



**City of Takoma Park, MD
Reimagining Public Safety Task Force
Community Listening Session
Meeting Summary
May 26, 2021**

Welcome, Review Charge

Jamal Holtz (*co-facilitator*) welcomed attendees and presented the Task Force members who each introduced themselves, the ward they live in, and their reason for joining the Task Force.

Councilmember Terry Seamens spoke on behalf of the City Council, reviewed the charge to the Task Force, and thanked the Task Force members for their service and for their leadership in looking at all aspects of public safety. Councilmember Seamens also thanked the public for attending and sharing their experiences as part of the work to make Takoma Park a better place.

Review Process/Timeline

Jamal briefly reviewed the timeline and its extension through June to allow for a deep dive into drafting recommendations that best reflect community needs and issues. The extended time offers opportunities to connect with the community and hear from subject matter experts to inform the process and the recommendations.

Task Force and Subcommittee Meetings

Jamal and Cordell Carter (*co-facilitator*) outlined Task Force activities since the last Community Listening Session on April 29.

May 4: Chief of Police Antonio DeVaul gave an overview of arrest data for Takoma Park 2015-2020 and took questions. City Manager Suzanne Ludlow gave an overview of the Takoma Park budget and took questions.

May 11: Subcommittees continued to dig into data and identify subject matter experts specific to their focus areas.

May 18: The Task Force and attendees heard from subject matter experts they had requested. Claudia Tolson, Takoma Park Police Department Victim/Witness Coordinator, and Dr. Simone Walton, Mental Health Subcommittee Lead on the Montgomery County Task Force.



May 25: Subcommittees worked to further refine the recommendations developing from their research. Subject matter experts requested by Task Force members met with the subcommittees. Dara Baldwin, *Director of National Policy, Center for Disability Rights*; Bernice Mireku-North, *The North Law Group, Co-Chair, Montgomery County Task Force*; Marc Mauer, *Senior Advisor at The Sentencing Project, Co-Chair, Montgomery County Task Force*; Donna Wright, *Takoma Park Communications Specialist*; Andrew Powell, *Deputy Chief & Internal Affairs Representative Takoma Park Police Department*; Dan Frishkorn, *Captain, Takoma Park Police Department*; and Jessica Clarke, *Takoma Park Deputy City Manager*

Subcommittees and Focus Areas

Jamal outlined Subcommittee activities and topics of focus for recommendations.

#1 Community Quality of Life

Facilitator: Jevin D. Hodge

Committee Members:

§ Sawa Kamara*

§ Duane Scott

§ Ajmel Quereshi

§ Emil Parker

§ Christina Morado

Areas of Focus:

- Mental health and substance abuse
- Civic participation
- Housing and homelessness
- Budgeting and funding

#2 Alternative Methods and Responses

Facilitator: Cordell Carter II

Committee Members:

§ Michael Rubin

§ Jide Atoyebi

§ Sadie Cheston-Harris

§ Cedric Boatman

Areas of Focus:

- Service call data as a means of understanding the volume, range, and severity of requests for service
- Technology to refine and support responses to requests for service



- Implementation of a 311 line that residents can call to find information about services, make complaints, or report problems
- Disposition of the K9 unit

#3 Community Engagement and Transparency

Facilitator: Jamal Holtz

Committee Members:

§ **Lauren Van Tol***

§ Adam Braskich

§ Jumana Musa

§ Kiminori Nakamura

Areas of Focus:

- Transparency in policies for all agencies/departments
- Transparency around complaints and how to handle oversight
- Bodycam policy going forward
- Move activities not part of policing out of the police department
- Improve city communications with public
 - Press Releases, Statements, Newsletters
 - Citywide Alert Communication System

Jamal noted the Public Comment Form and encouraged attendees to use it to participate in the process of reimagining public safety.

Jamal then opened the floor for conversation among the Task Force members and the members of the public in attendance.

Open Comments, Questions and Recommendations

Michael Akin (*co-facilitator*) invited Task Force members and members of the public in attendance to participate on or off screen and via the chat.

Q. Questions were asked by a community member and answered regarding input from the rank-and-file members of the Takoma Park Police Department.

- A. Members of the department participated in two focus groups and shared their experiences as administrative personnel and sworn officers. Participants were diverse and were candid in expressing their opinions and experiences as policing has changed and scrutiny of their actions has increased. The focus groups were not recorded, and individuals were not identified to ensure confidentiality and encourage candor. The summary report has been provided to the Reimagining Public Safety Steering Committee.

It was noted that Task Force members have been offered the opportunity to participate in a ride-along with police officers and members are scheduling those activities.

Q. A statement and questions were offered by a community member addressing the Task Force's process and possible outcomes. Process, transparency, and the opportunity for ongoing active community involvement were noted to be vital to the process and somewhat lacking from their perspective. The value and importance of these concerns to both the image of the Task Force to the public and its deliberations were emphasized. Comparisons were drawn among the Takoma Park Task Force and task forces from other venues.

A. It was noted that each Task Force meeting begins with a public session and that the proceedings of the public sessions and the subcommittee working meetings are summarized and posted on the City of Takoma Park's website. The link to the site was provided. It was further noted that this listening session was the second in a month and that input from the community is actively sought via the Public Comment Form. Public comments are entered into the Task Force record and shared as they are received with the Task Force members.

Q. As to possible outcomes of the Task Force's work, a series of questions was posed regarding: 1) the kind and depth of information collected and analyzed; 2) consideration of the social and economic contexts affecting public safety; 3) evaluation of alternative responses to sensitive situations; and 4) expectations regarding implementation of recommendations of the Task Force. The Task Force was urged to present a short, clear, concise, workable list of recommendations and to keep in mind the funds which will come from the American Recovery Plan Act.

A. It was noted that an additional Community Listening Session will be scheduled in mid to late June to give the community the opportunity to hear and react to the draft recommendations from the Task Force.

Q. A statement and questions were offered by a community member focusing on incarceration and the concept that often gets lost that in order to reduce the number of people in prison, it is necessary to arrest fewer people and incarcerate them for shorter periods of time. It was observed that this Task Force has an important role to play as there is a clear effort to reduce encounters between the police and the public and to evaluate whether police practices and procedures are written or habitual. Questions for consideration are: 1) who is getting arrested; 2) who is getting ticketed; 3) who is getting a warning; and 4) how many punitive measures can be done away with?

A. It was noted that Task Force members have reviewed the law for prescriptive versus discretionary language and identified where there is flexibility in response. The conversation on what can be de-prioritized continues.

A statement was offered by a Task Force member regarding the changes in public safety that they have observed over a lifetime of growing up, living, and working in Takoma Park. Takoma



Park is unique in its evolution to the diverse community it now is. We are products of our home life, our environment, and our experiences. How we are treated from our earliest days influences how we think of ourselves and how we treat others. If we want to change the course of our city and the course of our shared life, we have to change our attitudes and we need to start with our youngest children. To do that, we need to look within ourselves and prepare ourselves, our educators, police officers, and all community leaders for the changes we want to see.

A Task Force member expressed thanks to the community members who have shared their perspectives. It was observed that Task Force members did not have total control over the meeting format. Gathering data has taken time and makes it challenging to make decisions. The points about transparency and community participation are valid.

It was emphasized that the report to the City Council will not be the end of the road, but the beginning of the road that will set a direction and influence spending decisions for years to come.

End Meeting

Jamal thanked the Subcommittee members for their participation and the community members for their contributions. Jamal noted that community feedback is helpful to the Task Force as members work to craft recommendations. Jamal encouraged further feedback via the Public Comment Form and urged attendees to share the link.