work of the City in funding public art projects and the [Takoma Park Arts](#) cultural series at the Takoma Park Community Center, featuring free art exhibitions, concerts, theater and dance performances, poetry readings, film screenings, and lectures.

In a time of crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic, the arts are more important than ever. The arts bind us together and provide a creative outlet, emotional support, exposure to diverse viewpoints, and a window outside ourselves to a larger world full of hope and possibilities. *"The main thing is to be moved, to love, to hope, to tremble, to live," sculptor Auguste Rodin said.*

Since many upcoming *Takoma Park Arts* events have been canceled because of the coronavirus restrictions, City staff in the Arts and Humanities division have developed a new *Takoma Park Arts Online* initiative. We are promoting our [online video archive](#) of former performances along with the work of other local arts organizations on the City's Facebook page, City website, *Takoma Park Arts* e-newsletter, and other outlets. City staff also are organizing new online events, including a [Vintage Movie Night screening](#), poetry readings, and possibly some concerts.

The [arts industry](#) is a crucial part of Takoma Park's economy and the economy of Maryland, generating \$1.3 billion in economic impact, 17,000 jobs, and \$60 million in local and state tax revenue across the state. Artists and performers are a vibrant element of Takoma Park's community, but they often struggle to survive in a difficult economy. They need the City's support.

The City Council and the Commission unanimously approved a new Cultural Plan in 2019 titled [Empowering a Creative Community](#). The Cultural Plan "recognizes the need to deliver diverse cultural programs, advocates for increased support for our cultural assets, argues for improved public access to those assets, and aims to meet the cultural needs and aspirations of future generations."

For all of these reasons, the Commission urges the City Council to approve the proposed 2021 fiscal year budget without any cuts so we can maintain critical funding for our arts programs and public art projects.

TAKOMA PARK ARTS SERIES

Since January 2019, 46 events have been held in the Takoma Park Arts series, attracting a total audience surpassing 3,000 people. Takoma Park hosts more cultural events than many larger cities in the area. Here are some highlights:



ART EXHIBITIONS

City staff curate bimonthly art exhibitions at the Community Center with art for everyone to enjoy. The free exhibitions provide exposure for local artists, an opportunity for commission-free sales, and art reviews by *The Washington Post* and other media outlets.



REBRANDING

The former We Are Takoma cultural series was rebranded as *Takoma Park Arts* in 2019 to emphasize our focus and location. The initiative included a new logo, social media campaign, and other promotional efforts.

THIRD THURSDAY POETRY READING SERIES

Our monthly poetry series has been revitalized with new themed readings that emphasize cultural diversity and timely topics. Takoma Park Poet Laureate Kathleen O'Toole serves as the emcee. [Poems of Migration and the American Immigrant Experience](#) featured three local immigrant poets. In [Poetry from Behind Bars](#), Poet Ambassadors from the Free Minds Book Club who were previously incarcerated in the D.C. jail or federal prisons read their own poetry and the work of current inmates, revealing their humanity and the power of poetry to offer healing.

LECTURES

Many speakers have shared their expertise on various topics. Dianne Cross shared [the remarkable story](#) of her great-great-grandfather who escaped from slavery by serving in the Union Army during the Civil War. A breast cancer survivor shared her inspiring life story, and a local musician celebrated the legacy of famed Takoma Park guitarist John Fahey.



PERFORMANCES

A diverse range of performances included concerts, dance and theater performances, storytelling, and even a puppet slam. All performances are free and accessible to everyone. Audience members contributed a total of more than \$5,000 in donations at these events with all proceeds benefiting the performers, who also received City-funded honoraria of \$200-\$300 for each performance. The series has highlighted cultures from across the globe, including an all-female Balkan music ensemble, a chamber music quintet, African-American singer-songwriters, an Appalachian storyteller, and traditional Persian dances from the Silk Road Dance Company.

FILM SCREENINGS

In partnership with Docs in Progress, film screenings have offered a vital outlet for emerging filmmakers to share their work. Recent screenings included the opening night of the Community Stories film festival, a collection of vintage civil rights films, and other documentaries that challenged stereotypes by providing a voice to underrepresented people.



TAKOMA PARK ARTS E-NEWSLETTER

More than 2,000 people have signed up for our weekly [Takoma Park Arts e-newsletter](#), illustrating the popularity of our cultural events that reach an audience far beyond the city limits.



TAKOMA PARK HOLIDAY ART SALE

The 14th Annual Takoma Park Holiday Art Sale, which was held on Dec. 7, 2019, attracted hundreds of people to the Takoma Park Community Center to buy original artwork and crafts from more than 30 local vendors. The art sale supports the financial livelihood of local artists by providing an affordable venue for them to sell their work.

PUBLIC ART PROJECTS

How many cities can say they put a 17-foot-tall crocheted octopus on top of a downtown clock tower? It's a safe bet the only answer is Takoma Park! Public art meets people where they live, knitting our social fabric together and supporting local artists and businesses. A [public art map](#) shows some of our installations across the city. Our recent projects have forged a sense of community and yielded widespread positive media coverage.



OCT O'CLOCK INTALLATION AND PARADE

Fiber artist Stacy Cantrell knitted a giant crocheted octopus in the City logo colors called Oct O'Clock which landed on the downtown Takoma Park clock tower, delighting residents and visitors alike. After living for about six months on the clock tower, the octopus was donated to the Takoma Children's School in a City-sponsored contest. In April 2019, Cantrell led a procession of excited school kids who delivered the octopus to their school where it was placed atop a playground shed and renamed Octoshedopus. The parade was covered by [WJLA Channel 7](#), [NBC Channel 4](#), and other media outlets.

PUBLIC PIANO

Takoma Park joined an [international street piano movement](#) by placing a donated piano in the downtown Takoma Park gazebo that anyone could play. Local artist Zahava Frank painted the piano with her original design featuring a tree sprouting above a rainbow. More than a dozen pianists (and one fiddle player) performed at a grand opening concert in August 2019 that was covered by [Local DVM](#). The piano transformed the empty gazebo and underused park into a community gathering place. The piano was removed in December 2019 due to the changing weather.



ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGER STATION WRAPS

Two graphic designers created colorful designs that were used on new vinyl wraps for two electric vehicle charging stations at the Takoma Park Community Center and in downtown Takoma Park. One design featured a vibrant scene of flying hummingbirds while the other depicted electric cars, windmills, and the City logo to demonstrate the City's commitment to combating climate change.



BIRD CALLS PHONE

Local artist David Shulman reprogrammed a vintage pay phone so it plays bird calls from local bird species. Push button 5 and you hear a rooster in homage to Takoma Park’s legendary Roscoe. A new canary-yellow handset and two large feather banners were installed in 2019 to highlight the Bird Calls Phone which is located at 8000 Flower Avenue. The project was covered in this [WJLA Channel 7 piece](#), [UPI](#), and other media outlets.

LITTLE LIBRARY BOXES

In a project combining public art, cultural diversity, and women’s rights, local artists Samantha Contrino and Katie Macyshyn painted five new Little Free Library boxes with portraits of five groundbreaking female authors and activists. To celebrate Takoma Park’s Ethiopian and Hispanic communities, three of the little libraries feature Ethiopian educator and legislator Senedu Gebru, Guatemalan human rights activist Rigoberta Menchu, and children’s book author Juana Martinez-Neal. The little libraries will be installed across Takoma Park later this year.



GATEWAY SIGNS

In 2010, 30 original hand-painted signs featuring unique designs were installed on gateway signs and kiosks across Takoma Park to welcome visitors to the city. The signs have become faded and damaged over a decade so local artists Alison Baker and Jim Colwell are reprinting their designs on durable aluminum panels that will be installed later this year to replace the original signs.



SUPPORTING THE ARTS IN TAKOMA PARK

“Takoma Park is a vibrant arts community rich with public art, poetry, culture, and home to many artists and creative workers. The arts define the character of Takoma Park, simultaneously celebrating our diversity and unifying our community.”

Randy Cohen

Vice President of Research for Americans for the Arts
Founding Chairperson of the Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission

“We were thrilled and honored to participate in the Takoma Park Arts Third Thursday Poetry series. This was the first time our Poet Ambassadors, who were all previously incarcerated, have been invited to share their poetry as featured poets. It held tremendous meaning that they were able to share their own poetry as well as the works of Free Minds members still incarcerated at the D.C. Jail and federal prisons across the country.”

Tara Libert

Co-founder and Executive Director of the Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop

“Orfeia Vocal Ensemble performed to a full house at the Takoma Park Community Center in 2019. The concert provided a much-needed financial boost for our ensemble and helped us fulfill our mission and expand our audience. The *Takoma Park Arts* series provides wonderful and diverse free arts programming for the community.”

Diane Weinroth

Orfeia Vocal Ensemble

“In these strange times, preserving the arts may be even more vital. Art provides a window to other cultures and viewpoints which are more difficult to experience firsthand as we remain confined to our own homes. Takoma Park’s value for the arts is one of the reasons why my family moved here. It’s what makes this city a *community*. I hope the City will continue to recognize the importance of the arts during this unique time.”

Courtney Tompkins

Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission member

“Public art abounds in Takoma Park and is vital to our mental and physical well-being. Funding public art is an investment in infrastructure, supporting not only artists but also material suppliers, fabricators, and the installation services of general contractors.”

Liesel Fenner

Public Art Program Director for the Maryland State Arts Council
Takoma Park resident

Acknowledgements

Arts and Humanities Commission

- Thomas Parlon (Chair)
- Gloria Tseng-Fischer (Vice-Chair)
- Courtney Tompkins (Secretary)
- Bill Crandall
- Jon Frederick
- Eric Gordon
- Ebonee Harlee
- Joelle Rabion

- Madona Tyler LeBlanc
- John Warren

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