

# Assessment Report Takoma Park, MD

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COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES LLC

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# Takoma Park Assessment Report

## Introduction

- Collaborative Strategies LLC was engaged by the Takoma Park elected leadership, city management and AFSCME Local 3399 in May 2022 to conduct an assessment of the relationships between and among the parties.
- Collaborative Strategies LLC conducted a series of interviews with City council members, the mayor, City managers, and AFSCME Local 3399 leaders.
- Based on the interviews Collaborative Strategies LLC makes the following observations . . .

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## Interviewees

Tony Anderson - AFSCME Local 3399 member

Cindy Dyballa - City Council

Jamal Fox - City Manager

Peter Kovar - City Council

Terry Seamans - City Council

Talisha Searcy - City Council

Brendan Smith - President Local 3399

Jarrett Smith - City Council

Tracy Smith - Former HR Director

Kate Stewart - Mayor

Garrett Wozniak - Outside Counsel

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## Questions

1. Describe your most successful experience with one or both of the other stakeholders? What were the biggest factors that contributed the most to the successful outcome?
2. Describe your most disappointing experience with one or both of the other stakeholders? What were the biggest factors contributing to that disappointment?
3. As a stakeholder, how do you see your role as a contributor to the leadership and success of the Takoma Park City Government.
4. As a key stakeholder, how do you see your role as a contributor in maintaining strong employee morale? Do you see yourself as successful in that effort?
5. How would you describe your working relationship with the other two stakeholders? How do you think they would describe their working relationship with you?
6. If there were an outsider observing your working relationship with the other two stakeholders, what would that observer's advice be to you on adjustments you should make to build a better relationship?
7. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think we should know in thinking about the current relationship between the stakeholders?



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## Findings

**Recent and pending changes in key roles are affecting relationships among the council, city management and union**

- City Manager - tenure less than two years
- Union Leadership - tenure less than a year
- Mayor – Changing Fall 2022
- Council – New members Fall 2022

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## Findings

**There is no common vision among the city management, the union and council about the city's process to achieve its priorities.**

- All three parties are frustrated by the current situation.
- Union members feel their work is not valued by council or city management.
- There is no common agreement on the “accomplishments” or “important activities” of the city.



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## Findings

**There are no clear and commonly understood channels of communication among the parties.**

- Union leaders do not feel they have sufficient access to city management or the council.
- There is little interaction among the parties outside of “official” activities.
- Many feel communication has become more restricted, less “open.”

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## Findings

**There is confusion and disagreement about the roles and responsibilities of the union, council and city management in making the city effective.**

- Some see council only as the budget-setting entity.
- Some see union only interested in compensation.
- Some see city management as deciding issues with no union or council involvement.
- Many see only an “Us – Them” relationship with the other parties.



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## Findings

**There are no commonly accepted methods for decision making, problem solving or negotiations.**

- Some see confrontation between and among the union, city management and council, rather than dialogue and collaboration.
- Some see the union using only public demonstration to influence the council.
- Some see struggle between city management and the union as “just the way things are.”

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## **Interests that emerged from our interviews**

- Trust between the parties
- Effective communication
- Relationship continuity through changes to City and Union leadership
- Mutual respect
- Shared decision making
- Informed decision making
- Process for resolving issues

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## **Recommended Steps to address those interests:**

- Joint training on interest-based decision making and problem solving (All stakeholders) Day one, all stakeholders represented, Day 2 joint bargaining teams
- Create a Joint Work Group to develop strategies for greater union inclusion in decision making.
- Create a Joint Work Group to develop an onboarding process for newly elected council members and newly elected mayor, newly appointed city management personnel and newly elected or appointed union leaders on how the labor relations culture and processes work.
- Determine what direct support, if any, should be provided to negotiations (i.e., process facilitation)