

**Staff Responses to Questions and Comments from City Councilmembers
from January 12, 2022 City Council Meeting**

PUBLIC WORKS

Q1: There is only one stormwater-related project. What is the status of the FY22 funding for a stormwater study/intervention design? If Council decided to add stormwater projects to the ARPA spending plan, what would you recommend? (Kovar, Dyballa, Stewart)

Response: We have not moved forward with the Council funded \$150K project for assessing stormwater problems on private property. As mentioned at the time, Council included it in the budget. Staff capacity is extremely limited for such a project at this time. We have discussed internally how best to develop a scope of services for such an effort and have looked for examples in other jurisdictions, but have not yet been able to allocate staff time to moving this further along. Additionally, staff requested only fully designed stormwater projects to be included in ARPA given the funding time frame, especially those with a large price tag, rather than theoretical analysis of system capacity.

Q2: The Takoma Stream Branch Restoration funds were already allocated under the General Fund capital plan, why was this project suggested for ARPA? (Kostiuk)

Response: The project has been identified for several years and the City has made numerous attempts to get grant funding to do the project. It was only when we were unsuccessful at grant funding that we put it in the stormwater capital budget as a project. In fact, due to the expected cost, it was envisioned to be spread out over 2 fiscal years (\$125K) each in order to be done. Given the high cost, that one project would use most of the capital funding for the year. Once we learned ARPA funds could be used for stormwater projects we identified this as a good candidate as it was already designed and developed and ready to go. Additionally, as a result of the severe rain event that occurred in September, 2019, the funds initially assigned to the Takoma Branch project were used for other more urgent projects to address stormwater problems brought to light by that event (Chestnut Avenue project, Trench repairs below Cockerille Avenue and Sycamore Avenue project, among other smaller projects).

Q3: Would a Citywide traffic study and safety plan be a good use of ARPA funds? Let's use ARPA to promote Vision Zero goals (Kostiuk, Stewart).

The City's initial concerns are related to staff capacity to develop a scope of work and evaluate the results. A project to complete a detailed analysis of traffic volumes and speeds on all City streets would likely be quite expensive. Once that data was gathered additional engineering analysis would be needed to determine whether any streets showed evidence that the speed or volume of traffic exceeded the design of the street. We can assume that our City street design will allow a capacity larger than what most of our streets currently experience as well as speeds over the speed limit, so it is unknown whether or not a traditional engineering analysis will provide much actionable guidance. An alternative would be to develop a scope of work that establishes

criteria for evaluating our existing streets using width, driveways, crosswalks, pedestrian generators, volume, etc., and then create treatments for categories of roadway types. We could then develop a plan to implement any improvements based on the street category and deficiencies. Whether or not that would provide a useful/usable outcome is remains unknown. Staff are currently researching similar studies in other cities and will report back at the next Council session.

RECREATION

Q4: The budget amount for Recreation Scholarships seems high. Is our goal scholarships/expansion of City programming or direct support for childcare providers? (Kostiuk)

Response: The Recreation Department scholarship program is designed to assist individuals and families accessing our programs, by providing an opportunity to apply for a lesser fee than the published amounts. Scholarships give Takoma Park residents an opportunity to learn, grow and have fun.

Most programs offered by the Takoma Park Recreation Department are eligible for scholarships including child care, day camps, youth and adult classes and workshops, and many other programs covering all ages. Currently the City does not provide support for outside childcare providers.

Since COVID, the Department implemented a 100% scholarship designed to target families that were impacted financially. Our goal is to make sure that all residents (regardless of income) have access and the means to participate in Recreation programs and services. Overall, we anticipate an increase in the number of scholarship requests from residents for Recreation services over the next year. We also anticipate this number to decrease as public health and economic conditions improve.

Q5: How much capacity do we have to provide childcare? Should we expand our capacity, or subsidize other providers?

Response: The Recreation Department has the capacity to provide school year before and aftercare for up to 80 participants Citywide. Our summer camps have the capacity (under normal conditions) to host up to 164 participants per week. However, with Library construction expected this coming summer that number may be reduced. As of now, we are anticipating the ability to host 102 participants per week.

POLICE

Q6: Are the Reimagining Public Safety Recommendations reflected in the Staff-Recommended ARPA Spending Plan? Are there other funding sources available for the RPSTF recommendations? (Kostiuk)

Response: The mental health counseling recommendation came partially from the PSTF recommendations. We are awaiting direction from the Council on what recommendations the

Council would like the City to pursue and as such are still evaluating the PSFT recommendations. Many of the task force recommendations require extensive review and planning. Projects funded out of the \$1.2 million social services set aside could also address PSTF recommendations on community assistance.

Q7: The budget estimate for mental health counselors seems low. How will the City build long-term capacity for mental health services? (Kostiuk) Q8: Could some ARPA funds be utilized for the recommendations from the task force with regard to an emergency line and training to allow for not just police to be sent but to connect with other services? Is this already envisioned in the mental health pilot plans? I asked at the meeting last week about the total amounts of funds suggested for ARPA funding for the mental health pilot, which seems low to me. (Kostiuk)

Response: The funds are based on a two-year pilot program for two mental health counselors. Police Chief Devaul believes the \$600,000 is sufficient to cover the salaries and benefits, as well as associated costs, for two counselors. At the end of the two-year pilot we will evaluate program outcomes to determine the need and capacity for maintaining full time counselors or transition to County level resources. We are hopeful within two years that the County level resources will have expanded to the point that they will be able to provide sufficient mental health services to Takoma Park residents. Once we are able to get direction from the council, we will be able to evaluate how to best move forward.

Q9: I'm wondering with regard to the recommended mental health pilot how that relates to the task force recommendation to create a Community Assistance Office and Community Safety Team. This seems like the mental health part of the Community Safety Team. Is this envisioned to be a part of a Community Assistance Office? How could this be housed separately but coordinate with Police? (Kostiuk)

Response: We are awaiting directions from the Council on how to best review and implement the task force recommendations. The mental health team and the \$1.2 million in social services partnerships would address several of the components mentioned in the Community Assistance Office and Safety Team. Once we are able to get direction from the Council, we will be able to evaluate how to best move forward.

Q10: How does the atrium fill-in project funds that are proposed relate to the task force's recommendation to reevaluate plans for the new dispatch area and additional TPPD spaces, given recommended shifts in where different services are housed? (Kostiuk)

Response: The atrium buildout does not only involve dispatch, it also involves several new service windows, private interview rooms, three bathrooms that require ADA upgrades, and office space that will be needed for mental health counselors and a potential community safety team. Office space is in short supply at the community center. If it is decided that down the road we may take functions away from the police, this space could easily transition to other city uses. Space expansion is also advisable given the need for distancing and quality ventilation in a post-pandemic world for employee health and safety.

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Q11: Was the food security allocation sufficient? Should we allocate additional funds towards food security? (Kovar)

Response: The successful awardees were notified last week of our intention to provide them with grant funds for this effort. Grant funds will be for a combination of SNAP outreach/enrollment, pop-up food stands, mobile food distribution, and fixed site distribution. A requirement for the RFP was to provide metrics and data on the programs which will inform us about the program efficacy over the next year, at which point we can evaluate the need for additional funding.

Q12: What about services for our unbanked residents? (Kovar)

Response: The Staff recommendations do not directly address unbanked residents of Takoma Park. However, there is the potential to contract with a social service organization who can provide financial literacy and education services to affected community residents within the \$1.2 million. Banking status is not covered in the Takoma Park Data Explorer; staff asks that Council provide more information on how many residents this would impact, in which Wards, as this was not a policy issue that emerged from staff research.

Q13: The dollar amount for small business grants seems low. Can you provide a better understanding of how you arrived at that dollar amount? (Searcy)

Response: Many of our small businesses have received multiple grants and other funds to remain open. In discussions with the business community, there is less of an emergency need currently in comparison to needs which occurred at the beginning of the pandemic. The proposed ARPA funds to be used for grants to small businesses will be prioritized for those businesses who opened during the pandemic and may have been ineligible for pandemic-related business assistance, as well as businesses outside of our business associations.

Q14: Can we expand assistance to businesses who are not a part of our business associations, or expand OTBA? (Stewart)

Response: Yes, business assistance will be prioritized for those businesses not served by a business association.

Q15: Which of the proposed projects will actually serve condo communities? How will the multi-family rehab fund be used and how far will that amount really take us? Is that the right dollar amount or should it be increased (Searcy, Stewart)

Response: Condo associations will be eligible to apply for the Multifamily Rehab Fund and the Energy Efficient Upgrade Fund, which combined have \$2.5M. We will set up the funds as a supplemental source of funds and not the primary funding source to ensure the funds reach more residents.

Q16: Which projects invest in long-term outcomes concerning poverty reduction? (Kostiuk)

Response: Takoma/Langley Crossroads Business Incubator and Workforce Development, as well as potentially any projects funded out of the \$1.2 million in social services partnerships. The new, expanded library will also offer a variety of free resources for residents.

Q17: Is the eviction assistance program going to assist people BEFORE they fall behind in their payments? How is it preventative? (Stewart)

Response: Currently we utilize eviction prevention funds strategically to ensure that our residents most at risk for actual eviction are not forced from their homes. The funds are critical to prevent actual evictions, which are traumatic and life-altering. We rely on a network of County, non-profit, and property owner partners to accomplish this. Many of the City's property owners work closely with us to alert us to residents in need and they are connected with other resources as necessary. Providing direct cash assistance to residents, particularly renters, would be a way to assist people before they fall behind in their payments.