

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

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2023

MINUTES

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

Also present: Acting Deputy City Manager Grigsby, Public Works Director Braithwaite, 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: Proclamation of Lee Jordan Day (February 23)

Ms. Searcy read the proclamation. (Proclamation attached.)

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The City Council received an update from Legislative Advocate Ann Ciekot.

Ms. Dyballa requested to have the City provide testimony on the Energy Efficiency Standards bill sponsored by Delegate Charkoudian.

Ms. Searcy stated that more testimony may be needed on the Safe Access for All Roads Act (HB70).

PUBLIC HEARING

1. Traffic Calming – Second Avenue Speed Hump

Mary Jane Muchui commented in opposition to installing any additional speed humps or bump outs.

Abbey Caliceux spoke in support of the speed hump. She was the petition circulator. She stated that there were young children that live on the street and she hoped that a speed hump would slow vehicle speed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON VOTING ITEMS

There were none.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS

Paul Huebner, Ward 3, urged the Council to restructure the City government and achieve financial stability. He urged the City Council to pay attention to the Finance Director's presentation on the fiscal health of the City.

Karen Elrich, Ward 5, thanked the Council for their work in serving the community. She urged the Council to take note of where the City has been how it got here before moving forward in hiring a new City Manager. She asked for an explanation in an open public meeting as to why the City Manager suddenly resigned. She said she hoped that the new Council can put an end to the pattern of closed meetings. Ms. Elrich said that the number of secret meetings held over the past six months does not engender trust and confidence.

Sue Miller, Ward 3, said that some of the Council campaigned on the promise of increased transparency, accountability, and community engagement. She said that when going through the hiring process for a new City Manager, the Council now had the opportunity to act and move the City in the direction of the promises made during the election campaign. Ms. Miller noted that the hiring process of City Managers in cities such as Gaithersburg, Cambridge, Bristol, and Laredo that involved public interviews.

Tom Gagliardo, Ward 1, stated that he concurred with the comments made by Mr. Huebner, Ms. Elrich, and Ms. Miller. He asked the Council to engage with residents and find out the best way to meet the community's needs.

Mary Jane Muchui stated that gentrification was overtaking Takoma Park. She asked the Council to hire someone that has empathy for people who function differently.

Judy Rosenthal said that she was representing the Food Forest Group of the Climate Action Coffee in Takoma Park. She explained the purpose of a food forest and announced a February 25 work day to prepare for a food forest planting at Takoma Park Elementary.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Jason Small commented on his education and the different government positions he held over the years. He said that he assumed that people did not pay attention to other wards in the City

and that there were other people that live in the City. He said that there was more to a person than where they received their education, their expertise, or career.

Mr. Gibson commented on the food forest event. He remarked on the public comment process. He finds it stilted and not conducive to dialogue.

Mr. Seamens thanked the commenters. He reported that the Piney Branch Pool boiler needs to be replaced. The pool will remain closed until the replacement is located and installed.

Ms. Honzak thanked people for their comments. She said the Councilmembers are all wanting to do their best to have office hours or meet with groups. The Council is open to those dialogues. She said she values residents' concrete and specific suggestions.

Ms. Dyballa asked to receive an update on the status of the 10-year financial forecast and the online budget tool.

Ms. Searcy said that these were difficult times trying to navigate through issues with the resignation of the City Manager. She looks forward to working with the community in thinking about priorities and recruiting and retaining a City Manager. She said she values the feedback from the community and that she is committed to equity in hearing all the voices in the community.

CITY MANAGER COMMENTS

Ms. Grigsby noted that Acting Deputy City Manager Clark is not able to attend tonight's meeting.

PRESENTATION

2. 2022 Election Report and Debrief

Matthew Ling, Takoma Park Board of Election Chair, introduced himself and gave a brief overview of the Board of Election's report on the 2022 Election. (Report attached.)

Ms. Honzak said that she was pleased to see an increase in voter turnout in Ward 5 and asked about ideas on what more can be done. She asked about the election budget in comparison to other municipalities of the same size.

Mr. Gibson asked about staff time spent on the election.

Ms. Dyballa asked about the number of volunteer hours and whether the postal service was an issue. Mr. Ling indicated that there were no problems with the post office. A few ballots did not get delivered but were replaced.

Ms. Searcy noted the problem of confusion with county ballots and city ballots being a separate process. Additionally, we need to do more legwork ahead of time or have voting at the Recreation Center or elsewhere in Ward 6.

Councilmembers suggested that the Board be more proactive with multifamily buildings, educating residents, and getting people registered in advance so that they receive ballots in the mail.

Mr. Seamens requested a list of write-in votes.

Mr. Ling stated that the board was working on a survey to send out to all the candidates. He invited the Council to share their thoughts with the Board by email or to join in on a meeting.

3. Single Reading Ordinance Authorizing the Mayor to Execute an Amendment to the City Attorney's Contract

Ms. Honzak moved the ordinance, seconded by Ms. Fulcher. (VOTING FOR: Searcy, Fulcher, Dyballa, Gibson, Seamens; ABSENT: Small.)

Ordinance 2023-2 (attached)

4. Consent Agenda

The consent agenda was moved by Councilmember Honzak and seconded by Councilmember Fulcher. The motion carried (VOTING FOR: Searcy, Fulcher, Dyballa, Gibson, Seamens, Honzak; ABSENT: Small).

Resolution 2023-3 Providing for Appointment to the Arts and Humanities Committee (Rick Henry, Ward 3)

Resolution 2023-3 (attached)

Resolution 2023-4 Providing for Appointment to the Board of Elections (Joseph Goldman, Ward 1)

Resolution 2023-3 (attached)

Resolution 2023-5 Providing for Appointment to the Emergency Preparedness Committee (Frank Disimino, Ward 4)

Resolution 2023-5 (attached)

Resolution 2023-6 Providing for Appointment to the Ethics Commission (Mark Samburg, Ward 1)

Resolution 2023-6 (attached)

Resolution 2023-7 Providing for Appointments to the Grants Review Committee (Louise Klees-Wallace, Ward 5; Damaris Wanjiku, Ward 5)

Resolution 2023-7 (attached)

Resolution 2023-8 Providing for Appointments to the Sustainable Maryland Committee (Maggie Holland, Ward 3; Melinda Ulloa, Ward 5)

Resolution 2023-8 (attached)

5. Traffic Calming – Second Avenue Speed Bump

Ms. Braithwaite gave a brief overview of the traffic calming request. She said that all the traffic calming request requirements were met, and the public hearing took place earlier in the evening. that the public hearing had taken place. Ms. Braithwaite informed the Council that a standard Montgomery County speed hump was being recommended by staff.

In response to a question, Ms. Braithwaite said that completion of a traffic study is not a mandatory part of the process.

6. Overview of Traffic Calming and Sidewalk Request Processes

Ms. Braithwaite gave an overview on the traffic calming and sidewalk request process. She said that the goal is to provide the Council with enough background information to understand how the City got to where it is now in hopes that it would assist the Council with future discussion on making any changes or revisions to the current process. (Presentation attached.)

Ms. Braithwaite stated that there was a benefit to the neighborhood-initiated process but that there were some drawbacks as it can be a burden on the petitioner to plan a meeting to discuss the request.

Ms. Dyballa asked about speed humps and access for bicycles. She is interested in forming a subgroup to look at the recommendations from staff and the Complete Safe Streets Committee. She noted a request from a resident to go to a 15-mph speed limit.

Mr. Gibson commented on a previous sidewalk project that was to take place on Gude Avenue. He said that the Gude Avenue project was an example of one size does not fit all. He said that environmental impacts of sidewalks needed to be considered.

Ms. Braithwaite suggested that school zones would be top priority for sidewalks to enable students to go to school, and access to transit options. The City has made great improvements in this. We have some gaps related to school zones.

Mayor Searcy noted that there is a growing amount of information that we can reference. Montgomery County is keeping data. There are some areas that we know are problems, such as in Ward 6 around the Purple Line construction area. In thinking through priorities, routes to school are important as well as access to amenities, such as parks. We should prioritize access to connectivity points.

In response to a question from Councilmember Fulcher, Ms. Braithwaite indicated that she can look at the speed humps on the roads with bike sharrows to see if cutouts for bicycles might be an option.

Responding to another question, Ms. Braithwaite said that she does not expect much change in ADA requirements that would affect our sidewalk work. Going forward, sidewalk issues will be addressed when street work is done. People can let us know when there are hazards.

Ms. Fulcher asked how long installation of sidewalks takes after approval.

Ms. Braithwaite said it can take a year or two. We have two or three firms that we use. We have two major engineering firms that have been a good match with the City and a five-year on call contract for street and sidewalk construction. NZI is the current contractor. The engineering firms do the ADA compliance oversight.

Councilmember Honzak would like to see a map of where sidewalks do not exist. She said a primary concern is an equity one. She would want to prioritize having every street having one sidewalk. The Flower Avenue sidewalks made a huge difference for our residents.

She noted that Ward 5 is full of narrow streets going down to the creek and she is concerned about safety.

Ms. Braithwaite said it is a real challenge. In a perfect world, you would look at the broader area and creation of one-way streets. They must be done in tandem but getting agreement can be a real challenge. She noted that she is the only one who handles traffic calming.

Mr. Gibson asked what the process for prioritizing repairs to streets and sidewalks is.

Ms. Braithwaite responded that the resident requested work on Boyd Avenue would need to be added to the capital budget in order to prioritize it. The work on Gude Avenue was is an ADA compliance issue. The City is required to make a sidewalk ADA compliant when doing repairs.

Councilmember Dyballa asked to receive a copy of the ADA compliance guideline information.

Mayor Searcy commended Ms. Braithwaite for being able to tackle other issues during sidewalk project planning in order to do as much as possible at one time.

Recommended Board/Committee Appointments

Ms. Fulcher announced the recommendations for appointment to the Nuclear-Free Takoma Park Committee and the Commission on Landlord-Tenant Affairs.

Adjournment

The City Council adjourned for the evening at 11:02 p.m.

Minutes adopted June 14, 2023.