



CITY OF TAKOMA PARK

City Manager Comments

Report for City Council Meeting of September 11, 2019

Information to Share

City Manager Blog

We are gearing up for a very busy fall and winter. If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to read about some of the upcoming work in a "Fall Update from the City Manager" blog posted in late August: <https://takomaparkmd.gov/city-blog/fall-update-from-the-city-manager/>

Departure of Washington Adventist Hospital/Urgent Care On-Site

The Emergency Department and acute care patients were moved to the new White Oak Medical Center on August 25. Some patients and services remain in the hospital until space is ready for them at the White Oak facility next summer. A new Urgent Care facility opened in the former Emergency Department. (It is for minor ailments and injuries and open 24 hours per day, seven days a week. For more serious medical issues, call 911.)

Along those lines, we have received at least one criticism about the recent Newsletter article "promoting" the new urgent care facility. As you know, we have been working with the hospital staff to get information out for months now about the move and the urgent care. Our purpose is not to promote the facility over any others, but rather to make sure people are aware that it exists and is an option for eligible types of care. With the press around the hospital's move, we want to ensure that residents know about what remains on the property.

Regarding ownership and use, Washington Adventist University intends to purchase the hospital property, but almost any use requires zoning changes. Reuse of the site is years away. Once the hospital is completely moved, most of the property is likely to be subject to property taxes at least until new exempt uses are approved. The Takoma Park City Council is on record as wishing to see community needs met at the site, such as housing, medical care, and/or education.

Right of First Refusal Properties

When rental properties are placed for sale in the City of Takoma Park, the tenant(s), the City, and Montgomery County all have the opportunity to purchase the property under City and County law. The owner of the property must follow the applicable laws and provide notice. City staff ensure that the correct processes are followed and notices given. Staff also provide advice as to whether or not the City may wish to exercise its right to purchase the property. If a property looks like it might be appropriate for City purchase (guided by City policy and goals), information on the property will be shared with Council for a decision. Recently, the following properties were determined to not meet the criteria for City purchase:

- 6906 Westmoreland Avenue (two units)
- 8314 Flower (six units)
- 7304 Flower Avenue (four units)

Deterioration of White Oaks and Other Trees

Many residents, as well as tree care professionals in our area, have become concerned about the number, and relatively quick deterioration, of mature (primarily white oak) trees in our area. This situation is occurring in the entire DC Metropolitan Area and beyond. In addition to a blog put out earlier this week on the subject (<https://takomaparkmd.gov/news/statement-regarding->

[reports-of-sudden-tree-decline/](#)), we have developed a website that provides information on the issue and what residents can do to protect their trees and property:
<https://takomaparkmd.gov/government/public-works/tree-care-and-resources/>

The above link will also serve as a “landing page” for other tree-related information, including information on the Tree Ordinance, how eligible residents can apply for emergency financial assistance to address issues on their property, etc.

Guests from Other Levels of Government

In August, we had three separate and productive visits to the City by officials from other levels of government. Maryland Secretary of Planning, Rob McCord toured New Hampshire Avenue and the Recreation Center, and discussed possibilities under the Opportunity Zone and Enterprise Zone provisions as well as other grant and joint sponsorship opportunities the City may be able to tap. Also visiting the Recreation Center was County Councilmember Gabe Alborno, who was invited by the Friends of the Recreation Center. He had not been in the building for ten years and seemed very interested in the possibilities of the property. Montgomery County Planning Director Gwen Wright and her senior staff toured the Washington Adventist Hospital and University properties as well as properties down Maple Avenue to Piney Branch Elementary School. As a result of this visit, Ms. Wright expressed her support for her department undertaking a Mini Master Plan process to help address future Takoma Park needs and how they might best be met in this section of the city.

Update on Neighborhood Service Team (NST) Educational Activities

I am frequently asked about the educational and enforcement activities we do around our environmental regulations. Here is a summary of recent or upcoming activities. Make sure you sign up for City notifications so you can attend future events!

- **Safe Grow Activities:** In March, the City hosted an environmental film titled “Hometown Habitat.” In April, we hosted an organic lawn care workshop. We are showing a film on September 22 at 2:00 pm in the auditorium titled “Ground War,” regarding the implications of the use of harmful pesticides. In the spring, we will be bringing in a speaker to talk about organic lawn care and distributing a reminder to all homeowners about the Safe Grow legislation.
- **Plastic Bag and Polystyrene Bans:** All City retail business owners have received literature and been informed of the bans in person by NST members. We do random checks to ensure compliance.
- **Anti-Litter Campaign:** NST staff has contacted a speaker for a fall presentation to support this program. We are working on a date for this event. Also, we have obtained recycling coloring books and recycling stories for elementary school children to be distributed now that school is in session.
- **Plastic Straw and Stirrer Ban:** We have created a new pamphlet and will begin educating all food service businesses in the city about this legislation.

Washington Adventist University Visionaries Gala

Washington Adventist University will be holding their annual Visionaries Gala on September 15. Several Councilmembers and staff members will be attending the event with complimentary tickets. Also attending will be the development partners that WAU plans to work with regarding the hospital property. We wanted to report this activity to be transparent. This activity doesn't really meet the criteria for what is disclosed on the ethics forms that we use to report “gifts” so I am including it here.

New Property Tax Revenues

The former Johns Nevins Andrews school site is back on the real property tax rolls. For that site, in property tax alone (not stormwater fees, etc), the Potomac Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church owes \$63,0905.21 to Montgomery County and \$34,323.12 to the City of Takoma Park. On the City's Takoma Junction parking lot, which is also now on the property tax rolls, \$28,152.30 will go to Montgomery County and \$13,778.72 will come to Takoma Park.

We will remain vigilant about getting property onto tax rolls when appropriate. We have already alerted the State that it may be appropriate to begin assessing property tax on the hospital property beginning July 2020. Remember it is usually the use, not the ownership, that is the key factor regarding the need to pay property taxes.

Flower Avenue/Sligo Creek Parkway Intersection Improvements

We are pleased to report that the intersection improvements at Flower Avenue and Sligo Creek Parkway have been completed. As you know, this intersection has long been a source of concern related to safety and the speed of traffic entering the adjacent Long Branch/Sligo neighborhood. This project was developed to also provide treatment for the water run-off entering Sligo Creek from the paved area. Because the area is within Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning owned land, the project required joint review and approval between Montgomery Parks and the City. Thanks for the great work, Public Works staff!

Location Change for This Year's Halloween Parade and Monster Bash

The Recreation Department is anticipating approval from the State Highway Administration for a new parade route for this year's Monster Bash. The proposed route will start at Takoma Park Middle School and go down Piney Branch and Philadelphia and end in the parking lot of the Community Center/Library where there will be entertainment, games and costume awards. The Monster Bash parade has been held in different locations over the years and most recently it has been on Carroll Avenue from the Junction to Laurel Avenue (when it wasn't raining). Our goal is to move the route to different parts of the City each year so that more residents may participate and see the parade. Future parade routes may include walking down the Flower Avenue Green Street and a location near the Recreation Center on New Hampshire Avenue.

Silver Spring Intermediate Neighborhood Park

An informal community meeting regarding the disposition of the former Silver Spring Intermediate School Site (now Silver Spring Intermediate Neighborhood Park), located at Philadelphia and Chicago Avenues, is scheduled for Thursday, September 26 at 7:00 pm at the Sligo Avenue Park Activity Building (500 Sligo Avenue, Silver Spring). The County intends to convey the property to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). The purpose of this meeting is to explain the transfer of the property to the M-NCPPC, which intends to continue the property's use as Silver Spring Intermediate Neighborhood Park. For more Info, contact Ronnie L. Warner, Chief, Office of Planning and Development, Ronnie.warner@montgomerycountymd.gov

Montgomery Planning Launches First Countywide Pedestrian Master Plan

The Montgomery County Planning Department is developing the County's first Pedestrian Master Plan to make walking in Montgomery County safer and more comfortable, convenient and direct. Community engagement will occur in fall 2019 and a draft of the completed plan is expected to be presented to the Planning Board in late 2020. A community meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 21 from 7 to 8:30 at the Montgomery County Planning office (8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, MD). RSVP:

<http://events.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=oolj88bab&oeidk=a07egk8wai92bd5799b>

incentTrip

On August 28th, staff attended the official launch event for incentTrip at the National Press Club in Washington DC. incentTrip is a new mobile transportation app created by the Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland. The app recommends the best travel mode for commuters by factoring departure time, real time traffic analysis, and user travel preferences. incentTrip is unique in its "gamification" aspect as well as the offering of cash incentives to motivate users to choose more sustainable modes of transportation instead of single occupancy vehicles. The app is available for download now and more information can be found [here](#).

Sign up for Takoma Insider

If you haven't already, please be sure to sign up to receive the City's weekly Takoma Insider, which includes important updates about events and other goings-on around the City. You can sign up here: <http://takomaparkmd.gov/about-takoma-park/sign-up-eneews-updates/>

Also, please remember that you can access up-to-date information on City projects on our website through the City's Project Directory: <https://takomaparkmd.gov/initiatives/project-directory/>

Kudos

Kudos to all the staff involved in making this year's National Night Out another great success! Despite the weather, which resulted in the need to shut things down a little earlier than we'd hoped, the event was well attended and fun for all! Special shout-outs to the Police, Recreation and Public Works staff who organized and worked the event, and did an incredible job cleaning things up quickly when the rains began.

Hiring Update

New Human Resources Director!

The new Human Resources Director, Tracy Smith, joined the team on August 19th. Tracy has over a decade of HR experience, most recently working as a Human Resources Manager in Montgomery County's Department of Liquor Control and immediately prior to that as a Labor and Employee Relations Specialist with Montgomery County's Fire and Rescue Service Department. She also worked for the City of Sullivan, Illinois for over five years as the City's HR Administrator and Treasury Assistant. She earned a JD from Southern Illinois University School of Law and a BS in Communications from Illinois State University. We are very happy to have Tracy on board!

We are currently advertising and/or interviewing for a number of positions including HR Coordinator, Payroll and Accounting Specialist, Parking Enforcement Officer, Photo Enforcement Specialist, Economic Development Intern, Landlord – Tenant Mediator, Budget Specialist, Mechanic, Recreation Program Leader, Sr. Accounting Assistant, Police Officer, Youth Success Program Leader (Contract position).

My Schedule

I will be out of the office on September 16 and 17 for minor surgery. Deputy City Manager Jason Damweber will also likely be out during that time for jury duty. Chief Anthony DeVaul will serve as Acting City Manager when neither of us is available.