

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

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2023

MINUTES

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

Also present: City Manager Fox, Acting Deputy City Manager Grigsby, Acting City Manager Clark, Finance Director Cheung, City Clerk Carpenter

The City Council convened at 7:30 PM in the Community Center Auditorium, 7500 Maple Avenue.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA / AGENDA SCHEDULING UPDATE

Ms. Searcy provided an update on future agendas.

FOR THE RECORD

Mr. Small offered an apology to the Mayor and Mr. Gibson for any perceived discourtesy about the efficacy of the procedures of the Council or Robert's rules

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The City Council was updated by Legislative Advocate Ann Ciekot on Maryland General Assembly legislative matters. As part of the report, Ms. Ciekot noted that the Library Bond Initiative had been submitted to the Delegation.

Ms. Searcy confirmed with City Manager Fox that the Council had not voted on the request for library funding. She said it fell completely out of the procedural process and the prior Council should have had an opportunity to approve it.

Mr. Small made a motion to withdraw the grant request until proper procedure is followed. Mr. Seamens seconded the motion.

Ms. Dyballa proposed a friendly amendment to hold rather than withdraw the request for grant funding, with no substantive activity to occur until the Council has had the opportunity to discuss the request.

Mr. Small and Mr. Seamens accepted the modification to their amendment.

The Council voted 7-0 in favor of the motion.

Ms. Searcy said that she would add the grant request to the agenda for January 25.

Mr. Fox explained that when the library bond first came up, during ARPA program development, we thought to leverage ARPA funds by seeking other funding to add to the project. At that time, we talked with Ms. Ciekot about what funds might be available.

Ms. Ciekot then provided Council an explanation of the bill review process: consider the Council's priorities, figure out what is impactful to Takoma Park, whether the bill is viable, the bill sponsor, requests from legislators and legislative staff for the City to testify, and whether City testimony will make a difference.

Ms. Searcy asked Ms. Ciekot and the City Manager to provide the Council with a culled list of bills that were of interest to the Council and as well as the list of priority topics that was used to identify priorities. She offered to pull together a Council subcommittee to review bills if needed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Christine Simpson, Ward 1, encouraged the Council to take an interest in what was happening with the proposed development at the Takoma Metro. She thanked those who attended the WMATA hearing on proposed parking and bus bay changes at Takoma Metro.

Anderson Quintanilla, New Hampshire Avenue, commented that he would like to get involved in local government.

Brendan Smith, Ward 3 resident, Arts and Humanities Coordinator, and President of AFSCME 3399, commented on the need for open communication between the employees and the City Manager. He stated that there was a hiring freeze that was implemented without notification to AFSCME or the Council. Mr. Smith stated that employees were expected to do the work of jobs that were vacant and were experiencing low morale due to stress. Mr. Smith read a resolution approved by the Union in regards to the hiring freeze. Mr. Smith asked the Council to approve the labor consultant contract that was started by Kate Stewart and the former Council to work to resolve the issues mentioned.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mr. Small stated that the issues introduced by Mr. Smith were important to him. He said he was a big proponent of the rule based systems and if the rules were applied arbitrarily you end up with favor, not privilege.

Mr. Seamens requested a copy of the latest equipment replacement reserve in preparation for the budget process.

Ms. Dyballa thanked the Police Department and Mr. Small for the Ward 6 public safety meeting. She announced that a new stop sign was installed at Ethan Allen and Elm Avenues. She requested for more police attention at the intersection as well as temporary signage. She thanked the people that worked on Dorothy Woods and Takoma Woods. Ms. Dyballa requested an update on the union contract negotiations from the City Manager.

Mr. Gibson thanked the public for their comments. He thanked Friends of Dorothy Woods for their work. He also thanked the Police Department and Mr. Small for the Ward 6 public safety meeting. He announced a tentative Ward 3 meeting to be held on January 26.

Ms. Honzak commented on a racial healing conference that she and Ms. Fulcher attended. She said it was an amazing event. She would like to know more about the City's work on racial equity. She thanked the Chief for coming to the Essex House to talk through some issues. She thanked the people that came out to comment and said that she would like to see more community youth participation. Ms. Honzak thanked Mr. Smith and staff for bearing with the Council as they work to address their concerns.

Ms. Fulcher commented on the Takoma Woods clean-up. She said the current artwork on display in the Community Center is amazing.

Ms. Searcy thanked all who served for Martin Luther King Day. She said she served as a keynote speaker for a Fair Housing Symposium. She also attended the Maryland Municipal League roundtable meeting on childhood hunger, the 46th Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Breakfast, and the Takoma Metro meeting. In response to comments from AFSCME, Ms. Searcy commented that it is critical to make Takoma Park a great place to work.

CITY MANAGER COMMENTS

There were no City Manager comments.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

The December 7, 2022 minutes were tabled until next week to allow time for revisions. No other minutes were adopted.

PRESENTATION

1. Fiscal Health of the City

Susan Cheung, Finance Director gave an overview of the fiscal financial health of the City. (Presentation attached.)

Mr. Small questioned the way the budget is presented.

There was a question about the way the library project accounting is shown.

Ms. Dyballa requested the FY 2023 second quarter financial report and the projections for the rest of the year that led Mr. Fox to require budget reductions from staff.

Mr. Fox explained his concerns about ending the year with a substantial deficit.

Ms. Searcy said that it was important to make clear what was the true deficit. She expressed concern that the 2023 budget is being presented in a skewed way.

Mr. Seamens proposed lifting the hiring freeze and returning to the budget that the Council approved.

Mr. Seamens moved to lift the hiring freeze. Ms. Fulcher seconded the motion. The motion carried. (VOTING FOR: Searcy, Fulcher, Dyballa, Seamens, Honzak, Small; VOTING AGAINST: Gibson).

Councilmembers requested more information on finding new sources of revenue and a substantial overview of the big picture to understand what is the actual fiscal health of the City.

ADJOURNMENT

The Council adjourned for the evening at 10:51 PM.