



City of Takoma Park

City Manager Comments

Report of July 29, 2020

Celebrating the 30 Year Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act

Thirty years ago, President George H.W. Bush signed into effect the major civil rights law for persons with disabilities. The law has allowed greatly enhanced participation in daily life for people with obvious and not obvious disabilities, and has also benefited everyone else. Basic infrastructure improvements such as elevators and sidewalks, and accessible bathrooms, buses, elevators and work spaces, have not only helped people with disabilities, but have allowed people pushing strollers and workers carrying boxes to be able to move about safely. And, the other provisions of the ADA have allowed all of us to interact with more people with more diverse experiences and expertise on a daily basis.

There is much left to be done to meet the goals of the ADA, though. Many facilities remain inaccessible or difficult to navigate to persons with disabilities, including our own library and many other buildings and spaces in Takoma Park. A resident of Victory Tower who cannot climb steps cannot visit the doctor across the street or take their clothes on a scooter into the laundromat a couple of blocks away. Continued work on public space accessibility is needed and renovation and new construction is needed to allow all of our residents to be able to be served in our community.

Public Information Act Process and Cost

Questions have been asked about a recent Public Information Act request that requires a large number of hours to process and for which the requester has been informed there will be a charge for the work to be completed. This is the standard process. The Takoma Park City Clerk receives Public Information Act requests, works with the City Attorney to determine the appropriate records to be provided, and usually works with Information Technology staff and then City staff and/or Councilmembers as appropriate to gather records to respond to the request. The law provides for up to two hours of work at no charge to respond to Public Information Act requests. Generally, if the request does not exceed about four hours of work, the City of Takoma Park has not charged. If, after the initial determination of the amount of work that will be required to respond to a request, it is clear that more time is required that would trigger a fee, the requester is contacted by either the City Clerk or City Attorney with that information and a cost estimate to see if the requester would like to narrow the request to avoid or lower the fee.

The City does not charge based on the topic of the request. Neither the City Council nor the City Manager are involved in determining the records to be searched, the search terms used, or the amount of time to review and process the records. This process allows responses to Public Information Act requests to be fair to all requesters and without bias. It also allows for reasonable recompense to the City for the work done when a request is time-consuming.

Books to Go!

In a little over three weeks, Library staff have checked out 1,003 books for patrons through our new "Books-To-Go" program, including 734 children's and young adult books, and 257 adult books. Emails and comments at our book pick-up station have been appreciative and gratifying as more and more residents take advantage of our efforts to provide print materials.

To find out how to check out books, go to: <http://www.takomapark.info/library/curbside.html>

A Nice Note

Our City Recreation staff recently received a nice note from a parent of an 11-year old participant in the City's online REConnect program. I've removed some identifying information, but here is the note:

Hello,

I am writing to express my deepest gratitude to the team who is leading the Rec-Connect program. My son, age 11, is having much-needed contact with kids his age. The counselor online is wisely allowing kids to just play with each other, games, challenges, charades. Simple stuff. She has been kind in explaining the challenge, and she gently gets out of the way for kids to just talk with each other. Brilliant, and very effective.

I never thought it would be so challenging for kids to just talk with each other during this pandemic. Allowing them time to do so online allows my extroverted child to relax, to be himself with others and his mood and outlook has improved as a result in participating in these sessions. By the way: my son also missed two classes in the session, and I received a call from a kind member of your staff asking if everything was ok. I was so impressed to receive this call, after all, you are running a FREE PROGRAM. This is simply amazing service, an amazing experience, thank you, Thank You, THANK YOU a million times over.

I also direct a summer program and your team has taught me a lot about how to build community. I am so proud to belong to the Takoma Park community.

Thank you, for a great program.

Takoma Junction Project Development Review

The City's Takoma Junction project remains in the County's technical development review process. As mentioned last week, once the Development Review Committee has completed its work, the project will not go directly to the Montgomery County Planning Board, but will instead come back to the City of Takoma Park for the next steps. Those next steps include professional technical review by City planning and engineering staff, as well as an analysis of the plans based on the criteria set by the City Council in Resolution 2018-41, and the Development Agreement and Ground Lease with Neighborhood Development Company. At some point in the future, the City Council will consider a resolution on the site plan that will provide recommendations to the Montgomery County Planning Board when it considers the project. Following action by the Planning Board, there will be follow up action by the Historic Preservation Commission and by the City regarding trees and stormwater.

I take the City staff's technical review of the plans very seriously. I began my professional career in 1986 as a planner reviewing site plans for the City of Rochester, New York. I am a credentialed planner through the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and have kept my credits up throughout my career with the City of Takoma Park. Areas of special interest include site planning, equity in planning, planning for disaster resilience, and transportation planning, particularly mass transit, freight delivery and ADA accessibility. On staff, we have professionals with expertise in environmental planning, civil engineering, bicycle planning and our City's Tree and Stormwater Ordinances. In addition to the technical review, as City Manager, I oversee the assessment of the project's compliance with the Council's Resolutions and Priorities and I provide information to the Council on economic development and budget matters.

Council Recess and Vacation Plan

The Council will be on summer recess from July 30 through September 15, 2020. While there will not be Council Meetings (unless a special meeting is called), work will continue by City staff. City facilities remain closed to the public but the Police Department entrance remains open. Many staff work remotely and staff continue to respond to phone calls and emails. During August, I hope to take some vacation time, and during that time, Deputy City Manager Jessica Clarke will be the Acting City Manager.