



City of Takoma Park **City Manager Comments**

Report of March 10, 2021

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021

Congress has just approved the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 stimulus bill, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and President Biden will sign it. The bill has provisions that have been well-covered in the press related to stimulus payments, additional unemployment payments and payments for many families with children. There are many other very interesting provisions in the 628-page bill, including significant help with mental health, rental assistance, child care and many other specific areas. One provision of particular interest to us is the allocation for local and state governments. **Takoma Park is slated to receive \$14.8 million** over two years to provide assistance to households and small businesses that have been hurt by pandemic-spurred economic pain. It can also go to offset declines in local government revenue and to assist with water, sewer and broadband infrastructure. **The funding very specifically cannot go to reduce property taxes by either rate reduction or credits.**

As we learn about what can and cannot be done with the funds, we will be drafting a strategic plan regarding the uses of the funds and timing on expenditures. The Council will need to approve the spending plan. **The funds must be spent by December 31, 2024.** The funds will come to the City of Takoma Park in two parts. Approximately \$7.4 million will be transferred to us from the State of Maryland within three months. The second \$7.4 million will be transferred one year later. We will have a special fund identified in the budget for these monies and will be tracking them closely for reporting purposes.

The amount of money is large and will require staff and technology to manage it properly. We want to get the funds to those who need them, in the way that is most helpful to them, and document all processes. Where we can, we will be allocating funds in ways that also help the City for the long-term, such as establishing the communications methods that best work with our residents and small business owners, arranging for technology improvements that will help in work across departments, leveraging County and State funds on large infrastructure improvements in Takoma Park, and developing additional connections with nonprofits so they may serve our community in an ongoing way for many years. Getting workforce development systems in place will allow residents to improve their financial situation for the future, which will allow them to continue to live in and contribute to Takoma Park. Small businesses that get the training and systems they need, in addition to immediate funds, will similarly be able to become fiscally sustainable and a community asset for decades to come.

This bill is a huge jolt of hope to our community and the nation and Takoma Park will rise to the task to do our part well.

COVID-19 Related Information

Vaccination appointments have been opening up faster than ever. Please work to get vaccinated as soon as you can! Refer to both the [Maryland Vaccine Website](#) and the [Montgomery County Vaccine Information](#) page to learn more and to pre-register if you are in a category that can do so. You can also call 240-777-2982 to pre-register with the County. There are also phone numbers on the State site that can be easier to use than the online registration sites. And, a hint: the vaccines are safe, but be prepared for a day of not feeling well after receiving a shot. There are recommendations to be well-hydrated before and after the shot. About 30% of people receiving the shots seem to have this day of not feeling well, while the rest have little effects from the shot other than maybe a sore arm. Whether you are affected or not, it is a small price to pay for being protected from dying and helping the whole community move out of this pandemic. Please get your shot as soon as it is available to you!

COVID-19 testing in Takoma Park

Even though all of the attention is on vaccinations right now, it is still important to have regular COVID-19 testing. Without regular testing, we won't know if there are increases in COVID-19 cases until people need to come to a doctor's office or hospital. Free, no appointment COVID-19 testing is being held on Saturdays at the Takoma Park Recreation Center, 7315 New Hampshire Avenue from 10 am to 5 pm. For this and other testing options, please see the information here: [Montgomery County Testing Sites.](#)

Update on COVID-19 Response

Each week, the City's COVID-19 Dashboard is updated. The most recent one is here: [COVID 19 Dashboard](#)

It has been a year since the NBA shut down, due to fears of the pandemic. Somehow, it wasn't real until the sports teams stopped. Two days later, the City of Takoma Park went to largely remote operations, which continues to this day. I want to thank my staff for the essential work they have done on behalf of Takoma Park, at great cost to themselves and their families. And I am so sad at all of the losses felt in this community, by our staffmembers, and by our country as a whole. The end of the pandemic is in sight, but we can never forget the scary times, the sadness, and the amazing strength of so many to keep serving and keep on carrying on.

Reimagining Public Safety Task Force

A lot of work is being done to get the [Reimagining Public Safety Task Force](#) up and running. We are putting information on the website about the background of each member. The first meeting of the group is scheduled for March 16 at 6:30 pm. At that meeting, there will be discussions with the members about their preferences for a meeting schedule. Almost all meetings will be viewable by the public. Information on the Task Force, members, meetings schedule, and background materials will be posted here: [Public Safety Task Force](#)

Update on Takoma Junction

After many years of work and review, all of the County and other agency development reviews of the City's Takoma Junction project are now completed, with the exception of the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) comments on the site plan and layby. The City is requesting that SHA expeditiously transmit its review comments so that the City of Takoma Park and the Montgomery County Planning Board can finalize their reviews of the project site plan. A major issue for the City is that the layby is the only means for the Takoma Park-Silver Spring Coop to receive deliveries that meets transportation safety standards, with or without the development project that is proposed on the City's lot. The project has many benefits for the City and not having the project move forward would result in a number of hardships on the City and the neighborhood. Information is posted on the City webpages regarding the project, including [Takoma Junction FAQs](#). A schedule for City and County consideration of the project is likely to be released soon.

Update on Hiring

Besides the search for a [new City Manager](#), there are some other key positions that we are working to fill. We are recruiting for a Housing and Community Development Director and we are nearing a decision on a new Public Works Deputy Director and a new Planner. Go to our [Careers](#) page to see our job openings.

National Security Breach

Last night Takoma Park was notified of a security breach at Verkada, our cloud-based security camera provider. Out of an abundance of caution, they have restricted access to their internal systems and have engaged law enforcement and security experts to investigate the incident.

In addition to Takoma Park, many corporations, government agencies, schools, and hospitals have been affected including Tesla, Cloudflare, Siemens, and Halifax Health. At this point, there is no indication that the City of Takoma Park's onsite systems or Verkada user accounts have been compromised. No Personally Identifiable Information (PII) associated with Takoma Park's videos has been compromised since we do not associate PII with the videos.

Takoma Park's response: As Verkada has done, we have changed the passwords of the limited number of staff that has access to this system. In addition, we will be following guidance provided by Verkada and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

Availability of Compost Still Restricted

One of the nice options that the City of Takoma Park offers its residents who have their food waste collected is the opportunity to collect up to five barrels of composted material to use in their gardens. Since the pandemic started, that opportunity has not been available. The location of the materials is within an area that is closed to the public to help our essential public works employees stay safe during the health emergency. We hope that we will be coming out of the pandemic restrictions soon and can return to offering this service.

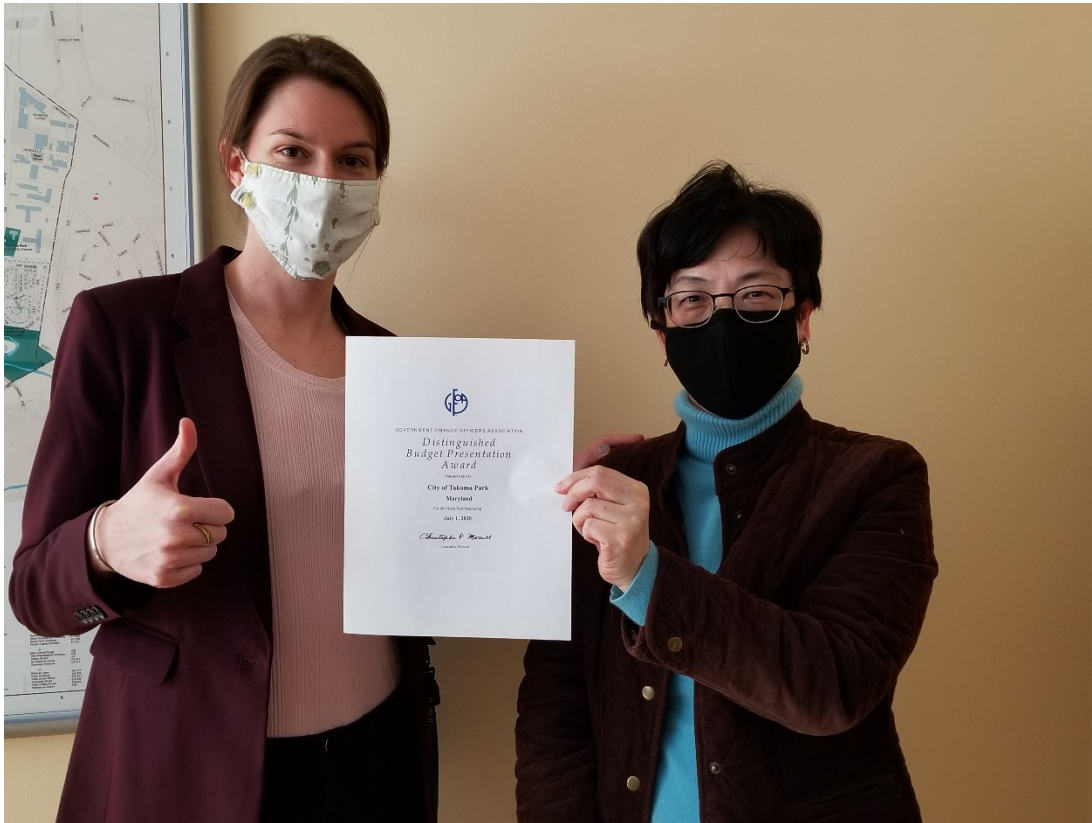
Government Finance Officers Association Award for Budget Excellence

I am SO happy to announce that the City of Takoma Park received the GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the FY21 budget!!

The Takoma Park budget document was prepared during the pandemic, by a very small staff, with many working remotely. It incorporated the many changes that were needed to reflect the sudden impacts of the pandemic, the establishment of the COVID-19 fund, and with detailed information on staff diversity and pay.

Every year, our budget document improves and I know the coming year's budget will be even better. However, **the remarkable work of Finance Director Susan Cheung, Budget and Accounting Manager Ron Kawaley, Communications Specialist Donna Wright and Deputy City Manager Jessica Clarke - under extreme circumstances - needs to be called out for its excellence.**

I am so proud to be associated with these fine staff!



Deputy City Manager Jessica Clarke and Finance Director Susan Cheung