

**CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND  
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING**

**MONDAY, JANUARY 9, 2022**

**MINUTES**

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**REPORT OF CLOSED SESSION OF DECEMBER 12, 2022**

The City Council convened in the Community Center Auditorium at 6:00 PM on Monday, December 12 to vote to convene in closed session pursuant to General Provisions Article, § 3-305(b)(7) and § 3-305(b)(9). Present: Mayor Searcy; Councilmembers Fulcher, Dyballa, Seamens, and Small; Absent: Councilmember Honzak and Councilmember Gibson.

Upon motion by Councilmember Fulcher, second by Councilmember Seamens, the Council voted to designate Councilmember Dyballa as a member who has taken the Maryland Open Meetings Act training. The motion carried unanimously.

Councilmember Seamens moved to convene in closed session to consult with counsel to obtain legal advice and to consider matters related to collective bargaining negotiations with the City's two unions. Councilmember Small seconded the motion. VOTING FOR: Mayor Searcy, Councilmembers Fulcher, Dyballa, Seamens, and Small; ABSENT: Councilmembers Gibson and Honzak.

The Council adjourned to the Hydrangea Room for the closed session. Present: Mayor Searcy, Councilmembers Fulcher, Dyballa, Gibson (via Zoom), Seamens, Honzak, and Small. Also present: City Manager Fox, Acting Deputy Managers Gregory Clark and Rosalind Grigsby, City Clerk Carpenter, City Attorney Skip Cornbrooks (via Zoom) and the City's labor attorney Garrett Wozniak (via Zoom).

The Council received advice from the two attorneys. No actions or votes were taken. The meeting adjourned at 9:24 pm.

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**JANUARY 9, 2022**

**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

**Present:** Mayor Searcy, Councilmember Fulcher, Councilmember Dyballa, Councilmember Gibson, Councilmember Seamens, Councilmember Honzak, Councilmember Small

**Also Present:** City Manager Fox, Acting Deputy City Managers Gregory Clark and Rosalind Grigsby, City Clerk Carpenter, HCD Director Eubanks, Finance Director Cheung, Police Chief DeVaul, Public Works Director Braithwaite, Acting Recreation Director Huffman, Communications Manager Wright, Human Resources Director Cannon, Library Director Jones, Information Systems Director Abbas

Mayor Searcy called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium of the Takoma Park Community Center, 7500 Maple Avenue.

## **AGENDA SCHEDULE UPDATE**

Mayor Searcy provided information on upcoming agendas.

## **COUNCIL ORIENTATION PRESENTATIONS**

(PowerPoint presentation attached.)

### **City Overview and Organizational Structure; City Manager's Office**

The City Manager provided an overview of the City's organizational structure, the roles of Council and the City Manager, and provided information on staffing in the City Manager's Office.

Councilmembers asked for clarification on the FTEs in the City Manager's Office and the status of the Deputy City Manager's position. There was also a question about the amount of time a position can be filled by an individual in an "acting" role.

### **City Clerk's Office**

The City Clerk summarized the duties of the City Clerk's Office.

A Councilmember requested a more explicit and robust orientation for new members of the City Council after future elections if not before.

## **Communications Department**

Communications Manager Wright presented information on the work of her office and on City TV's role in communications.

Councilmembers asked questions and made suggestions:

- Noted the lack of staff capacity in Communications,
- Suggested using lessons learned from the Direct Cash Assistance Program for future outreach opportunities,
- Suggested partnership with Council and community organizations to communicate with residents,
- Utilizing the website to push out information to residents,
- Using the proposed ARPA-funded community navigators to reach residents not already receiving information online.

## **Finance Department**

Finance Director Cheung described the work of her department and initiatives.

Council comments and suggestions:

- Noted the interest in pursuing the sustainable banking and finance work recommended by the Task Force on Sustainable Banking and Investments.
- There were questions about the two interactive budget tools being implemented (Balancing Act and Socrata) and interest in increasing transparency of the budget, particularly for average residents who are not immersed in the City's budget,
- Utilize the tools in future years at the right time in the fiscal year,
- Collect demographic data to find out who is using the tools, and learn if other cities have been successful in engaging lower income or less engaged residents.
- Have a good communications strategy about the tools to manage expectations.

## **Human Resources Department**

Human Resources Director Cannon provided the department overview.

Council asked questions or commented on:

- Length of time to fill positions,
- Training opportunities offered by Local Government Insurance Trust,
- Need for modernization or status of modernizing the department,
- Status of job descriptions and development of an employee handbook,
- Asked about how the department is viewed by staff
- Status of filling the department's vacant positions.

Council asked about vacancies across the City and whether all positions are being recruited for.

Mr. Fox said that only strategic hiring is being done at this time as he is looking at how to fill the FY 2023 budget deficit. Staff is looking at the budget to determine what projects cannot be completed this year and he has frozen hiring, in an effort to get the City where it needs to be by the end of the fiscal year.

More information was requested by Council, including clarification on the budget deficit described by Mr. Fox. A list of vacant positions was requested, as well as what positions and projects are on hold.

Mr. Fox was asked if new things are being funded that were not included in the adopted budget.

Mr. Small moved, and Ms. Dyballa seconded, a request to the City Manager to provide information on positions and projects on hold, and to provide the information within a week. The request included a list of vacant positions, length of vacancies, projects affected, and where we are in the process of hiring or holding positions.

The motion carried unanimously.

### **Information Systems**

Information Systems Director Abbas presented information on IT projects and operations.

### **Library**

Library Director Jessica Jones presented information on Library and Computer Center operations, temporarily located at the space on New Hampshire Avenue during reconstruction of the main facility.

Ms. Jones provided background on the Library redevelopment project and an update on the current status.

HCD Director Eubanks updated Council on the status of the construction project. Final permitting from the Department of Permitting Services is still pending but much progress has been made.

Council asked questions about options for using the temporary location as a permanent satellite location, the permitting process for the construction project, whether any problems or surprises have occurred with the temporary space, and suggested how to further engage Ward 5 residents with the Library.

There was a question about the request to the 20<sup>th</sup> District Delegation for a capital bond grant for the Library and whether the Council should have voted to approve the request first.

Ms. Jones explained that the grant funds may allow for redirecting to other uses some of the ARPA funds reserved for the project.

### **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Programs**

Mr. Fox noted that one year ago the ARPA budget was developed. The final rule from the Treasury Department enabled the City to take a \$10 million standard allowance to apply to areas of revenue loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The prior Council adopted a spending plan. Any changes would need to be approved by the Treasury Department.

Department heads presented information on major ARPA projects.

- Street Rehabilitation Public Works
- Energy Efficiency Upgrades: Weatherization and Electrification
- Community Center Renovation
- Recreation Center Redevelopment
- Emergency Rental Assistance
- Takoma-Langley Crossroads Business Incubator
- Multi-Family Housing Rehabilitation
- Municipal Broadband
- Mental Health Crisis Counselors
- Direct Cash Assistance

Councilmembers requested additional information, commented, and asked questions.

Ms. Grigsby will provide an updated ARPA budget table to the Council.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Council adjourned for the evening at 11:14 PM.