



# **CITY OF TAKOMA PARK**

## **City Manager Comments**

**Report for City Council Meeting of September 5, 2018**

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

#### **State Highway Administration Spraying of Herbicide**

On Friday, August 24, it came to the attention of City officials that residents had witnessed workers applying an herbicide called Razor Pro in the right-of-way along Ethan Allen and Highway 410. Upon learning this information, City staff immediately reached out to the SHA District Engineer to report the incident, express our deep concern, and find out why and how this particular herbicide was being used. The City had not been made aware that spraying would be taking place and the use of this herbicide is a violation of permissible practices within the City limits.

The District Engineer was unaware and told staff that he had assigned the Acting Assistant District Engineer to investigate the situation and report back to the City on what happened and why as soon as they had additional information. Based on the preliminary information provided, it appears to have been an unfortunate accident and likely a case of a subcontractor being provided wrong information or misunderstanding a work assignment. We are still awaiting a report from SHA.

In addition to the District Engineer and other SHA staff, we have also ensured that our State representatives were made aware of the issue. We understand that one or more of them have reached out directly to SHA for information.

#### **Takoma Junction Parking Lot**

We were pleased to learn late last week that an agreement was reached between Neighborhood Development Company (the City's development partner) and the TPSS Co-op regarding a sub-lease of the parking lot at Takoma Junction. Per the agreement, the Co-op assumed operational control of the parking lot when the Ground Lease between the City and NDC commenced on September 1, 2018. The lot will remain available to the public for parking at no charge during the term of the sub-lease, which is expected to last until construction begins.

This agreement was a result of the mediation discussions between NDC and the TPSS Co-op regarding the City's Takoma Junction project, which are continuing.

#### **Pre-Resident Survey Focus Groups**

Per the Council's discussion when approving the contract for the 2018 Resident Survey, the City's contractor, National Research Center, conducted a focus group in late August comprised of residents who are immigrants from African countries. Another focus group comprised of residents who are immigrants from Latin America countries is scheduled for later this month. The reason for focusing on these groups in particular is that response rates to previous surveys from African and Latin American immigrants in the City have been low. Focus groups, facilitated by National Research Center staff in coordination with community partners and translators, were seen as way to gather important feedback from these residents that could help inform City officials about their perspectives. National Research Center staff will create a summary report using the transcriptions and notes from the sessions, and feedback gathered may also inform some of the questions to be included in the final version of the survey.

#### **US Census Bureau – Research Project – Smart Phone Users Needed**

The U.S. Census Bureau will be at the Takoma Park Community Center on Wednesday, September 12 to conduct to test a smart phone application they have developed. To participate in the study, volunteers must be between 18 and 65 years of age, have used a smart phone for at least 12 months, be proficient in English and able to read a newspaper. They will be on site between 8:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Participants will receive \$60 for about 90-minute participation. Individuals

interested in participating in the study can sign up for a time slot at the front desk on the main level of the Community Center, or call 301-891-7119 or email [housing@takomaparkmd.gov](mailto:housing@takomaparkmd.gov) to reserve a time.

### **Rent Stabilization Reporting Update**

The City's Rent Stabilization ordinance requires an annual accounting of the rents of all rent stabilized rental facilities. The reports are submitted online and are due no later than September 30. This past month, local landlords were notified that the reports, which include rental information for the period between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018, were available online. The City has expanded its contract with its housing portal vendor – Rent Control Consultants – this year to include the initial review of the reports for compliance with the city's law and to provide technical assistance to landlord's experiencing problems submitting the rent report or logging into the system.

Takoma Park renters interested in learning if they live in a rent stabilized building - and if the rent and the fees they are paying are legal - are encouraged to participate in a short online survey. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RentProgramSurvey>. Staff will follow-up with respondents within one business day of their submission to verify the status of the rental property and confirm compliance with the City's rent stabilization laws.

### **Montgomery College Math Science Building**

After a short recess over the month of August, Montgomery College resumed work on the Math and Science Building. Earlier this evening, community members had the opportunity to tour the site and to meet with project representatives. Next week, on Tuesday, September 11, the College will host the third in a series of design charrettes focusing on various stages of the design process. As stated throughout this process, the overarching goal of the College is to develop a building that balances the needs of students, neighbors, and fiscal prudence.

The September 11<sup>th</sup> discussion will be held from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus Cultural Arts Center, 7995 Georgia Ave, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Additional information can be found online at <https://takomaparkmd.gov/initiatives/project-directory/montgomery-college-math-and-science-building/>

### **Welcome New Housing and Community Services Manager**

The City is pleased to welcome Grayce Wiggins to the Housing and Community Development Department. In her new capacity as Housing and Community Services Manager, Ms. Wiggins will be responsible for administering the City's rental housing and grants programs in addition to the implementation of a variety of affordable housing projects benefiting the community's low and moderate income residents. Prior to coming to the City, Ms. Wiggins served as Program Counsel at the Legal Services Corporation overseeing the operation of grants to nonprofit legal services across the country. She has also served as the Director of New York Program at Single Stop USA, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping vulnerable individuals and families gain economic stability, and with the District of Columbia, administering their rent stabilization program.

### **What Master Plans Guide Our Work?**

I have received suggestions that the City develop an economic development master plan and a plan for open space in Takoma Park to consult when considering individual development plans or issues. In fact, there are a number of significant adopted master plans that does guide City work and there are several plans that are at various stages of adoption or development to help us in the future. Below are links are to the plans or the project pages that provide more information on each of these:

- [Adopted Master Plans Affecting Takoma Park](#) includes links to the Takoma Park Master Plan, the New Hampshire Avenue Corridor Concept Plan, the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Sector Plan, the Long Branch Sector Plan and a number of transit and bikeway master plans
- [Draft Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan](#) includes background data and a series of recommendations designed specifically for Takoma Park (rather than on generic

approaches) that the City Council will be considering over the year, including a number of items already underway

- [Public Land and Open Space Management Plan - in preparation](#) includes review of and recommendations for the use of land within rights of way and other open space
- Other planning studies and projects are listed on the City's website: [Initiatives Project Directory](#)



New Bike repair Station – Metropolitan Branch Trail  
Photo by Jamee Ernst

### **New Bus Stop Information**

The Housing and Community Development Department took the opportunity this past month to begin to install the new updated informational materials at local bus stops. The new materials feature a variety of helpful information including route maps, “Next Bus” information, the location of bike share stations, and City resources.

### **New Bike Repair Stations Installed in August**

Thanks to the efforts of City Planner Jamee Ernest and Construction Manager Ian Chamberlain, area bicyclists now have access to a total of three bike repair stations. The stations, located at the Community Center outside the entrance to the Police Station, on New Hampshire Avenue near the Sligo Creek Trail, and on the Metropolitan Branch Trail across from Belle Ziegler Park, include air pumps and the basic tools needed to make emergency bike repairs. This latest effort of the Housing and Community Development Department to encourage residents to bike, received a lot of media interest from the community with radio and TV coverage and on the City's Facebook page.



Jamee Ernest, City Planner  
Photo by Brendan Smith

### ***Kudos***

I wanted to pass along some kind words that a resident emailed regarding what she called the “above and beyond work” of the staff in the City’s Sanitation Division. She said, “I’d love to nominate our city’s trash and recycling workers for recognition. Not only do they do a wonderful job with their official duties, they go above and beyond to be kind to my two kids, in particular my preschool aged son who is fascinated by their work. They talk to him, wave to him, honk the horn, let him inspect their work, etc.”

I hear this kind of comment from many people, but it’s always nice to receive written acknowledgement of great work!

### ***Hiring Update***

We are currently advertising for a number of positions, including Deputy Police Chief, Communications Specialist (formerly Media Specialist), Economic Development Manager, Grants Coordinator, Contract CDL Driver (a great opportunity for someone in the community who has a CDL and is looking to make some extra money on an as-needed basis!), Police Officer, Senior Accounting Assistant (Part-time), Sanitation Technician, Recreation Program Assistant, Recreation Program Leader, HR Intern, and Planning Intern.

### ***Personal Schedule***

The International City County Management Association (ICMA) Convention will be held in Baltimore, Maryland September 22–26 this year, hosted by the Maryland City County Management Association (MCCMA). The City Manager and Deputy City Manager both try to attend this valuable conference each year. As our small State Association is hosting the conference, we will be heavily involved in coordinating activities, so may be less available during this time than we normally are when attending the conference.