



## City of Takoma Park City Manager Comments

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### Report for City Council Meeting of March 18, 2020

#### ***Information to Share***

#### **Coronavirus (Covid-19) Update**

The Covid-19 pandemic is here and official restrictions and responses are being issued several times per day. It will get worse. And, it is likely to impact us for months.

As the number of cases surge, we will need to adapt in many difficult ways. I am pleased to have a strong Senior Leadership Team and dedicated staff working to serve the public as we face this health emergency. I am also pleased to work collaboratively with the City Councilmembers even as our regular means of communication must change. We are fortunate to be living in Maryland, which is being proactive, and in Montgomery County, which is also showing strong leadership. Ultimately how we get through this pandemic will depend on each of us doing the social distancing that is needed while working to help others.

I have taken several steps under the Emergency Ordinance adopted by the City Council last week. I changed staff schedules and working locations without providing the notice required by our collective bargaining agreements and procedures. I am paying some employees for the hours they would have worked if we weren't in a State of Emergency. I am not docking sick and vacation leave balances for employees in most cases. The collective bargaining agreements and Personnel Code are adopted by the City Council, so these emergency exceptions need to be noted.

I anticipate having to take some other actions primarily related to funds for emergency assistance. Most of those actions are adjusting budgeted funds among existing accounts. I am committed to being transparent about actions that are taken and continuing to work collaboratively with the City Council.

Today I ordered that the City's playground equipment be fenced off from use for the safety of our children and community. A statement was posted on the website tonight and we will be getting signs up in areas where people play to remind them of the need for social distancing.

The Takoma Park Police Department is doing a terrific job during this stressful time. Our police officers are the staff most likely to be interacting with residents who may have Covid-19 or residents who are facing mental distress. They are also having to learn all of the different rules and procedures that are being issued by the court systems. One of our officers has been called up for Maryland National Guard duty. I have been working very closely with Chief DeVaul through this period, given the special role of the Police Department in a public health emergency.

Our Public Works staff is here every day to collect the trash and do the physical work necessary to keep the community clean. They are also undertaking projects that are a little easier to do while other staff is away and traffic is lighter. But, it is stressful for them to be away from their families as they work.

Most of the City staff are working remotely if they can. We are providing tools for them to use and they are adjusting. We are also trying to keep morale up. This is difficult during any stressful time, but is particularly difficult when staff is isolated. Several of our Recreation Department staff members have been charged with developing remote team-building activities and other staff are looking to engage virtually with the public in recreational activities. Our Arts and Humanities and our Library staff are also looking at ways to get resources out to the public to help keep the community strong and upbeat.

Our Housing and Economic Development Department is very busy. They are dealing with families with housing issues made more difficult by the limits on interior inspections. They are also working hard to learn of and help coordinate financial and other assistance to our businesses and to help provide information to the many people who are suddenly unemployed. One of the biggest challenges ahead is the likely reuse of the Washington Adventist Hospital building for Covid-19 patients. We are discussing helping recruit cleaners, food service workers and vendors to help with getting the building ready and functioning if the decision is made to move forward at that location. And, hospitals are urging retired nurses to come back to work to address the pandemic surge that is on its way.

We will be getting a postcard out to every household within the week that directs people to the City website for information. The postcard will be in English, Spanish, Amharic and French. We want everyone to know we care, we have information for them, and we want to help. Please go to the City's website, [www.takomaparkmd.gov](http://www.takomaparkmd.gov), for information, links and resources. And, for more detailed and up-to-date health information, check the websites of the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov) and the [Montgomery County Health Department](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Health).