



City of Takoma Park

## City Manager Comments

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### Report of June 17, 2020

#### *Information to Share*

#### **Montgomery County Phase 2 Reopening To Begin Friday at 5 pm**

County Executive Marc Elrich announced that Montgomery County will move to Phase 2 Reopening beginning Friday, June 19 at 5 pm. The [Phase 2](#) Reopening allows indoor seating in restaurants, indoor service in retail stores, indoor and outdoor services at houses of worship, and increased availability of childcare programs. In all cases, social distancing and maximum occupancy/size of gathering rules apply.

**Please, if you are near other people and can do so, continue to wear masks to help reduce virus spread.** Virus spread inside a local business will have severe economic repercussions to that business. The costs of additional business closures, cleanings, and employee testing are high. **So, shop local – wearing a mask!**

Please note that City of Takoma Park governmental facilities remain closed to the public and most work will continue to be done remotely except for Public Works and Police services. The main areas of the Community Center will remain closed for some time. City Council and Committee meetings will continue to be held virtually. The Police Department is open for emergency services and can be accessed through the Police Lobby on the lower level of Maple Avenue. Please wear a mask when entering the building and follow the traffic flow path that has been laid out to help maintain social distancing.

The Montgomery County Health Department has not yet approved the proposed **Books To Go** program being planned by the Takoma Park Library. Montgomery County libraries are not allowed to open in Phase 2 and contactless book distribution is also not permitted. We have been told we may be allowed to have a Health Department exception so that our program may begin. Materials that are touched will be quarantined for four days and we will have a process to protect users and staff when picking up library books.

As courts begin to reopen through July, there will be greater public need for police reports or communications regarding code and parking enforcement matters. For that reason, we will begin to have a few more staff members in City facilities. In-person service to the public will be via the Police Lobby only for the time being, but we will continue to communicate by phone or email to the greatest extent possible. We will be staggering work days for some divisions, particularly when work space areas are confined but actual presence by some staff on site is required. Staff that are working remotely effectively will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Some City services have been reduced for health safety and/or budgetary reasons. For example, we have suspended hiring of temporary assistance for garden maintenance and, as of June 30, we have significantly reduced part time staff for City TV and Recreation. We will be encouraging some volunteer help with our garden maintenance, such as an Adopt A Garden

program. If you are interested in participating in or organizing such an effort, please email Ms. Daryl Braithwaite at [DarylB@takomaparkmd.gov](mailto:DarylB@takomaparkmd.gov).

The most important unknown regarding City services is what may be needed for child care. The City has traditionally provided before and after-school care, summer camps, and special programs on days when school is not in session. We are waiting to learn how the Montgomery County Public Schools will hold classes in the fall so that we can see how we need to be supportive. And, we are aware that lack of child care is a significant hardship for families most affected by the pandemic. In order to allow adults to return to work, child care needs to be available. We are aware that at least two private child care facilities have closed permanently in Takoma Park and the challenges for others are large.

The standards for child care during the pandemic are high, requiring greater staff training and skill, greater physical space for small groups of children, and more frequent facility cleaning. We are studying best practices and considering options for various models as we see what MCPS is proposing.

City playgrounds remain closed, but if the County moves to open its playgrounds, we may consider opening ours. We are working on new signage for the playgrounds, as well as processes to allow the playgrounds to be opened and then closed again if needed. Takoma Park has a substantially higher rate of COVID-19 cases than Montgomery County does, so we may choose to keep our playgrounds closed for a longer period of time. Even if playgrounds are open, children and adults should wear masks and keep social distances. (Masks are not appropriate for children under 2 years old or for people with certain breathing difficulties.)

Public gatherings: We have received inquiries from several people wishing to hold gatherings on a closed City street. The County's Phase 2 standard – beginning Friday at 5 pm – is that indoor or outdoor gatherings must be limited to a maximum of 50, or 1 person/family unit per 200 sq ft, whichever is lower. Beginning Monday, June 22, if public space (roadway, etc) is requested to be used, a plan to show how the space will be set up to maintain these standards must be submitted for review and approval by the City Manager at least seven days in advance. We are working on ways to get the required neighbor sign off on street closing requests that may be safer than going door-to-door. For the event itself, there should be social distancing and cloth masks between different families. We recommend no shared food or open drinks and we may have special requirements depending on the event.

Most of Montgomery County's Phase 2 Reopening applies to the private sector. We are working with our small businesses to help them take advantage of the increased opportunities to open while protecting public health. Please patronize our local businesses either in person or remotely. They need your money and they want to know you care.

### **Laurel Avenue Road Closure**

In order to facilitate continued business operations and provide increased space for social distancing during Phase 1 of COVID-19 response, the northbound side of Laurel Avenue was closed to vehicular traffic. Bicycles and pedestrians are permitted in this newly created "Takoma Streeterly." The southbound side of Laurel remains open to vehicle traffic and parking and the handicapped accessible parking space has been relocated here as well. More information about this initiative can be found on the City website [here](#). Residents are encouraged to take a [survey](#) on the closure to provide staff with feedback and ways to improve moving forward.

### **ICYMI – Watch the June 16 Virtual Town Hall Discussion on Policing with State District 20 Delegation**

The Council hosted State Senator Will Smith, Delegate Lorig Charkoudian, Delegate David Moon, and Delegate Jheanelle Wilkins for a Zoom discussion on policing reforms in Maryland. It was held on Tuesday, June 16 and was very interesting and informative. While we had a high level of viewership, I am sure many others would like to see it. Topics covered included the Law Enforcement Officer's Bill of Rights and other State laws that either exist now and are being proposed for amendment or may be proposed in the coming Legislative Session. The Town Hall can be watched here on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/CrOyi7yg9w0> Here is a copy of the powerpoint presentation: [D20 Policing Town Hall PPT](#)

### **Largest Hazardous Waste Drop Off Event Ever!**

The Public Works Department held their annual Household Hazardous Waste Drop-Off last Saturday and had the highest turnout ever – 151 vehicles disposing of household hazardous waste. Thank you, Takoma Park!