

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

MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2022

MINUTES

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 7:30 PM in the Auditorium of the Takoma Park Community Center, 7500 Maple Avenue.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

A resident of 7419 Aspen Court requested help with a series of housing-related issues at his apartment.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. Small offered congratulations for completion of the Hillwood Manor Playground and thanked Mayor Searcy and Public Works Director Braithwaite for their help in getting it completed. He announced a Ward 6 public safety meeting to take place at the Recreation Center. Mr. Small noted the value of community associations because they are closest to the residents and it means a lot when an association makes a request.

Ms. Dyballa announced service opportunities for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. She also noted that the stop sign would be installed on Ethan Allen at Elm Avenue on Saturday.

Ms. Honzak thanked those who attended the ribbon cutting for the primary care offices located in the Annex Building on the Washington Adventist Hospital campus. She encouraged people to learn about the practice. She thanked Chief DeVaul for scheduling the meeting at Essex House and announced additional service opportunities for Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Mayor Searcy said she will attend the Ward 6 public safety meeting. She thanked Adventist Healthcare for holding the grand opening and recognized Councilmember Dyballa, former Mayor Stewart and former Councilmember Kovar for advocating for the services to include behavioral health along with primary care in the same location.

CITY MANAGER COMMENTS

City Manager Fox announced that Ann Ciekot, the City's legislative advocate, will provide an update next week, since the General Assembly is back in session.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Mr. Small moved adoption of the minutes of November 21 and November 30. Ms. Dyballa seconded the motion. The minutes were adopted unanimously.

COUNCIL ORIENTATION PRESENTATIONS

(Presentation attached.)

Recreation Department

Acting Recreation Director Deborah Huffman presented information.

Council asked questions and commented. In response, Ms. Huffman offered the following:

- Fees were increased by 10% in 2022. Scholarships are available to anyone who qualifies. Once qualified, the family is eligible for scholarships for the full year. Scholarships are treated as lost revenue.
- Lee Jordan Field and Ed Wilhelm Field belong to Park and Planning. There is an agreement with the City that allows the City to permit and maintain the fields. Our leagues get priority, then the sports leagues in the community can request permits. Field rentals are limited to youth leagues.
- Major impediments to adding recreation programming are facilities, parking, and staff capacity.
- The Department is willing to do outreach to any of the area schools attended by Takoma Park students. Rolling Terrace Elementary is used as one of the Department's facilities.
- Transportation is not offered from schools to the Community Center or the Recreation Center.
- Recreation is not part of the tax duplication formula. The City gets \$88,000 a year from the Montgomery County Recreation Department.
- The Department does not offer scholarships for swimming. Before COVID, the Department had a swimming club.

- In response to a question as to what the advantage is of having our own recreation programs, Ms. Huffman said that location and a small-town feel are part of the advantage. The nearest County facility is at Long Branch.
- There was also a question about whether the County would provide recreation services in the City if we didn't provide them.

Housing and Community Development

Director David Eubanks responded to questions and comments.

- There was discussion about development potential along New Hampshire Avenue.
- Rental housing was discussed. Quality rental housing is important, along with increasing access to housing and maintaining housing affordability.
- There were questions about property maintenance code enforcement. The City's process begins with a courtesy notice. Usually there are 30 days to comply. After that, there is a notice of violation with a certain amount of time to cure the problem. It is not uncommon to give multiple extensions. The inspectors have to enforce the law we have. In addition to responding to complaints, inspectors also survey neighborhoods.
- Council wanted to review the courtesy notice.
- Mr. Gibson requested that the Council review Code Enforcement at a future meeting.

Regarding the contract with Montgomery County to provide multifamily housing inspections:

- The current contract is for three years.
- Annual or biannual inspections are done depending on violations found. There are requirements to respond to requests within a certain amount of time.
- During COVID, inspections were very limited. There will continue to be a backlog.
- If we wanted to increase inspections or augment them, the County would have to be willing to add staff, even if we are willing to pay more for the service.

Public Works and Stormwater

Public Works Director Braithwaite made her presentation. A separate presentation on the stormwater management program will be scheduled at a future meeting.

In response to a question about the sustainability program, Ms. Braithwaite explained that the program's focus on energy has been driven by the Climate Action Plan resolution. The City just received its updated greenhouse gas inventory.

Ms. Braithwaite's other responses to Council are below:

- Regarding traffic calming, the process is currently petition-based. Most of the speed humps, the traffic circles, and many stop signs were installed as part of a neighborhood-based traffic calming, rather than petition based.
- When requesting traffic calming, residents can say what type they want. Staff reviews the proposal and advises on what might work best.
- Regarding permeable pavement, the cost is more than five times the cost of a sidewalk.
- In response to a question about GIS capability, Ms. Braithwaite responded that there is GIS capability in the City but not much staff capacity. She said the Public Works Department needs a work order system based on a GIS platform. Getting a system has been a funding issue.
- In response to a question about CDBG-eligible areas in the city, Ms. Braithwaite said that Ward 5 and a tiny portion of Ward 6 are eligible.

Police Department

In response to a question about staffing, Chief DeVaul said there are four vacancies in the Department: two officers and two crossing guards.

Council requested that the City Manager provide a full list of staff vacancies by Monday.

Mr. Seamens moved that the City Manager should fill the vacant positions in the Police Department. Mr. Small seconded the motion.

Ms. Dyballa noted that Council had just asked for a full list of vacancies.

Mr. Seamens then suggested tabling the motion until the Council has the list. There was no objection.

Mayor Searcy noted that the Council will have a presentation on the financial health of the City on January 18.

Mr. Small moved, and Mr. Gibson seconded, that the City Manager provide the presentation in advance, no later than Friday, January 13. The Council approved the motion unanimously.

Chief DeVaul said that the Department is still working on the Public Safety Task Force recommendations.

In response to a request for data comparing the Takoma Park Police Department with other local departments, Chief DeVaul said that Hyattsville is more comparable to Takoma Park than is Gaithersburg or Rockville, which are larger but do not have full service departments. He suggested that it is better to focus on what we are doing in Takoma Park, rather than trying to compare our department to other departments. He said he will share statistics that were provided to the Public Safety Task Force that included some comparative data.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:20 PM.