

**City of Takoma Park, MD**  
**Reimagining Public Safety Task Force**  
**Community Listening Session Summary**  
**June 28, 2021**

**Welcome, Review Charge, Introductions**

Jevin Hodge (co-facilitator) welcomed Task Force members, attendees, city officials (Councilmember Talisha Searcy, Mayor Kate Stewart), and the public. Jevin reviewed the charge to the Task Force, the timeline—noting where we are in the process, and the workplan—noting there are five remaining touchpoints, including tonight.

Jevin introduced Councilmember Talisha Searcy who thanked the Task Force for putting in so much time and effort during meetings and after hours and developing the recommendations. This was an opportunity for the Task Force to share the draft recommendations with the community and hear from community members.

Task Force members introduced themselves: Cedric Boatman, Ajmel Quereshi, Adam Braskich, Michael Rubin, Kiminori Nakamura, Jumana Musa, and Sadie Chester.

Co-facilitators introduced themselves: Cordell Carter, Michael Akin, Jamal Holtz, and Jevin Hodge.

**Review Timeline Graphic, Timeline Work Plan, Public Feedback Form**

Jamal Holtz (co-facilitator) reviewed the Timeline Slide and noted the Task Force had been meeting and working since January. Jamal reviewed the format for the session and the work plan through submission of the draft recommendations to the City Council. He explained that the Task Force is looking for ongoing feedback from the community on the discussion draft recommendations which will be incorporated into the final recommendations and report. Jamal emphasized that community members should continue to use the public feedback form to provide feedback to the city and the Task Force.

Michael Akin (co-facilitator) introduced the subcommittee reporting portion of this meeting with the following observations:

The Task Force worked at the subcommittee level to review and process extensive information from public feedback, subject matter experts, other reports, city data, etc. Three subcommittees were formed:

- Community Quality of Life
- Alternative Methods and Responses
- Community Engagement and Transparency

Each subcommittee came up with a list of initial topics and recommendations, which were then combined into this discussion draft for review by the full Task Force and presented for feedback at this Community Listening Session on June 28, 2021.

The Task Force sought to answer three questions:

- What are we trying to solve for?
- What solutions can we offer?
- How will implementation and evaluation recommendations be handled/monitored?

Some recommendations come from a belief that specific things can and should be done better, others build upon the many things that Takoma Park does well, while others come from a belief that Takoma Park can and should be “Best in Class” on these issues.

The discussion draft recommendations (posted last week on the Takoma Park website, and dropped into the chat ([here](#)) represent the best thinking of the Task Force at this point in our work, informed by the resources they had access to, and constrained by a time-bound process. This is a working draft and will continue to evolve.

These recommendations have not yet been discussed or reviewed by the City Council. Once the recommendations are finalized by the Task Force they will be presented to the Council in early July. In coming months, the Council will review and work with City staff and members of the public to evaluate, discuss, and decide how to move forward with the recommendations.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

Cordell Carter (co-facilitator) introduced the subcommittees who presented the draft recommendations via a slide deck with reference to the link to the document in the chat.

**Alternative Methods and Responses:** Cedric Boatman presented the recommendations developed by this subcommittee and noted that keeping on task enabled subcommittee members to be creative; they worked hard and took a deep dive into their focus areas.

**Community Quality of Life:** Ajmel Quereshi presented the recommendations developed by this subcommittee. Ajmel cited three main motivations in developing their recommendations: 1) reduce potential for violence; 2) reduce criminalization; 3) address efforts to remove root causes of disparities in socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Community Engagement and Transparency:** Adam Braskich presented the recommendations developed by this subcommittee. Adam emphasized the subcommittee’s focus on transparency as a way to build trust; oversight as a means to share understanding of police work and discipline; and multimodal, multi-language communication to increase engagement.

## **Public Comments, Q&A**

**The full recording of the meeting can be found at: [6.28 TP Listening Session Recording](#)**

Michael Akin facilitated the discussion: comments were accepted via Q&A function, the chat box, and by welcoming attendees to use the “raise hand” feature to be brought on screen to engage with the Task Force via audio and/or video.

Comments from the community members present included:

- Thanks to the Task Force for diligent work.
- Recommendations should be supported by data.
- The subject of domestic violence does not appear in the recommendations. Annual police reports do not break out calls regarding domestic violence so it’s hard to know frequency of occurrence.
- All information provided to the Task Force should be made available to the public.

Councilmember Searcy noted that the overall process is ongoing and will involve the Task Force and the Council. The rationale and the “why” will be part of the final report. The Council will review the report and undertake consideration of what gets implemented. There will be far more opportunities to engage; this is the first step to many.

Community members continued their observations:

- Participation in the Chief’s Advisory Board for two years prompted questions about what was really achieved. The meetings were not public, there were no goals, no minutes. Can another committee serve to replace that?
- There were groups named specifically in the resolution. I noted a lot of presentations by police and city staff not by activists; did presentations by activists take place? Are there any recommendations regarding reducing police? Did the Task Force feel the structure of the process allowed for consideration of all those kinds of options? It appears there are recommendations for adding police.

A Task Force member commented that speaking for themselves, the Task Force had a compressed timeline, and some resources requested became available late in the process which

made it difficult to incorporate them into the recommendations. The Task Force did not hear from specific activist groups but did hear from individuals from a variety of perspectives, including those advocating for defunding as well as those who work in specific areas of policing.

A co-facilitator noted that efforts were made to try to make sure every voice in the process was heard. All subject matter experts requested by the Task Force were called upon. The actual text of the recommendations are all directly the words of Task Force members, and City Officials have had no “veto” power over recommendations.

A Task Force member noted that while they didn’t have concrete presentations from those groups, the City Council was pretty careful to compose a Task Force with those viewpoints represented. The city has been quite responsive to provide information and answer questions.

- There were questions about if a reduction in police funding was discussed and a question of if going with Montgomery County police instead of funding a local force was considered. Additionally, there was a recommendation that what the “right size” for a police department for Takoma Park is should be a question to be discussed with the City Council, and a note that ARPA funding may support data collection around this question.

Task Force members replied and noted three things in the recommendations: 1) call for creation of Neighborhood Services Division to respond to mental health crises; 2) Community Assistance Office; and 3) creation of a subset of unarmed officers all of which would lead to a shrinkage of police as well as growth in other areas. Additionally, in our recommendations we ask for clear communication from the Chief in terms of what enforcement looks like in Takoma Park. A Task Force member shared their belief that in any discussion of the police, Takoma Park police are preferable to Montgomery County police.

Community feedback continued:

- A community member noted their attempt via social media to engage residents in reaching out to police. The response was that the police should be reaching out to them. The member suggested a project entitled the Living Library as an outreach/engagement strategy.
- The same community member observed that there are significant challenges in hiring mental health professionals to be on call with the police.
- Another community member asked what happens next? They are worried that when it comes to the budgetary season, it’s hard to get money redirected away from officers on the street and toward other services. That’s where the rubber meets the road; how will the recommendations translate into action?

A Task Force member noted that they share that concern. One recommendation called for requiring that all recommendations for increasing the police department budget be publicized at

least 30 days ahead and reviewed by citizens. Such new programs as Community Assistance and Neighborhood Services functions call for removing some functions from the police department, which would shrink the size of the department.

Councilmember Searcy noted that there had been a misunderstanding in the budget; there was no increase in the number of officers. Moving forward, there can be novel approaches we have to figure out. ARPA creates the opportunity to pilot approaches and bring in staff. We can make decisions from an evidence-based approach based on experiences with pilot programs. We appreciate the timing of the recommendations at a time when we should get some solid answers around ARPA funds and before the next budget process.

Mayor Stewart noted that a new city manager will be starting on August 2<sup>nd</sup>. They will be able to take the recommendations and look at departments and budget. Some recommendations are brand new, some share interests of the City Council and staff; there is a lot of opportunity here. ARPA can fund us to try new things then look for grants to sustain. The County is looking at the rebate formulas for The Takoma Park Police Department. These conversations are all happening at once and they help us see where the opportunities are for Takoma Park to lead and make the transformation we want in our own community.

Mayor Stewart extended thanks to the Task Force for all their work as well as to members of the public for comments. Mayor Stewart noted that the Task Force has done an enormous amount of work and the city looks forward to working with Task Force members in whatever structure evolves; this is about much more than policing.

A co-facilitator thanked the Task Force, community, and City for attending and contributing and encouraged everyone to continue to engage and provide feedback which will be incorporated into the final report.

The session ended at 8:00 P.M.