



Memorandum

To: Talisha Searcy, Mayor
Members of the Takoma Park City Council

Copy: Rob DiSpirito, City Manager

From: Ann Ciekot
Public Policy Partners

Date: April 22, 2024

Re: 2024 Maryland General Assembly Session Review

As a review of the General Assembly Session, this memo starts with an overview of legislative and budgetary actions in the context of the City of Takoma Park's priorities announced at the end of 2023.

Advances a Community of Belonging

- *Support legislative efforts to expand both public and private health insurance to people without legal documentation*
 - HB 728/SB 705 - Health Insurance - Qualified Resident Enrollment Program (Access to Care Act) – Will require the State to apply for a federal waiver to allow eligible individuals regardless of immigration status to purchase unsubsidized health insurance plan from the MD Health Benefit Exchange (January 2026 implementation). > **PASSED**
- *Additional funds for municipalities to address community mental health service needs through initiatives such as crisis intervention teams*
 - HB 933/SB 974 - Behavioral Health Crisis Response Services - 9-8-8 Trust Fund Fees – Will establish a fee of \$0.25 per phone line per month to fund the 988 Trust Fund (similar to fees that support 911 services). > **PASSED**
- *Support legislative and budget initiatives that make childcare services more accessible and affordable*

- Maryland Family Network is the state’s leading child care advocacy organization. Their successful work in protecting and expanding child care is detailed in their [2024 Public Policy Report](#).

Has a Fiscally Sustainable Government

- *Support legislation to change calculations to the homeowner’s and renter’s property tax credit programs*
 - HB 287/SB 342 - Property Tax - Renters' Property Tax Relief Program - Assets Calculation – Will establish parity in the asset calculations in determining eligibility between the homeowners and renters tax credit programs. > PASSED
- *Collaboratively explore potential sources of new revenue streams for municipalities such as the authority to collect a sales tax, receive a percentage of sales tax collected in the jurisdiction, receive a portion of revenue generated by alcohol and tobacco sales*
 - There were no bills that addressed this issue in a significant way that would benefit Takoma Park.
 - While not a revenue stream, HB 694/SB 482 - Governor's Office for Children - Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions, Governments, and Households Grant Program (ENOUGH Act of 2024) separates the Governor’s Office for Children from the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention and sets up a grant program designed to advance place-based strategies targeting child poverty. Government entities can be “lead partners” and “partnership organizations” include local law enforcement.

Is an Environmentally Sustainable Community

- *Support legislation that prohibits deceptive recycling claims on packaging and products*
- *Support the Responding to Emergency Needs from Extreme Weather (RENEW) Act and invest in disaster relief and preparedness*
- *Support progress on Climate Solutions with an eye toward the impact on new construction in the City*
- *Support storm water mitigation efforts, including funding and technical assistance geared to use in municipalities*
 - As usual, there were many pieces of legislation dealing with environmental issues. Of the most substantial were:
 - HB 864 - The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Plans (EmPOWER

Reform) updates Maryland's successful EmPOWER energy efficiency program, setting clear greenhouse gas reduction targets and introducing incentives for adopting efficient electric appliances and heating. This bill applies standards to multi-family buildings and provides protections to low-income tenants. > PASSED

- HB 449/ SB 148 - Comprehensive Flood Management Grant Program - Funding for Underserved and Overburdened Communities authorizes the Governor to include in the annual budget an appropriation for the comprehensive flood management grant program of up to \$20.0 million. The bill also requires that, for fiscal 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter, at least 40% of funding provided under the program be used for projects located in or directly benefiting underserved or overburdened communities. There is already funding allocated to this program, so it does not represent new money, but a focus on specific communities in need. > PASSED
- HB 397/SB 570 - Public Utilities - Thermal Energy Network Systems - Authorization and Establishment (Working for Accessible Renewable Maryland Thermal Heat (WARMTH) Act) authorizes an electric company, a gas company, or a water company to own, manage, and recover costs associated with a thermal energy network system, subject to Public Service Commission approval. > PASSED
- In the budget, the Governor re-allocated \$90 million to invest in critical climate change programs, including building electrification initiatives, installing Electric Vehicle chargers at multi-family buildings prioritizing low-and-moderate income communities, and electric school buses. > PASSED

Encourages Community Development for an Improved & Equitable Quality of Life

- *Pass legislation enabling local jurisdictions to enact Just Cause eviction laws*
 - HB 477/SB 644 - Landlord and Tenant - Residential Leases and Holdover Tenancies - Local Good Cause Termination Provisions – While this bill did not ultimately pass, HB 477 advanced farther than it has in the past. Changing “Just Cause” to “Good Cause” this bill as passed by the House would have enabled local jurisdictions to pass local “Good Cause” laws. There were two substantial amendments made to the bill: It would have created one standard that would have to be adopted by a local government instead of allowing each county to develop its own standards, and it created an exemption for small landlords renting only a few properties. The Session ended in a flurry of activities including the passage of

two other substantial bills addressing renters' rights. There was not the political will to bring another pro-tenant bill to a vote in the Senate. See below for information on other renter-related bills.

- *Support budget and legislative initiatives to significantly increase the stock of affordable housing, including housing for the missing middle and for people with disabilities*
 - HB 538 - Land Use – Affordable Housing – Zoning Density and Permitting (Housing Expansion and Affordability Act of 2024) requires local jurisdictions to allow new manufactured homes and modular dwellings in zones that allow single-family residential uses and increased densities and uses in specified zoning areas for “qualified projects” (which include specified amounts of affordable housing). The bill also prohibits a local jurisdiction from imposing unreasonable limitations or requirements on a qualified project or requiring a qualified project to be reviewed at more than a specified number of public hearings. Finally, it establishes a Historic Property Revitalization Director within the MD Department of Housing and Community Development. > **PASSED**
 - HB 599 - Maryland Community Investment Corporation - Establishment (Housing and Community Development Financing Act of 2024) establishes the Maryland Community Investment Corporation with the purpose to do all things necessary to qualify as a Community Development Entity and apply for designation as such, apply for an allocation of federal New Markets Tax Credits, and make investments and financial assistance available to low-income communities in the State. The bill also expands the eligible uses of the Strategic Demolition and Smart Growth Impact Fund in the DHCD to include credit enhancement. > **PASSED**
 - HB 7 - Housing Innovation Pilot Program and Housing Innovation Fund - Establishment (Housing Innovation Pilot Program Act of 2024) establishes the Housing Innovation Pilot Program and related special fund within DHCD with the purpose of creating opportunities for the State’s public housing authorities and county governments to increase the volume of housing production and rewarding counties pursuing innovative solutions to the problem of housing scarcity. “Housing innovation project” means a project to provide mixed-income, cross-subsidized housing that meets specified criteria. > **PASSED**
- *Support legislative efforts to create a source of funds for multi-family buildings including condominium rehabilitation*
 - HB 280/SB 446 - Local Government - Condominium and Homeowners

Associations - Repair and Rehabilitation Funds authorizes counties and municipalities to establish a local fund for the purpose of repairing or rehabilitating infrastructure within communities that are subject to the Maryland Condominium Act or the Maryland Homeowners Association Act. > **PASSED**

- *Pass legislation requiring the State Highway Administration to increase its responsiveness to the pedestrian and cyclist safety needs*
 - Several pieces of legislation address pedestrian and cyclist safety were introduced, but none passed.

Has an Engaged, Responsive, Service-Oriented Government

- *The City is undertaking a \$1.2 million capital project to renovate the community center. The renovation includes filling in the atrium area to provide residents in need of support with more privacy. The project will also allow for much needed office space and meeting rooms for mental health counselors to meet with residents*
 - Successful LBI request from the District 20 Team resulting in \$200,000 in capital grant assistance

In addition to Takoma's Park's stated priorities, housing policy is always an important issue. There were a number of bills that **passed** this Session related to renter's rights, including:

- HB 823/SB 689 - Melanie Nicholle Diaz Fire Safety Act – This bill establishes requirements regarding the installation of automatic smoke detectors and notices regarding the lack of automatic sprinkler systems in residential rental high-rise buildings and modifies existing provisions related to notification appliances for deaf or hard of hearing individuals to include people who are deafblind.
- HB 693/SB 481 - Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act of 2024 – This was the Governor's bill. It has several pieces:
 - Limits security deposits to one month's worth of rent (in most cases)
 - Creates a more uniform bad weather standard where evictions cannot take place
 - Creates the Office of Tenant and Landlord Affairs in the Department of Housing and Community Development
 - Increases surcharges assessed in civil cases in the District and Circuit courts and earmarks some of the revenue for eviction-related services
 - Establishes a tenant's right of first refusal prior to the sale of certain residential rental

property

- HB 1117/SB 946 - Tenant Safety Act of 2024 – This bill makes changes to the state’s rent escrow law by:
 - Establishing that a landlord that offers a dwelling unit for rent is deemed to warrant the dwelling “fit for human habitation”
 - Allowing tenants in the same building with the same issue to join their cases
 - Allowing tenants greater access to the process by making the amount of money needed to open a rent escrow case more affordable
 - Allowing prevailing tenants to recovery attorney’s fees
- HB 428/SB 370 - Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program and Fund – This bill establishes the Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program to provide rental assistance to eligible student households at community schools. There is \$5 million in the FY 2025 budget to start the program.
- HB 181/SB 19 - Failure to Pay Rent Proceedings - Shielding of Court Records – This bill requires the District Court, within 60 days after the final resolution of a failure to pay rent proceeding that did not result in a judgment of possession, to shield all related court records.
- HB 139/SB 171 - Landlord and Tenant - Notice of Utility Bills in Residential Leases - Gas and Electric Services – This bill requires landlords of large buildings to provide sufficient information about utility bills that will allow tenants to qualify for OHEP assistance.
- HB 93/SB 162 - Landlord and Tenant - Termination of Residential Lease - Limitation of Liability for Rent – This bill expands the health reasons a tenant can terminate a lease early and only owe up to two months of rent to include mental health conditions.

Also, as a member of the Maryland Municipal League, Takoma Park should be aware of the outcomes of their work, which can be found in their [Local Dispatch](#) online. Here’s a summary:

- HB 601/SB 442 - Street Racing and Exhibition Driving – Prohibited Acts, Enforcement, and Penalties defines "exhibition driving" and is prohibited on public roads in the State. Municipalities may also designate a "special event zone" for certain automotive events that occur on a roadway, which allows additional safety measures to be put in place. >
PASSED

- HB 282 - Speed Monitoring Systems - Agencies - Statements and Certificates of Violations was a priority for MML. It would have permitted municipalities that do not maintain a police force to use a technician to review speed camera images and sign the citations. The bill passed the House but did not come to vote in the Senate. This bill would not have had an impact on Takoma Park because it has its own police force.
- HB 1281/SB 14 - Economic Development - Tourism Zones - Designation and Benefits was a priority for MML. It will enable the state's 157 municipalities to establish Tourism Zones, allowing local jurisdictions to establish definitions for tourism businesses, provide certain local incentives, and set qualifications. > PASSED
- HB 571/SB 485 - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Modifications will change the implementation of the program: claims open now on July 1, 2026 (delayed from January 1, 2026) and for those employers that plan to use the State plan, mandatory contributions begin on July 1, 2025 (delayed from October 1, 2024). Also, for those employers that will use a third-party insurer, the State will levy an application fee to cover administrative costs. > PASSED
- HB 649/SB 525 - Labor and Employment - Equal Pay for Equal Work - Wage Range Transparency will require all employers in the State to include the wage range and benefits associated with a position when publishing a job posting. > PASSED
- SB 360 & SB 362 - FY 2025 Budget and Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) respectively – While the Senate passed a version of the budget and BRFA that would have reduced local highway user revenues (HUR) in FY 26 and FY 27, pushback from local governments gave support to the House of Delegates that resulted in the identification of new revenue sources to fund transportation and education moving forward to bring an additional \$350 million for the State. This allowed for HUR to be fully funded. > PASSED

Finally, for those interested in participating in any bill signing ceremonies, they are public events that take a few hours, but you get to be in a photo with the Governor, Lt. Governor, Senate President, and House Speaker along with others who advocated for passage of bills. The bill signing dates (subject to change) are:

- Thursday, April 25th, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- Thursday, May 9th, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- Thursday, May 16th, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

If there are particular bills for which you would be interested in being a part of the ceremony, keep your eye on the Governor's website and/or reach out to me. The list of bills to be signed on a given day is generally available one to two days ahead of time.

**Please note – we've gotten word from the Governor's office that the housing bills will be signed this week, April 25th.