



City of Takoma Park

## City Manager Comments

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### Report of June 24, 2020

#### *Information to Share*

#### **Reopening-Related Actions Regarding Sign Ordinance and Hazard Pay**

Montgomery County moved to Phase 2 Reopening on Friday, June 19 at 5 pm. As the COVID-19 case numbers and deaths continue to decline in the area, and the region is moving towards more normal operations while wearing masks and adhering to social distancing guidelines, some Takoma Park provisions can be changed.

**Sign Ordinance** – On June 2, 2020, I temporarily suspended the ban on posting signs in the public right of way. At the time, no groups of more than ten people could gather. Now that larger-sized groups can gather, residents are not limited to posting signs to share one's opinion in public. For that reason, the temporary suspension of the ban on posting signs in the right of way will end on July 9, 2020. This date allows sufficient time for the City Council to take action on sign provisions if it so chooses.

**Hazard Pay** – On March 27 and April 24, I authorized Hazard Pay at various levels to police officers, public works employees and police dispatchers. At the time the Hazard Pay was authorized, there was a great less known about how COVID-19 is transmitted and there was little testing available for the virus. Now that more is known, the number of cases is declining, and safety protocols are in place (including mask wearing, social distancing and enhanced cleaning), Hazard Pay for staff is no longer justified. Many jurisdictions in the area have already ended or are in the process of ending Hazard Pay as well. Hazard Pay will continue through Saturday, July 4. It may be reinstated if conditions change in the future.

#### **Other COVID-19 Information**

Building Closures Continue: 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. A few additional staff will begin to operate out of City facilities beginning July 6, including the Neighborhood Services Team.

Although the City facilities are closed to the public, the Police Department is always 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.

Montgomery County's First Pop-Up Walk-Up COVID-19 Testing: Tomorrow, Montgomery County will hold an appointment-only walk-up COVID-19 testing at the Takoma Park Recreation Center on New Hampshire Avenue from 10 am to 2 pm. This event is free, does not require insurance or a doctor's order, and is for people without symptoms. The appointment window

closed today at 2 pm. A close working partnership with City staff allowed appointment opportunities to be targeted to residents who live near the Recreation Center. City staff assisted with translation of materials, set up of the site, and promotion of the event. If the testing site works well, there is interest in having more such pop-up testing events held in Takoma Park. Thank you to Mayor Stewart for tirelessly advocating for the County to do testing in Takoma Park. And, thanks to Jessica Clarke, Grayce Wiggins, Greg Clark, Vince Cain, Donna Wright and a number of others who have been working with the staff of Montgomery County Health and Human Services to organize the event tomorrow.

First COVID-19 Reimbursement Received: Since early April, Ron Hardy and Jessica Clarke have been working to seek FEMA reimbursement for City funds spent on COVID-19 related personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitizers and cleaning supplies, technical and legal guidance, and certain limited personnel costs.

We first submitted for expenses incurred from March to mid-May, mostly covering Police and Public Works. We are currently working on a second submission that will cover costs from Mid-May into July. We were notified yesterday by MEMA (Maryland Emergency Management Agency) that our first submission for \$28,405.66 was approved and we will receive 75%, or 21,304.25, in several weeks.

The Takoma Park Library's Books To Go program will begin July 6, or earlier if the City receives special authorization from the Montgomery County Health Department. Books and other materials will be quarantined for four days and we will have a process to protect users and staff when picking up library books. Stay tuned!

### **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 and the "Takoma Streetery" was created. The southbound side of Laurel remains open to vehicle traffic and parking and the handicapped accessible parking space has been relocated here as well. Thanks to TakomaBevCo for agreeing to supply and clean tables and chairs in the area open to the general public. Space for yoga and hopscotch is coming, as well as plastic Adirondack chairs for seating. Similar fun socially-distanced activities are being planned for Anne Street.

On a very discouraging note, a number of Black Lives Matter, Pride and similar signs were removed from the Takoma Streetery overnight last night. A police report has been filed and the matter is being investigated. If anyone has information regarding the removal of the signs, please contact Chief DeVaul at [TonyD@takomaparkmd.gov](mailto:TonyD@takomaparkmd.gov) or 301-891-7104.

### **Possibility of Changing the Names of City Streets**

In recent years there have been discussions in Takoma Park about potentially changing street names that celebrate Confederate leaders or others that residents may not wish to have celebrated. With the national Black Lives Matter efforts helping spur changes to statues, street names, etc., the Montgomery County Council also wishes to see changes made. Montgomery County is responsible for the names of streets in Takoma Park even though the City owns the streets. We do not know yet how we may be working with the County in considering street renaming. Here is a letter from the County Council regarding its interest in changing street

names:

[https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press\\_Detail.aspx?Item\\_ID=25465&Dept=1](https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=25465&Dept=1)

### **Independence Day**

Independence Day is on Saturday, July 4<sup>th</sup>. In honor of the holiday, most City employees will not be working on Friday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>. With the COVID-19 pandemic, Independence Day activities that encourage the gathering of people have been canceled for this year. Please celebrate safely, keep gatherings small, wear masks and keep social distances. Please also remember that **no fireworks are permitted in Montgomery County!** Fireworks are dangerous and this is not a time to have to go to a hospital due to a fireworks accident or burn. Be safe as you celebrate!