



CITY OF TAKOMA PARK

City Manager Comments

Report for City Council Meeting of October 30, 2019

Information to Share

Tax Duplication – Contact the County Executive!

County Executive Marc Elrich is holding budget forums to hear from residents on what should be included in the FY21 Montgomery County Budget. Please attend one of the budget forums or send an email to ocemail@montgomerycountymd.gov (copy council@takomaparkmd.gov) and let the County Executive know that fair tax duplication payments must be made to the City of Takoma Park now. We need a comprehensive look at tax duplication, but one step that needs immediate attention is to address the fact that the partial rebates being paid to Montgomery County municipalities have been frozen since 2012. Since that time, inflation has increased 11.83%. Takoma Park, on its own with no financial support from the County, provides road maintenance, police services, crossing guards and City park maintenance in Takoma Park. But, Takoma Park taxpayers pay taxes for those services to both the City and County. The overpayment to the County is not the County's money and so must be returned. The County Executive's office is preparing the proposed FY21 Budget over the next few months, so this is the time to insist on fair tax duplication payments to be included. More information can be found here: [Tax Duplication](#).

Report on Committee Survey Response Rate

To help inform the Council's review of the structure, role, function, and effectiveness of City boards, commissions, and committees, staff sent out a comprehensive survey to 167 current and former members. We are pleased to report that 100 surveys were completed by the deadline. The survey responses are being reviewed and a report will be provided in November.

Purple Line Community Advisory Team Meeting

City Staff attended the Purple Line Community Advisory Team (CAT) meeting on Tuesday, October 15th at Langley Park-McCormick Elementary School. Councilmember Searcy was also present. The meeting included a brief review of the project area for the Purple Line which, as you know, spans 16 miles from New Carrollton to Bethesda and connects the Metrorail, MARC, and existing bus services. This CAT meeting particularly focused on the University Boulevard segment from the Takoma-Langley Transit Center to Adelphi Road.

Construction for the Purple Line is approximately 20% complete. Work on University Boulevard primarily consists of median removal and utility relocation to make way for the Purple Line tracks which will be in the center of the road alongside vehicular traffic. In the next six months, there will be increased overhead utility work, traffic signal reconstruction, and timing alterations at University Boulevard and 23rd Avenue and University and New Hampshire Avenue. City staff cited concerns regarding cut through traffic on neighboring streets impacted by construction on University Boulevard. MDOT staff noted that cut through traffic is notoriously difficult to enforce, but will make greater efforts to work with City of Takoma Park, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County police to enforce speeding through these streets.

Residents who wish to stay informed on this project can sign up for Purple Line updates at www.purplelinemd.com, email outreach@pltcilc.com, or call the 24/7 hotline at (240) 424-5325. Services are available in English and Spanish.

On a related note, there are a number of efforts underway to have discussions concerning traffic issues stemming from the construction of the Purple Line. One meeting has been held with a representative of JBG's shopping center at New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard and efforts are being made to meet with a representative of the BF Saul property across New Hampshire Avenue. More importantly, a great deal of pressure is being placed by City and County officials to meet with the Maryland Department of Transportation and Purple Line Transit Partners. A date for a meeting has not yet been established, however.

Pedestrian Master Plan

City Staff also recently attended a Community Meeting for Montgomery County's upcoming Pedestrian Master Plan at the Montgomery County Planning Department in Silver Spring. The purpose of the Pedestrian Master Plan is to improve and enhance the pedestrian experience in Montgomery County to promote walking as a preferred means of travel for short trips within the County. It will recommend new and enhanced policies, design standards, regulations, and programming to improve the way that people travel throughout the County including traffic calming, accessibility, signal timing, and material selection. The plan will not provide funding for these recommendations and it must be allocated by local jurisdictions and elected officials. More information and opportunities for outreach can be found [here](#).

Clarification on Takoma Junction Process

Neighborhood Development Company has recently had preliminary consultations with the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC agenda item [documents](#) are posted on the County Development site). The next step in the process is for the plans to be considered by the County Planning Board, and then they will go back to the HPC for the Historic Area Work Permit. We wanted to clarify this as there has been some confusion about whether the plans would be back before the HPC again prior to going to the Planning Board. As a date for Planning Board consideration nears, the plans will be reviewed by the City Council and a resolution on the revised site plan considered.

Evaluation of City Streets

A component of the City's program for maintaining street pavement is the regular evaluation of surface conditions. The City Council allocates funds each year for the purpose of cyclically and systematically evaluating and maintaining City streets with a goal of resurfacing each street within a 20-year cycle or before the pavement conditions fall to "below fair" in the evaluation ratings. Falling "below fair" not only means that the street is in bad condition, but also that it will deteriorate at an exponentially higher rate than a street in "fair" or above condition and will be significantly more costly to repair since reconstruction costs far more than resurfacing.

The City completed Pavement Condition Evaluations in 2004, 2011 and most recently in June, 2016. The most recent report is available [here](#). These evaluations serve as the basis for scheduling resurfacing projects. It is important to note that moving a street up in the schedule due to complaints from residents means putting off addressing streets elsewhere in the City that have poorer ratings.

Dog Park Use by Commercial Operators

City staff had observed and received complaints about heavy use of the City's dog park by a commercial dog care business. While I understand the business did schedule enough staff to meet the requirements that there should be no more than three dogs to a person, the heavy use prompted staff to ask me for permission to post a "No Commercial Use" sign at the dog park, consistent with assumptions of the operation requirements of the park when the park was established. Remembering the discussions of Council about the expected use of the dog park when it was being considered, I approved the sign. Very quickly I heard from upset clients of the business which apparently does not have an alternative outdoor facility to use.

I have done some additional research into commercial use restrictions of public dog parks and options for allowing commercial use. Prohibition of commercial use at municipal dog parks is common. If it were to be permitted, there are options to be considered about when the park may be used and the permitting fees charged.

The Takoma Park dog park is relatively small. When it was constructed, there were discussions about whether or not there should be a membership requirement which could include a residency requirement and/or a fee paid by dog park users. There were also discussions of having certain hours for small dogs only, as the park is not large enough to have an area just for them. Any restrictions or membership processes add expense in administration and monitoring, and it was decided to try having the dog park open without these requirements and see how things might go.

While our parks are available for use by individuals, the City of Takoma Park rents out park facilities and rooms to groups and businesses for events. With groups and businesses, we charge a fee to offset costs and we look to ensure the facilities are available to rent by a range of groups within the city. We allow some regular or longer term rentals: sports leagues may rent out fields and gyms and we allowed a church whose building was under construction to rent the auditorium on Sunday mornings for the duration of the construction project.

If the Council wishes to allow for a rental agreement for the dog park, we can make those arrangements. Normally it would be part of a Council budget discussion, but it could be done on a trial basis, with more formal consideration during the FY21 budget process. We would need to determine the cost per hour and the days and hours that the dog park would be rented out. In speaking with staff, City residents tend to use the dog park most heavily before and after work and at lunch time. Rental of the facility might be limited to weekdays during the two hours from 9:30-11:30 am or 1 pm-3 pm. There would be a maximum number of dogs allowed, and there could be a choice of exclusive dog park use or shared use (allowing other users into the dog park at the same time). Consistent with other facility rentals, rental agreements would be on a first-come, first-served basis, the rentals would be for a set duration (eg semi-annual term), and charges for Takoma Park businesses would be lower than those for businesses located outside of Takoma Park.

There are other options we could choose for general use of the dog park. We could issue memberships, establish a fee system, or have limits on the number of dogs at a time, etc. These options would require additional staff time for administration and enforcement. If the Council wishes to move in this more complex direction, it would require time to develop the recommendations for Council consideration.

Halloween Safety

Halloween is an exciting time for children of all ages, but we want to make sure they understand how to keep themselves safe, whether they are with their parents or out with friends. I know that there is additional concern this year that road and utility work may make some of the roads less safe for trick-or-treaters. The Takoma Park Police Department will be paying additional attention to the safety of pedestrians crossing roads under construction this Halloween. Here are some general safety recommendations:

- Make sure your child's costume is bright and reflective since it will become dark outside during the course of their trick or treating. If it's not, consider putting reflective tape or striping on their costumes.
- Make sure their shoes fit well and their costumes are short enough that they don't find themselves tripping.

- Put your child's name, address and phone number somewhere on them, especially for little ones, in case they get separated from you.
- Review with your child "Stop-Drop-Roll" in case their costume comes in contact with fire.

When trick-or-treating, remind children:

- To use a flashlight so they can see and be seen by others.
- Stay in a group, walk slowly and communicate where they are going.
- Only trick-or-treat at homes that have a porch light on.
- Remain on well-lit streets and always use the sidewalk. If no sidewalk is available, walk at the farthest edge of the roadway facing traffic.
- Never cut across yards or use alleys.
- Never enter a stranger's home or car for a treat.
- Obey all traffic and pedestrian regulations.
- Always walk. Never run across a street.
- Only cross the street as a group in established crosswalks.
- Remove any mask or item that will limit eyesight before crossing a street, driveway or alley.
- Don't assume the right of way. Motorists may have trouble seeing trick-or-treaters. Just because one car stops, doesn't mean others will.
- Never consume unwrapped food items or open beverages that may be offered.
- No treats are to be eaten until they are thoroughly checked by an adult at home.
- Law Enforcement authorities should be notified immediately of any suspicious or unlawful activity.

Kudos

Kudos to all the staff involved in making this year's Monster Bash another successful event. In addition to Recreation staff, the event could not have happened without Police and Public Works. A special shout out to **John Webster** for organizing the event. (The new route worked out very well too!)

Hiring Update

We are currently advertising and/or interviewing for a number of positions including Budget and Accounting Manager, HR Coordinator, Audio/Visual Technician (part-time), Photo Enforcement Specialist, Economic Development Intern, Landlord – Tenant Mediator, Mechanic, Recreation Program Leader, Police Officer (entry-level and lateral), Crossing Guard, and Youth Success Program Leader (Contract position).

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