



CITY OF TAKOMA PARK

City Manager Comments

Report for City Council Meeting of October 2, 2019

Information to Share

Safe Routes to School Grant Award

Congratulations are in order once again for the Safe Routes to School Program in Takoma Park. The "Takoma Park Improvement Project 2020" was awarded \$86,494.00, representing the 80% funding from the State Highway Administration. The budget includes coordinator salary, non-infrastructure activities and the iCan Shine Bike Camp for two years. This is the 10th consecutive award for Takoma Park since 2007. The City has received Safe Routes funding in every grant cycle since the beginning of the program.

Huge kudos to **Lucy Neher**, Special Projects Coordinator, for her work on securing these funds and continuously improving safety for everyone in our community and in schools within and just outside of Takoma Park! And thanks to Lucy as well for today's Walk to School Day activities!

Congrats to RS Automotive!

Takoma Park's very own RS Automotive open the nation's first fully converted gas-to-electric refueling station last week! The refueling station hosts a state-of-the-art, high-powered (HP), 200 kilowatt (kw), four dispenser system, delivering 50 kws and higher for EV charging. The station allows four EVs to charge simultaneously within 20 to 30 minutes under an illuminated canopy. A new 200 kw/HP charging system with DC fast charging capability is in place to support the EV station along with a certified repair facility that can handle all aspects of servicing, including battery pack replacement and disposal, plus a fully stocked and automated convenience store.

Congratulations to RS Automotive owner Depeswar Doley and family! Thank you for taking this wonderful step to help address climate change!

Lobby for Fair Tax Duplication Payments

County Executive – and former Takoma Park City Councilmember – Marc Elrich is holding five budget forums regarding the FY 2021 County Operating Budget. The forums are from 7-8:30 pm on Oct. 7, 21, and 30 and Nov. 7 and 13, at various locations around Montgomery County. The October 7th forum is at the new Wheaton Library/Recreation Center and the October 30th one is in the Silver Spring Civic Building. This is the public's opportunity to let the County Executive know what should be included in his Proposed FY2021 Budget.

The County's FY2021 Budget should include fair tax duplication payments for Takoma Park. Letters have been sent in the past year regarding tax duplication payments for all County municipalities, for those that provide policing services, and from just Takoma Park. There has been virtually no response from the County Executive's office to these letters. Tax duplication payments have not been increased in years, despite increasing staff and service costs. Information and talking points will be updated on the City's webpage within several days.

Thriving Earth Exchange

We were pleased to learn earlier this week that the City has been selected to participate in the December project launch of the "[Thriving Earth Exchange](#)," which pairs up scientists with communities to work collaboratively to address an issue using a scientific approach. Our project proposal involved evaluating our existing stormwater infrastructure in light of increased rainfall

to determine the system's weak spots and potential areas of likely over-capacity. We look forward to going through the process and benefitting from our participation in the Exchange. Thanks to Councilmember Dyballa for alerting staff about the opportunity!

Ward Six Traffic Issues

Ward Six has been hit particularly hard with traffic trying to avoid or get through the construction areas associated with the Purple Line construction project. City staff has been working to document problems, identify ways to approach solutions to traffic related to the construction in the short term, and ways to protect communities and sanity in the long term when the construction is complete. Some traffic counts have been done, we have police officers driving through and observing the area, we are reaching out to the property managers of the shopping centers to work with them on site-specific traffic issues, and – most importantly – we are looking to get financial support for traffic engineering consulting so that appropriate and effective measures can be made to address the issues. There needs to be a lot of work on this and it will need to be a multi-pronged effort.

Right of First Refusal Properties

When rental properties are placed for sale in the City of Takoma Park, the tenant(s), the City, and Montgomery County all have the opportunity to purchase the property under City and County law. The owner of the property must follow the applicable laws and provide notice. City staff ensure that the correct processes are followed and notices given. Staff also provide advice as to whether or not the City may wish to exercise its right to purchase the property. If a property looks like it might be appropriate for City purchase (guided by City policy and goals), information on the property will be shared with Council for a decision. Recently, the following properties were determined to not meet the criteria for City purchase:

- *7611 Maple Ave (single condo unit)*
- *408 Elm Ave (single family residence)*

October Marks the Start of the Maryland STEM Festival

The Maryland STEM Festival is a month-long celebration of science, technology, engineering and mathematics that takes place every fall. There will be hundreds of events focused on fun, interactive science learning opportunities taking place throughout Maryland for students, families, friends, STEM professionals, and teachers to enjoy.

The City has partnered with the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) to bring Transportation Day to Takoma Park as part of the MD STEM Festival. Students of all ages are invited to participate in interactive transportation activities that explain the fundamentals of traffic safety, engineering, and traveling around town by all modes - walking, biking, driving, and using transit.

Date: Saturday, October 19
Time: 3:30 - 5:00 PM
Location: Takoma Park Recreation Center
[7315 New Hampshire Avenue](#)

Finance Department Reorganization

As the City's services have grown over the years, so too have the responsibilities and duties required in our administrative departments to support the growth, namely Human Resources and Finance. Last year, a position was added in Human Resources to help address the workload issues. However, no changes have been made in Finance in the number of FTEs or the position duties and titles in quite some time.

In recent years, we have moved toward newer and more complex budgeting and finance systems which require different skill sets and duties than those associated with some current positions. Many of these duties are confidential in nature, involving personnel issues related to benefits, workers' compensation, garnishments, etc. More importantly, because of the nature of the existing positions, we do not have backup capacity for some of the most important duties in the City like payroll processing, accounts payable, and a number of essential responsibilities of the Finance Director. Basically, there are two positions for which there is no one able to fill in if the staffperson is absent.

Following the announcement of an impending retirement of a Senior Accounting Assistant and an unsuccessful recruitment process for the Budget Specialist position, which has been vacant for many months, staff was presented with an opportunity to reevaluate needs and how they might be more effectively met. In light of these needs, we plan to change the essential duties and titles of two positions in Finance: 1) change one of the two Senior Accounting Assistant positions to a Payroll and Accounting Specialist, and 2) change the Budget Specialist position to a Budget and Accounting Manager position.

Since we are nearing the very time and labor-intensive process of developing the Fiscal Year 2021 budget, the need to make these changes and recruit for the positions is urgent.

Regarding the transition of one of the two Senior Accounting Assistant positions to a Payroll and Accounting Specialist, we are currently recruiting for the new position. The existing Senior Accounting Specialist is set to retire at the end of the calendar year and we need to hire for the new position in order to facilitate knowledge transfer from the retiring staff person (who has been with the City for 27 years). Regarding the newly created Budget and Accounting Manager position, we hope to begin advertising as soon as this week.

The associated budget modifications will be included in the next Budget Amendment that comes before Council for approval. For the current Fiscal Year, if we assume a hiring date for the Payroll and Accounting Specialist position of mid-October and a hiring date for the Budget and Accounting Manager position in early December, we expect that the personnel budget in the Finance Department for the current Fiscal Year would need to increase by about \$25,000. This accounts for a period of 2.5 months where we would essentially be "over-hired" to allow for knowledge transfer between the retiring Senior Accountant position and the new Payroll and Accounting Specialist, and about seven months of salary for the Budget and Accounting Manager.

The hiring range for the Budget and Accounting Manager would be about \$20,000 per year higher than the Budget Specialist position because of its reclassification, which would be the expected increase in the budget associated with the position in Fiscal Year 2021.

Hiring Update

We are currently advertising and/or interviewing for a number of positions including HR Coordinator, Payroll and Accounting Specialist, Parking Enforcement Officer, Photo Enforcement Specialist, Economic Development Intern, Landlord – Tenant Mediator, Mechanic, Recreation Program Leader, Sr. Accounting Assistant, Police Officer, Crossing Guard, and Youth Success Program Leader (Contract position).

My Schedule

I plan to attend the Maryland Municipal League (MML) Fall Conference, October 13-15. Deputy City Manager Jason Damweber and I will attend the International City County Management Association (ICMA) National Conference in Nashville, October 19-23.

Suzanne R. Ludlow, AICP, CPM
Takoma Park City Manager
7500 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912
301-891-7229
SuzanneL@takomaparkmd.gov