



City of Takoma Park

## City Manager Robert DiSpirito

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### Update on the State Highway Administration's changes to the intersection at Carroll Ave. and Philadelphia Ave.

My staff and I met last week with SHA in a meeting that we called to discuss the multiple functional and safety problems with this intersection since SHA made changes to it. This includes the elimination of a west-bound traffic lane on Carroll Ave., altering the metrics of the intersection of Carroll and Philadelphia by widening a corner sidewalk, causing more difficulty in navigating it, creating conditions whereby vehicular traffic backs up and blocks the intersection and the coming and going of fire trucks and rescue apparatus from the adjacent Volunteer Fire Department. Vehicles try to drive around other vehicles that are stalled, creating a traffic pattern that conflicts and is thus unsafe. Vehicles then honk their horns and there is much driver frustration, especially at peak traffic hours. In the midst of all of this, pedestrians try to navigate crosswalks at this intersection that is all too often blocked with motor vehicles. All of these are serious concerns that the City has been bringing to SHA's attention. At the meeting last week, City staff made these points all over again, and with the District 3 Chief Engineer, Mr. Derek Gunn, in attendance. We were able to show photographs of accidents and described how they occurred as a result of poor design and implementation by SHA.

Mr. Gunn acknowledged at this meeting that SHA had not yet installed all of the signage that was to attend this project and that the old lines painted on the roadway were not adequately blacked out since they can still be seen. He conceded that these things would add to the confusion for drivers that's been occurring. City staff pointed out that there is a lack of "lane guide lines" in the intersection itself, and that drivers are making right turns onto Philadelphia from what is no longer a travel lane, which puts them in conflict with vehicles that are making that right-hand turn from the legitimate turn lane. It needs to be made clear to drivers that this space is *not* a turn lane, perhaps with much cross-hatching and other methods.

Mr. Gunn then committed to revisiting the overall plan in order to address all of our concerns and getting back to us, which we insisted needed to be soon. He agreed to my request that once all of SHA's additional work is completed, that SHA would provide the City with a written report providing their assessment of how functional and safe the intersection is at that point. I said that the City would then evaluate the performance of SHA's changes, and advise them of whether or not in our opinion even more would need to be done. Mr. Gunn agreed to this approach. Last Thursday, I called Mr. Gunn and had a one-on-one conversation with him to reinforce the City's points, and impress on him that this problem needs to be addressed as soon as possible. He agreed, and I said that I would be calling him again regularly for updates.

In my opinion, it remains to be seen whether the reduction of two west-bound travel lanes to one will ultimately work. And perhaps SHA's sidewalk alteration will have to be re-visited by SHA as well. It is my understanding that SHA will *not* reconsider their sidewalk construction component of their project until they feel they've completed the roadway and signage work that they have yet to do, and evaluate the final product. My staff and I will continue to keep the Mayor and Council and public informed regarding this matter.

### Finance:

The finance staff is currently processing the Levy Year 2023 Homeowners Property Tax Rebate and Renter Tax Rebate. Checks will be issued by the City to eligible homeowners and renters next week. A total of 81 households have benefited from the homeowner's program, receiving a combined check payment amount of \$121,889. In alignment with the City Council's dedication to providing affordable



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housing in Takoma Park, the supplement amount has increased since its establishment in 1991. Presently, the City's supplements constitute 50 percent of the State tax credit or the total tax due, whichever is lower.

In recent years, the City has also introduced the renters tax credit. For the Levy Year 2023, Takoma Park renters are receiving a payment totaling \$1,930 through the City's local supplemental program.

### HCD Department:

- Since May is National Bike Month, Safe Routes to School Coordinator Kaysi-Ann Webley and the Housing & Community Development Department have prepared a full slate of events and activities to promote safe biking in Takoma Park. These events include:
  - May 11: Learn to Ride Class at Takoma Junction Lot, 10am-1pm.
  - May 12: Bike Repair Pop-Up at Takoma Park Farmers Market.
  - May 15: Bike Repair Pop-Up at Crossroads Farmers Market.
  - May 17: Bike to Work Day with City sponsored stops at Sligo Creek, Takoma Bicycle, Takoma/Langley Crossroads.
- The Housing Division will be holding a Tenant Forum to bring renters in the City together to learn about Tenant Laws, Eviction Protections, Policies the City is considering, and resources for renters. The Forum is May 21st at 6:30pm at the Community Center Auditorium. Housing Initiative Partnership, Montgomery Housing Partnership, Department of Health and Human Services, and others will be staffing tables before and after to provide residents with information about their services.
- Timothy Gratton, Code Enforcement Officer, is coordinating with County Code Enforcement to address property maintenance in rental properties along Houston Court, working to address not only interior maintenance but also exterior issues that contribute to neighborhood health, safety, and overall cleanliness.

### Library:

- Phil Shapiro was named one of *Library Journal's* Movers and Shakers this year. 50 people are chosen annually for this title, which is nationally recognized. We are very proud of his achievement and wish him a speedy recovery after a successful major surgery last week.
- The Friends of the Takoma Park Maryland Library are holding a book sale at the Library on New Hampshire Avenue on Saturday, May 18th, from 10am-2pm. Their annual meeting, featuring speaker Marc Mauer, former Executive Director of The Sentencing Project, will follow on Monday, May 20, at 7pm at the Library as well.



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### Police:

#### Photo Enforcement Update:

- **Speed Camera Program:**

- City staff conducted a comprehensive review of our current speed camera deployments. Overall speed camera violations are down, which is a good thing. This means driver behavior has been corrected, which is the purpose of photo enforcement programs. The City has nine speed cameras deployed in the City. Five of the nine speed cameras have experienced a sharp decline in the number of violations observed.
- The reduction in violations at these locations is due to several factors including: corrected driver behavior (the purpose of the program) and some structural changes (the addition of the four-way stop sign on Ethan Allen at Elm Ave impacting both speed cameras on Ethan Allen, the addition of the four way stop sign at Carroll Ave and Lincoln Ave impacting the speed camera on Carroll, and purple line construction). The number of citations generated by these cameras does not justify having the cameras at these locations for traffic safety reasons. All five cameras are being taken out of service. We will periodically assess if reinstallation of the cameras may be needed.

- **Red light Camera Update:**

- We are pleased to announce that we are finally getting our red-light camera program up and running. SHA has finally approved the permits for our sites in the city and we expect to have all cameras installed and operational by mid-June. There will be a thirty-day period where warnings are issued to violators before citations are issued. Seven cameras will be installed in the City. The locations are:
  - SB New Hampshire Avenue @ Glenside Drive
  - NB New Hampshire Avenue @ Erskine Street
  - NB New Hampshire Avenue @ Holton Lane
  - SB New Hampshire Avenue @ Ethan Allen Avenue
  - NB Piney Branch Road @ Philadelphia Avenue
  - SB Piney Branch Road @ Philadelphia Avenue
  - EB Philadelphia Avenue @ Piney Branch Road

Many thanks to Mayor Searcy and our District 20 elected officials in assisting us to get SHA to finalize the permit approval process.

### Recreation:

- Action Youth Media will be screening the film developed by the Recreation Departments "Filmmakers in Action Teen Camp" at the AFI Silver Theater and Cultural Center on May 18th at 11am as part of their Youth Media Festival. The MoCo Youth Media Festival celebrates the creativity and impact of young filmmakers and artists in the DMV area.



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### **City Manager's Office:**

This week's Shout-out is from the Communication Department who would like to give Ryan Kelly, Communications Specialist, a shout-out for his work on our social media platforms. Right from the start, Ryan told us how much he loves communications and how important good outreach tools are for the community.

Ryan's storytelling ability shines through in the captivating social media stories he crafts on our social media platforms. His efforts have not only significantly increased participation in our programs and projects but have also impacted engagements with residents and businesses alike. His attention to design has further bolstered our social media presence as the new branding has been added.

Ryan is flexible, adaptable, and able to troubleshoot like a pro. He is currently evaluating social media tools that will help with posting and tracking our performance with metrics, while evaluating which engagements are reaching our intended audience. This means that Ryan can spend more time in the field meeting the community face-to-face, which is his real passion.

That concludes my report this evening, I am happy to answer any questions. Thank You.