



Visualizing Racial Disparities in Takoma Park

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Staff Contact: Dan Powers, danielp@takomaparkmd.gov

City Website Link: <https://r.takomaparkmd.gov/hcd/takomaparkexplorer.html>

Project Goal

- Make information on racial disparities in the City more readily available to advocates and policymakers with or without technical backgrounds.

Project Description

- Create an interactive webpage or series of web pages showing data on race, opportunity, and disparities in the city.

City Council Priorities

- Community Development for an Improved & Equitable Quality of Life – Webpages should inform the Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan implementation.
- A Livable Community for All – Webpage includes information on racial disparities in access to home-ownership and housing costs faced by residents.
- Environmentally Sustainable Community – The goal includes emphasizing equity issues in sustainability programming, which this project should provide information towards.

Racial Equity Considerations Submitted to City Council

- NA

Racial Equity Toolkit Considerations

What does data tell us about who is likely to be impacted by the project? What data sources are you using and are there any data gaps?

A. The data will hopefully improve city services and advocacy for resources for those whose needs are demonstrated by the project.

It uses publicly available American Community Survey data from the Census. Gaps in the data include:

- Data is available only in 5-year increments because the Census does not make 1-year data available for places of Takoma Park's size, and the most recent data available is 2015-2019. As a result, more immediate trends will be harder to identify. In particular, as more recent data becomes available, data will include years before and after the onset of COVID-19; separating the pandemic's effects will be challenging.

It is also difficult to compare data in the explorer with 2020 Census data as that is released. The Census has released summary files for redistricting to the public.

These include basic population and demographic information, but not data on measures of life outcomes broken out by race (e.g., education, employment, income). The Census will release this data at some point in 2022 or 2023.

Comparing one-year data to data collected over five years complicates making comparisons, as do differences in how the data are collected (the 2020 Census is a survey of all households, and the 2015-2019 American Community Survey does not survey all households but a sample of households).

- More-disaggregated data (data broken out more; e.g., unemployment by race by age by gender) and data for smaller racial groups have a high margin of error, meaning that we have less confidence in the accuracy of specific results. We control for this to some extent by including analyses of Montgomery County and the state—which have larger samples and smaller percent margins of error—and checking for statistically-significant differences between Takoma Park and each.

What is your community engagement strategy for this project? How will you use community feedback to avoid unintended consequences?

A. The web pages have been presented to City Council and the public for preliminary feedback. The web pages will include a contact page to enable input. The web pages will inform the City's community-engagement efforts (e.g., understanding what languages residents speak, knowing what countries residents come from). I have prepared instructions on using the webpage and will record a video explaining how to use the webpage. The City has done some social media outreach and will create a two-pager of important data from the webpage for lobbying around the needs of vulnerable residents and to help people from outside the City understand more about Takoma Park. The code used to produce the webpage has been made available online on the City's Github page.

How are you evaluating the success of this project?

A. By whether members of the public, City officials, or the City council use the data to advocate for racial-equity measures in the City (e.g., state legislation, city legislation, public organizing) or use the data to inform the deployment of resources for racial-equity purposes in the City.

How might a successful project advance racial equity in Takoma Park, in a sustainable way?

A. It would provide ongoing, easily updatable information on racial equity in Takoma Park and allow users to see trends over time. The easily updatable nature of the webpage should enable it to remain relevant for policy-making over time.

Report Back

Project Outcome & Racial Equity Impact

A. The webpage has just been released, so we cannot know the impact for sure; this will need to be updated after the webpage has been live for some time.

Next Steps

What were the challenges of this project?

A. The Census makes a lot of detailed data available. It is challenging to decide which data types to highlight in the explorer, how best to visualize that data, and how to describe it. Too much text makes the webpage feel overwhelming, but some residents may have difficulty interpreting charts, and explanatory text can be useful to pull out important insights. As more data is added, the webpage takes longer to load, but it's useful to have key information available on one page without needing to navigate between different web pages; balancing this is tricky.

Interpreting Takoma-Park-specific data is challenging as data is further disaggregated. An observed difference in outcomes by race that's not statistically significant in Takoma Park but statistically significant in Montgomery County and Maryland likely "actually" exists. For instance, men and women have different poverty rates in Takoma Park, but the difference is not statistically significant. However, in Maryland and Montgomery County, the difference in poverty rates between sexes is similar to Takoma Park but statistically significant. There is also no statistically significant difference between Takoma Park's poverty rates for each sex and Montgomery County/Maryland's. Therefore, there's likely a difference in poverty rates between sexes in Takoma Park. Still, the smaller sample of Takoma Park and a higher margin of error means it doesn't show up in the data when you just look at Takoma Park.

What further action and resources are needed?

A. I intend to add more visualizations as they are needed to inform City decision-making in broken-out webpages. I also plan to include trend data in a separate webpage (comparing 2015-2019 to 2010-2014) and make it possible to compare Takoma Park to other cities or counties. The webpage will be updated yearly as a new round of ACS data comes out. I will make aesthetic or text changes necessary to improve comprehension of the data.

I intend to complement data on residents and household needs with data on businesses in the City to the extent it's available. I also plan to think about where to put map visualizations of this data type on the City website.