

**City of Takoma Park  
Reimagining Public Safety Task Force  
4.27.2021 Meeting Takeaways**

## **Agenda**

Welcome, Meeting Format

Jevin Hodge welcomed Task Force members, city officials, and attendees and outlined the structure of the meeting and breakouts.

Review Charge, Timeline, Listening Session, Public Feedback Form, and TOC.

Jevin reviewed the above from the PowerPoint and then introduced Grayce Wiggins.

Grayce Wiggins, Manager, Housing & Community Development

Ms. Wiggins said she was energized to be meeting with the group and is excited for the Task Force and its work and for the power of the Task Force and the subcommittees to influence events in the city. Ms. Wiggins has been in her role for two years. Her goal is working to improve the lives of Takoma Park residents. This is a rich diverse, open, welcoming city- everyone wants to be here. Divisions arise around residents cultural and linguistic differences. The agency uses community ambassadors to foster effective communication and to encourage people to engage with the city. Previously the agency's interaction with residents was transactional, but, while it is necessary to get the work done, it is important to leave space and time for deeper discussions with residents about issues at home. Housing is the core issue. Ms. Wiggins then took questions and confirmed she would be meeting with the subcommittees.

**Q:** Are there things in the context of your work you wish you could do but can't for lack of resources?

**A:** The department needs to be three times the size it is. There is a lot we can't touch. We need a social worker. Takoma Park is good at camouflaging what is happening; there can be 5-10 different housing programs on one strip.

**Q:** Are communications managed in house, or in collaboration with the city?

**A:** We have spent more than we ever have before to get appropriate information out. We have tagged community folks and city staff who are bilingual. We have had meetings in three languages. We want people to feel connected; it takes more than our team to build trust; we send personal notes re life/family changes. To be poor is to be busy all the time; it only takes one thing to trip up a family and make their situation almost unrecoverable. We try to preserve people's dignity.

**Q:** Can you expand on wanting to do more: what are the top three landlord – tenant issues?

**A:** They are: 1) workforce; people are underemployed, working multiple jobs, trying to hide it, ashamed to send resume; 2) so many mental health issues for young adults and older adults:

criminalization of mental health and homeless – the easiest way to go to jail or be institutionalized; 3) lack of encouragement >feel like you can't make it;

### Subcommittee Updates

Jamal Holtz updated attendees on the subcommittees and their efforts to thinking through broad buckets of issues and recommendations to develop...3 subcommittees...5 recommendations each...15 recommendations to go to City Council

Michael Akin described how CM Searcy's list of concerns had been broken down and assigned to the subcommittees.

Jamal referred to the PowerPoint to review the subcommittees' focus areas.

Adam Braskich suggested that recruitment and retention of police department staff be moved to the subcommittee on communication and transparency, which was agreed to.

Jevin introduced the Takoma Park subject matter experts and described how they would be making the rounds of the subcommittees. Jevin also asked Task Force members to prepare 1-2 questions for the 4.29 listening session to prompt discussion.

- Talisha Searcy, Councilmember
- Kate Stewart, Mayor
- Suzanne Ludlow, City Manager
- Jessica Clarke, Deputy City Manager
- Grayce Wiggins, Manager, Housing & Community Development
- Dan Frishkorn, Captain of Police

### Subcommittee #3 Breakout Room Discussions

How the city communicates is a recurring theme: who creates press releases, who reviews them, are they coordinated across agencies or do the agencies issue them independently. How individuals are described has been perceived as insensitive and without bases in fact. Residents' access to information via means other than websites and listservs is an ongoing concern.

CM Searcy and DCM Clarke responded that the city communications staff is very small and the review process is not many-layered. They are very aware that communications need to be improved and are working to achieve that. They noted that there are many neighborhood approaches to communication and they vary widely in sophistication and amount of use.

The city budget, and particularly the police department budget are focuses of concern.



CM Ludlow responded with an overview of the police budget and referred members to the materials provided which contain the details members requested.

Transparency regarding the timely and complete release of information and body camera footage by the police department is a concern. Extent of training is a concern. Response to non-policing calls is a concern.

Capt. Frishkorn responded in detail with the goals and constraints surrounding release of information. Training begins when an officer is hired and is deep and ongoing. The city and department are exploring additional connections to behavioral and mental health resources in anticipation of federal funds.

Housing in general and affordability in particular are concerns.

Mgr Wiggins and Mayor Stewart responded in detail with descriptions of the many housing programs in effect in the city and the support given to people re-entering the community. Sharing this information would highlight the agency's work on behalf of residents but it has to be done with care due to confidentiality issues and the wish to avoid embarrassing anyone.