



## Takoma Park City Council Meeting – June 10, 2020 Agenda Item 2

### **Work Session**

Update on COVID-19 Assistance to Residents and Businesses

### **Recommended Council Action**

Provide feedback on staff proposals for the continuation and expansion of COVID-19 relief services using funds from the newly-created COVID-19 Relief Fund (CRF) in Fiscal 2020 and Fiscal 2021.

### **Context with Key Issues**

On May 13, the City Council voted to approve the Fiscal 2021 budget ordinance. The Fiscal 2021 budget reflects the City Council's desire to blunt the impact of the COVID-19 public health crisis in Takoma Park by providing immediate relief services through the creation of a new COVID-19 Relief Fund totaling \$634,150. The purpose of the COVID-19 Relief Fund is the continuation of Housing and Community Development emergency services for struggling residents and small businesses, as well as an expansion of services to facilitate economic recovery.

When the pandemic began, the Department of Housing and Community Development sprang into action to support residents and small businesses. Economic Development Manager Samira Cook Gaines launched a new Mini-Grant Program to give direct emergency aid to small businesses. The Economic Development Division also spearheaded the "Takoma Park Together" marketing campaign to raise additional grant monies and promote curbside pickup from Takoma Park restaurants. An estimated 266 businesses received emergency funding, resource-sharing and/or technical assistance.

Similarly, the Housing Division under Housing Manager Grayce Wiggins served an unprecedented number of more than 80 vulnerable families. Housing staff leveraged the City's existing Emergency Assistance Fund to assist low to moderate income families facing housing instability or other urgent needs. Services included eviction prevention, temporary relocation, food purchases, COVID-19 testing, insurance sign-ups, unemployment benefits guidance, prescription subsidies, face mask distributions, and donations to grieving families. The Housing Division also provided virtual forums explaining how to access County, State, and Federal resources and social services.

City staff see no indication of a slowdown in the demand for these services. City staff predict a surge in housing instability when eviction courts reopen at the end of July. Small businesses are struggling to survive and reopen in the face of plunging sales. Both the Mini-Grant Program and the Emergency Assistance Fund had many more applicants in Fiscal 2020 than the original funding allocation allowed. In the face of immense need, City staff recommend a spending plan that dedicates a significant portion of the COVID-19 Relief Fund to assisting waitlisted businesses and expanding eviction prevention efforts. Their proposal also fills in service gaps by providing technical advice on reopening for small businesses and quadrupling the budget for workforce development services.

### **Council Priority**

A Livable Community for All: Identify Programming Needs in the Community

## **Environmental Considerations**

There is no direct environmental impact from the City's COVID-19 relief initiatives.

## **Fiscal Considerations**

The City of Takoma Park's COVID-19 Relief Fund is one-time funding obtained through savings approved by Council during the Fiscal 2021 budget reconciliation. The starting balance in the fund is \$634,150 from a Fiscal 2021 set-aside of \$440,000 and a Fiscal 2020 set-aside of \$194,150.

## **Racial Equity Considerations**

Residents and business owners most impacted by the pandemic are disproportionately people of color. People of color make up 56.7% of Takoma Park's population, and foreign-born residents make up 31% of the City's population. Higher poverty levels, lower education levels, high housing cost burdens, and higher unemployment existed in Takoma Park communities of color prior to the pandemic. The economic hardships caused by statewide shutdowns have compounded those vulnerabilities and left many Takoma Park minority families in dire need.

The COVID-19 Relief Fund will address racial inequities in Takoma Park by connecting minority residents and businesses with basic necessities over the short-term and with tools for economic recovery and housing stability over the long-term. City staff have developed community engagement strategies around the COVID-19 Relief Fund that target the City's hardest-to-reach populations by accommodating for language barriers, government distrust, and a lack of internet access.

## **Attachments and Links**

- [COVID-19 Resource Page](#) on the City's website summarizes City services for residents and businesses impacted by COVID-19.
- The [Racial Equity Initiative Page](#) on the City's website summarizes the City's methodology for ensuring that minority populations are beneficiaries on the new funding.