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City of Takoma Park

Montgomery Delegation Joint Priorities Hearing November 12, 2020

Testimony of Mayor Kate Stewart

Good evening. I am glad to join all of you this evening. One year ago, the City of Takoma Park presented its priorities to the Montgomery Delegation:

- Mitigate the impacts of Purple Line construction on area small businesses and low and middle-income home owners and renters
- Support State Highway improvements to New Hampshire Avenue
- Improve transportation safety and support Vision Zero
- Support building community resiliency and mitigating the impacts of climate change

None of us could have imagined the pandemic now upon us and how the pandemic's health and economic impacts have exacerbated problems we were already facing as a municipality.

This year we want to share what we need and what we are doing and ask for your assistance and partnership. This year we have four priorities:

- **First, help for our small businesses.** As Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins and the other members of the District 20 team know, \$2 million that was designated by the Maryland General Assembly last year to help small businesses along the Purple Line is sitting untouched, while the businesses need the funds more than ever due to the financial hits of the pandemic. Thank you for your leadership on having the funds designated and for your ongoing push to have Governor Hogan release the funds. We will continue to work with you to get the funds to the businesses that need them. And, for our businesses not along the Purple Line route, they need help as well to survive the economic impacts of the pandemic. Funding that is simple to apply for and does not require relationships with banks or significant legal review is best.
- **Second, help in mitigating the impacts of climate change and this means passing Community Choice Energy.** Thank you to Delegate Charkoudian for her work on CCE. The City strongly supports Community Choice Energy. We have already begun to witness the impact of climate change in our community, including more severe and

frequent storms, greater rainfall, increased flooding. CCE gives Maryland's counties and municipalities an important and necessary tool to address these very real challenges, by authorizing counties and municipalities to negotiate, on behalf of their residents, for purchase of electricity, allowing local governments to negotiate lower rates and purchase renewably sourced energy with less GHG emissions. It allows communities that have made significant commitments to reducing GHG emissions to move efficiently and effectively in that direction. Takoma Park has been a leader among Maryland communities in responding to the challenges of climate change and in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through our many local policies and actions. In a recent analysis of options to meet our City's commitment to reduce GHG emissions by 2035, The Cadmus Group rated Community Choice Energy as a top strategy to get us there.

- **Third, reimagining public safety and addressing community mental health needs.** Thank you, Senator Will Smith for your leadership on holding the hearings this summer on addressing the problems with the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights, and other State laws related to policing and to Delegate Moon and the entire D20 team for their work on these issues. I had the opportunity to give testimony and would like to underscore one important component – made ever more clear during this pandemic – is the need for better mental health services. This is an area where the State must take leadership to ensure there is a continuum of mental health care, from community mental health staff to outpatient care, to adequate inpatient behavioral health care for our residents.

Finally – but no less important – is financial assistance and flexibility:

- **Financial assistance.** The pandemic and its impacts are likely to continue through 2021. Great attention will be needed to make sure funds and support systems are in place to help local jurisdictions, residents and businesses. This is the rainy day that rainy day funds are for. As a small municipality, our funds are extremely limited. We have identified \$634,000 in Covid-19 funding to help our businesses and residents, and our mini-grant program and hand's on assistance have been critical for them, but they need so much more. Renters need protection from eviction and most of our businesses need money to pay rent. The State can help. We appreciate the assistance that has been provided so far, but much more is needed.
- **Financial flexibility for our municipality.** We are a small city with a small budget. Under Maryland law, municipalities have very limited authority in the ways they may generate revenue – they really only have flexibility in setting a property tax rate and applying for grants. Municipalities need to have taxing and other revenue-generating authority similar to that of Maryland's counties. As you consider legislation that involves local government funding mechanisms and grant opportunities, please ensure that municipalities are eligible for these programs.

- **Enforceable tax duplication provisions.** As we look to find ways to help our residents and businesses in need during this pandemic, we absolutely need the full amount of tax duplication funds that are due us from Montgomery County. Under State law, Montgomery County is a “shall” county when it comes to addressing tax duplication with its municipalities. Particularly in these difficult times for our residents, it is wrong that our residents are being taxed twice for services they receive from just one governmental entity. We understand that, given the pandemic, there may not be time to develop enforceable measures to the tax duplication section of the Maryland Property Tax Code this Session this year. We will want to work with you on those provisions in the future.

Thank you for your work on behalf of our community. I look forward to working with you on these priorities of the City of Takoma Park.