



Takoma for All sent a questionnaire of 6 questions covering several aspects of interest to our group to all candidates on September 28. All but one candidate responded until the deadline of October 3.

We express our deep appreciation of the time and thought that went into responding to these questions, and are making them public for all voters in Takoma Park to assist in their decision making in this election.

The document ended up taking 40 pages. Please use the Table of Content below to jump to specific questions or candidate responses. The candidates responses have not been altered in content, though to allow for easier reading, the formatting has been synchronized.

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Dear Candidates for Elected Office in the 2020 Takoma Park City Council Election,

Takoma for All (TFA) is a group of Maryland and Takoma D.C. neighbors working to strengthen a vibrant, inclusive, prosperous, resilient, and transit-friendly community. We advocate the creation and preservation of affordable and market-rate housing and commercial spaces, as well as the community amenities that support a growing, inclusive community. More information is available at [www.takomaforall.org](http://www.takomaforall.org).

Thank you for standing for election to city office. To help us understand your position on topics of interest to our group and the Takoma Park public, would you please provide responses to the following questions, in as much detail as you feel comfortable?

## 1. Do you agree with us that more housing, both market rate and subsidized, should be created in Takoma Park? If so, what steps will you take to facilitate creation of new housing?

### Kate Stewart (Mayor)

Yes. When I first became Mayor, I convened a community conversation with local and national housing experts and residents to look at steps the City could take to address the affordable housing crisis. After this discussion, I led concrete actions over the last few years, including:

- Adoption of the City's Housing and Economic Development Plan;
- Creation of a housing reserve fund to support affordable housing efforts;
- Establishment of a homestretch down payment assistance program that assists low-income residents in the purchase of homes inside the city limits; and
- Now, the City is entering into a partnership with Habitat for Humanity to create affordable missing middle housing.

It is critical that we preserve our rent stabilization program, which makes the City one of the most affordable in the area for renters. But we need to do more. The [Housing and Economic Development Plan](#) sets forth the City's plan to preserve existing affordable housing while "increasing the number of units and variety of housing types across the affordability spectrum that are attractive to a diverse demographic and do not result in economically segregated communities or increase economic segregation." The Plan lays out strategies for achieving these objectives. It also provides direction to City staff, who have developed -- and continue to do so -- additional implementation steps to move the City forward.

### Roger Schlegel (Mayor)

In light of the regional housing crisis, I agree with the goal of creating more housing in Takoma Park. Absent the generation of more equitably distributed housing, particularly in the affordable range, our community, situated as it is between Bethesda and Landover, downtown DC and Burtonsville, is going to continue to accommodate more and more through-commuters, while itself becoming ever more bifurcated in terms of income and wealth. Generating a good balance of new housing here in Takoma

Park will help increase the market for local goods-and-services businesses and will thus help to support the transition to more localized and thus greener transportation patterns.

I think that Takoma Park's priorities should be on generating truly affordable housing, e.g. for households with incomes at or close to the regional poverty rate, and on generating first ownership opportunities in the form of new properties that are simple, efficient, transit-oriented, and thus affordable to households at or below the median income level for Takoma Park (I would call these "simplicity homes.")

The Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan approved by the Council last year contains no real objectives. There's nothing in the Plan that seriously indicates a commitment to stemming and reversing the loss of affordable housing in Takoma Park. Not one of the 17 objectives in the Plan contains a single numerical target, measurable indicator, specific location, or date by which the objective should be achieved. In other words, these "objectives" are not specific, measurable, or time-bound.

An October 29, 2018 Council work session suggested that staff would be responsible for creating indicators associated with the Plan. While it may be that staff are in the process of developing indicators for equitable generation of new housing, it has been at least a year now since such work should have begun; and any staff-generated indicators are only the precursors to a productive community dialogue and decision-making process.

Without clear objectives, it is not possible to prioritize actions, schedule actions, or budget properly for actions. These objectives cannot be called "realistic" since there is no clear path to ensuring that they are achieved. The only thing making these statements look like objectives is the fact that, in broad terms, they are "actionable."

Therefore, I would go further than the current Housing and Economic Development strategy, which calls without elaboration for "aligning" housing generation by 2030 with regional targets; I would work to establish community and Council consensus on definitions and specific numerical targets for the categories of "affordable," moderately priced," and "market priced" units. As a starting point for discussion, if the City were to apply available regional targets proportionately to Takoma Park's population, City targets would need to be set at:

- **393 additional low-cost housing units** (round to 400 units)
- **166 additional units that are affordable to middle-income households, at under \$2,500/month** (round to 170 units)
- **186 additional units that are affordable to higher-income households** (round to 190 units).

These numbers indicate the magnitude of the commitment that our current plan seems to have made implicitly: roughly 760 new units in ten years.

In planning how and where to generate new housing units, two key first steps are to agree on Takoma Park's definitions of "affordability" and to agree on targets for new housing creation by neighborhood to support a more equitable distribution of housing types (in terms of rent levels/prices) across the City.

To produce new affordable housing in big numbers, the City should explore and seek to implement the following three strategies, perhaps to varying extents. Individually or combined, these strategies would clearly disrupt the current pattern and function as significant “game-changers”:

### **1. Reserving Land for Future Affordable Housing**

The cost of land, not the cost of construction, is the biggest obstacle to producing new affordable housing. One strategy the City could use to mitigate this problem is to leverage government grants, nonprofit grants, donations, or City funds to reserve particular properties around town for potential future development of housing. These could include underused sites in commercial areas, empty or underused institutional properties, or other properties with a right to build more housing density. The idea would be that easements or agreements can be purchased right now at lower cost than would be the case in the future, assuming that area property values continue to increase. “Land trusts” are one form that these kinds of agreements can take.

### **2. Zoning and Regulatory Changes in Detached-Home Neighborhoods**

In the past, Takoma Park’s detached-home neighborhoods accommodated many more low-priced housing units. This is because many larger homes were subdivided as duplexes, triplexes, etc., were used informally as group houses, or had owner-managed rental units on site (sometimes unregulated), also known as “Accessory Dwelling Units” (ADUs), perhaps in a converted garage, a basement, or an upper floor with separate access. A simple and (environmentally speaking) fairly low-impact path to producing more housing is simply to make it easier for homeowners to establish ADUs. (This can also help some homeowners of limited means to pay their property taxes and thus stay in Takoma Park.)

Takoma Park could make it possible for more detached homes to host ADUs by easing its regulations and allowing more ADUs to be permitted in closer proximity to each other. In some cases, the City would have to advocate for changes at the County level to achieve these results.

If Takoma Park wanted to go even further, it could follow the lead of Minneapolis, Minnesota and push to get all detached-home neighborhoods rezoned so that any detached home could be modified or replaced to accommodate a duplex or triplex. (Since 2019, Minneapolis allows triplexes and was considering allowing four-plexes but backed away due to neighborhood opposition.) This radical change won support in Minneapolis when it came to be viewed by the majority of homeowners as an opportunity to “welcome new neighbors.” Key issues to resolve in considering such a change would be the supply and allocation of parking, the impact on local schools, and the importance of mitigating negative environmental impacts such as increased impervious surfaces and tree canopy loss.

### **3. Zoning Changes to Accommodate More Affordable Units in Mixed-Use Developments**

Montgomery County’s zoning code governs how land can be used in Takoma Park. In recent years, many commercial areas have been rezoned to allow for “mixed-use” development, which typically combines first-floor commercial space with upper floor housing. Takoma Park could advocate with the County to allow mixed-use developments to add, say, an additional floor if the extra units thus produced were permanently priced at affordable levels.

On page 10 of the Plan, there are four “strategies” outlined for encouraging mixed-use development in Takoma Park. But the objective of these strategies says NOTHING about producing below-market (affordable) housing. This is a major omission that I as mayor would seek to remedy as soon as

possible.

Locking in land for future housing, allowing more density in detached-home neighborhoods, and allowing more density in mixed-use developments are all very significant actions. Not only would they require successful advocacy or partnership with other levels of government and/or outside partners; reaching the decision to take any of these actions would require very difficult, frank, and open conversations about our community's values and interests.

For example, there are questions about how the look and feel of neighborhoods and commercial areas would change if they hosted more housing. There are questions about how each strategy might work to reverse or reproduce historic patterns of residential segregation. There are questions about environmental impacts of greater density, both locally and in global terms. And there are questions about the impact of increased housing density on local taxes, demands placed on services and schools, and allocation of public space such as street parking, parks, and playgrounds to accommodate "new neighbors." These questions cannot be resolved, and the community cannot move forward amicably and continuously, without a well-facilitated, broadly inclusive community dialogue.

Examine the City's Housing Strategic Plan, and you will see that it sidesteps consideration of the three big strategies described above. Instead, it focuses on "low-hanging fruit," such as making sure existing rental properties are maintained in good condition, providing workshops on how to qualify for home buying, and continuing to provide tax credits to homeowners on low incomes. These may be effective approaches, but they do not **produce** affordable housing.

Whether or not our community would "buy in" to any of the productive and disruptive strategies above is not known. As Mayor, I will advocate for a frank, informed, and transparent conversation about what Takoma Park can and should do about the affordable housing crisis.

### Peter Kovar (Ward 1)

Currently in Takoma Park there are a large number of expensive single family homes which are tending to become more costly, as well as many apartment units which are kept reasonably affordable because of our rent stabilization law. There's a danger we'll increasingly move toward a community that's bifurcated from a housing perspective. We don't have as many condos or affordable starter homes, often called the "missing middle." I'd like to see us focus on creating more home ownership opportunities in this category as well as additional affordable rental units. As outlined in our Housing Strategic Plan, among the approaches we should follow for helping achieve these goals are: continuing to grow our Housing Reserve so we're well positioned to take advantage of opportunities for housing creation; developing partnerships with outside non-profits, foundations and financial institutions for housing development of all sizes; working at the County level to change zoning requirements to give us more flexibility in where and how housing can be constructed in Takoma Park; promoting expansion of Accessory Dwelling Units consistent with the new County ADU law; focusing on bringing vacant residential structures into active use; taking advantage of tax incentives and other housing creation programs offered at the County, State and Federal levels; coordinating with the Greater Washington Council of Governments on its regional affordable housing goals; and cataloging and marketing open land or older structures in the City that may be available as sites for housing production.

### Cindy Dyballa (Ward 2)

The city housing strategic plan, which I actively support, calls for expanding a range of housing types, both rental and owned, throughout the entire community. It outlines a variety of creative steps to expand our housing. Recent steps I advocated for are county adoption of new rules that make it easier to build an accessory dwelling unit, and a partnership with Habitat for Humanity to convert an existing building into two “missing middle” homeowner opportunities. In my second term, I look forward to taking more steps like these to implement the plan.

### Kacy Kostiuk (Ward 3)

We face an affordability crisis in Takoma Park and throughout this region, and regional housing shortages are pushing housing prices upward. Takoma Park’s desirability as an active, diverse, beautiful, transit-accessible community is wonderful but also creates affordability issues. We need to take steps to address the housing shortage in a variety of ways and create new housing affordability programs and supports. All of this work must emphasize affordability, racial equity, and a commitment to maintaining a diverse community.

First, we should grow our affordable housing stock in locations throughout the city and look for new opportunities to create high-quality subsidized housing through collaborations with the County and nonprofit providers.

Second, we need to grow our “missing middle” housing to provide opportunities for families looking to move out of rental housing with an affordable home purchase. The City Council recently authorized a collaboration with Habitat for Humanity to create new missing middle housing, and we should continue to look for partnerships that help us achieve this goal, as well as make zoning changes when appropriate to allow for higher-density, more affordable housing.

Our work should also focus on the needs of young adults and seniors. Takoma Park has a smaller population of young adults than most parts of our region because we lack many smaller, affordable housing opportunities. Young adults who grew up here and want to live here independently have few options. We also need housing options for seniors who want to downsize from their houses and remain in the community. Smaller, more affordable units could appeal to both groups, and I would also love to see an innovative project that would bring together both groups.

Additionally, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) offer an important opportunity to provide additional housing capacity within neighborhoods that are largely “built out.” I strongly supported the recent adoption of modified requirements at the County level that make it easier to build ADUs in Takoma Park and believe these should be emphasized in particular in highly transit-accessible locations.

As we move forward, Takoma Park needs to grow our housing stock, maintain and grow our affordable housing protections, and be innovative in our work. Given that we have relatively few spaces for new development, we need to work in collaboration with residents, developers, and other levels of government to ensure that housing projects are done in strategic ways that meet our housing and community goals.

### Olly Swyers (Ward 3)

In the wake of COVID-19, our primary focus as it pertains to immediate housing issues needs to be preventing displacement due to economic losses. Any direct funding and energy from the city needs to

be oriented towards keeping people in the housing that we already have. Evictions and foreclosures are a surefire way to open up paths for property poachers, loss of community culture, and gentrification. This happened after the financial crisis of 2008 and it's happening again now. At the county level we also need to stand with organizers advocating for extending rent control protections in Moco to protect residents who call Takoma Park their home but who's houses don't fall within the city limits, this is especially important with the incoming purple line. As we imagine ways to increase housing, we need to figure out how to support and maintain the housing we already have, especially large scale multi-family buildings that have been in disrepair for years without proper maintenance.

That being said, I agree that we do need to figure out how to assist in facilitating more accessible housing in Takoma Park, both at market rate and below. This is already being looked into at the New Hampshire Ave development, one of the few projects the city has a direct impact on, and I support finding ways to incorporate mixed income housing into that project. One other way that we can, as a city, assist in paving the way for more reasonably priced housing, is to work with Montgomery County to build zoning policy that mirrors those implemented in PDX and Austin, some of which take a radical look at reviving a form of "rent to buy", a practice that has been all but phased out but that offers true pathways to social mobility and homeownership for low and middle income folks.

These cities, and others, have worked towards development and density policies which could be potentially pulled from and scaled to our own specific needs, balanced with our climate and equity goals. If we do it right, the "missing middle" should be filled from our own community, with pathways to homeownership and economic opportunities helping to eliminate wealth stratification, especially between racial lines.

[Terry Seamens \(Ward 4\)](#)

[Jarrett Smith \(Ward 5\)](#)

Yes, I agree. One of the top three issues for our region is affordable housing. The largest expense that most people is rent and a mortgages. The greatest opportunities for affordable housing in Takoma Park on along the New Hampshire Avenue corridor. There is enough land in that corridor to develop a very large number of multifamily residences.

[Sawa Kamara \(Ward 5\)](#)

YES! I agree that more housing, both market rate and subsidized, should be created in Takoma Park.

Affordable quality housing is one of the biggest concerns for Ward 5, and I support stronger policies that lead to more housing opportunities for low- and low-to-middle income residents. Ward 5 already has a number of affordable housing units but this is not enough. Any plan to build new housing in Takoma Park must include apartments, condos, and single-family homes that attract people from a variety of incomes. Whenever city leaders enact plans to develop land for additional housing, our goal should always be to offer residents a balanced mix of homes in the same geographic area. City data show that amenities like parks, safe roads and sidewalks are not equitably distributed among the wards, with more racially diverse and lower income areas not having these amenities. Data show that building low-income housing complexes separated from more prosperous neighborhoods is an ineffective means of addressing economic and racial inequalities. To build a more vibrant and a more equitable community, people from all socioeconomic backgrounds must be able to interact on a daily basis.

For low and low-to-middle income residents, there needs to be expansion of housing subsidies and measures to address rent stabilization.

As your Ward 5 city council member, I'll review existing urban studies and data (including new Census data) as well as try to leverage experience with City. If indicated, I may advocate for new study to determine the ideal location for developing intermixed housing in Takoma Park. Once we have decided on a location, I'll work with other city leaders to determine the best way to finance the project. I'll also push for increased housing subsidies and rent stabilization measures.

### Talisha Searcy (Ward 6)

More housing is needed in the City. This includes high quality market rate and subsidized rental units. We also need more entry level homeownership opportunities. We know that:

- No new multi-family rental buildings have been constructed in Takoma Park since the 1970s. [https://documents-takomapark.s3.amazonaws.com/housing-and-community-development/Strategic%20Plan/FINAL\\_Takoma\\_Park\\_Housing\\_Economic\\_Data\\_Analysis\\_Oct2017.pdf](https://documents-takomapark.s3.amazonaws.com/housing-and-community-development/Strategic%20Plan/FINAL_Takoma_Park_Housing_Economic_Data_Analysis_Oct2017.pdf)
- In 2018, Takoma Park residents appreciate the community, but are concerned about the cost and quality of housing. (<https://dwpl4lfcfux0y.cloudfront.net/government/city-council/agendas/2019/Documents/Takoma%20Park%20Report%20of%20Results%202019%20282019-03-04%29.pdf> )
- Rent stabilized and subsidized properties are not dispersed evenly throughout the City with the largest clusters in Wards 5 and 4. [https://documents-takomapark.s3.amazonaws.com/housing-and-community-development/Strategic%20Plan/FINAL\\_Takoma\\_Park\\_Housing\\_Economic\\_Data\\_Analysis\\_Oct2017.pdf](https://documents-takomapark.s3.amazonaws.com/housing-and-community-development/Strategic%20Plan/FINAL_Takoma_Park_Housing_Economic_Data_Analysis_Oct2017.pdf)

I believe the key to realizing the goal of generating new housing is twofold. First, we have to optimize the use of City property to further housing development. Second, we have to work in partnership with private property owners within the City to increase housing development.

## 2. Takoma Park has several potential development and revitalization opportunities. Please describe your vision for the following sites. In your opinion, how should they be further developed?

### Cindy Dyballa (Ward 2)

All three of these sites have great promise to help build our city's housing stock, local economy, and financial base. My vision is not what, so much as how. The city can actively influence revitalization of these sites, by active engagement with the immediate neighbors (especially those whose voices are not often heard), close cooperation with other government and nonprofit entities, and partnerships with the private sector that stretch the city's limited resources.

## Jarrett Smith (Ward 5)

All the 3 of the proposed development sites have similar opportunities. There is economic opportunity for Takoma Park and the projects above offer tremendous opportunities in the economic growth for our city. These new developments should be a mixed use and high-density incorporating housing, retail, restaurants, and community space.

### a. Takoma-Langley Crossroads (Purple Line station)

#### Kate Stewart (Mayor)

The Takoma-Langley Crossroads area has a rich and culturally diverse range of businesses. The Crossroads Farmers' Market connects local farmers and small entrepreneurs with community members on a weekly basis in season. We have supported our businesses in the area throughout the COVID-19 crisis and before that to deal with the impact of Purple Line construction. This area has long been underserved by City, County and State governments. Over the last five years I have made it a priority to advocate for the area, bringing county and state officials there so that they understand its needs and opportunities. Specifically, I worked closely with Delegate Wilkins and State Senator Will Smith, who were able to allocate \$2 million in the state budget to fund a grant program to help businesses affected by Purple Line Construction last year.

The Purple Line project is currently stalled, but will hopefully restart in the not too distant future. Its completion will create both opportunities and challenges. As the state determines next steps, we are taking advantage of the pause to advocate for better pedestrian and bike access, an improved tree canopy, and additional focus on better managing (and reducing) automobile traffic.

Ultimately, my vision for that area is sustainable mixed-use development that takes advantage of the Purple Line and other public transit options, protects and supports local businesses, enhances walkability, provides needed community facilities, creates a sense of place in the area and fosters greater economic opportunities for local residents and businesses. Any such development should expand and improve the community's affordable housing and commercial options. The Purple Line will make the area much more accessible for residents who need to travel for work and we need to support creative ways to maintain existing housing and incentivize new affordable housing near the public transportation hub it will create. I support the [PLCC Housing Action Plan](#).

I also recommend that folks take a look at the [New Hampshire Avenue Corridor Concept Plan](#), which sets forth a plan for improving and developing all of New Hampshire Avenue.

#### Roger Schlegel (Mayor)

The Takoma-Langley Crossroads commercial area is excellently situated for mixed-use infill development, located as it eventually will be (if all goes well) along a key transit corridor. (The small commercial area at the southeast corner of Flower Avenue and Piney Branch Road in Ward 5 has similar potential.)

My vision for the Takoma-Langley Crossroads area is for mixed-use development that protects existing affordable goods and services, generates rental and ownership housing units at a variety of price points, incorporates excellent public amenities including a piazza or public square and a play area, improves pedestrian and bicycle access to the area from Wards 6, 2, and 5, protects the Long Branch and Sligo

Creek stream valleys, and maintains the character of the adjacent Ward 6 neighborhood in terms of noise and light buffering and traffic circulation patterns.

Care should be taken to integrate the design of the entire Crossroads area and to coordinate the timing and logistics of construction projects across jurisdictions, so that the area, when developed, has an even more cohesive feel and so that the two major road arteries do not function as dividers between neighborhoods or sub-districts.

To encourage walkability and bikeability as well as reduction of our community's carbon footprint, innovative designs should be encouraged in coordination with the Counties and State. These could include rooftop or parking-lot based solar installations, narrow-profile wind turbines, the planting of canopy-scale shade trees, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian pathways, and possibly even a cross-intersection pedestrian bridge.

It is critical that all of Takoma Park begin now to view and use the Crossroads area as a "second front porch" for the City, and to that end, any redesign of local bus/circulator routes and networks should allow for easy transportation to connect Takoma Park's commercial and major institutional nodes with the Crossroads.

#### [Peter Kovar \(Ward 1\)](#)

It's vital that any development in the Crossroads area be centered on affordability: keeping existing housing units affordable to the extent possible, enabling small businesses to be able to stay in operation (during and after Purple Line construction); and ensuring that any new apartment buildings include substantial numbers of affordable units.

#### [Cindy Dyballa \(Ward 2\)](#)

Any mixed-use project in this area must balance retail redevelopment with needs for more housing at several income levels. To achieve this, the city can do such things as promote the opportunity zone designation; work with the Purple Line Corridor Coalition and other area governments in partnership; let area property owners and developers know that the city is "open for business;" and insist that proposals address displacement issues and respect existing small businesses and residents.

#### [Kacy Kostiuk \(Ward 3\)](#)

The Crossroads is a vibrant commercial area with transit access, and it has great potential for additional transit connectivity when the Purple Line is completed (hopefully the state will get the project back on track soon!) and when the New Hampshire Ave Bus Rapid Transit project is completed.

I would like to see additional housing opportunities in the Crossroads area so that more people can utilize these transit opportunities, as well as shop and work at small businesses in the area without driving. Development needs to be done carefully to ensure that current residents and small businesses are not negatively impacted or pushed out. Like with any development, we need to work together with residents and businesses to listen to their needs, work together on common goals, and preserve affordability.

Development at this location also needs to address the particularly high level of pedestrian safety issues and challenges that exist due to high levels of traffic and fast-moving cars. Pedestrian and bike-safety improvements are essential to protect people and create walkable spaces that de-emphasize car use.

We must work with the State Highway Administration and developers who propose projects to ensure that these needs are prioritized.

### Olly Swyers (Ward 3)

Historically, the word “revitalization” has become synonymous with gentrification and displacement. Montgomery County has predicted that the building of the purple line will lead to the displacement of tens of thousands of residents who are primarily low-income, immigrant and black, brown, indigenous latinx and people of color will be forced to move. Development can be done strategically and in a way that actually bolsters and protects economic opportunity for the existing community first before making way to bring more people in. That area already has a vibrant community and businesses that serve the community, a great way to “revitalize” the community is to make it more walkable, provide more public green space and improved infrastructure for pedestrian safety. The area outside Takoma Park in Langley is unincorporated, and don't have political representation, so we need to stand with residents who are at risk of being displaced

### Terry Seamens (Ward 4)

### Jarrett Smith (Ward 5)

### Sawa Kamara (Ward 5)

The Purple Line will significantly benefit the Ward 5 community once completed. In immediate future, the biggest concern is disruption to residents and local businesses. Along the Purple Line Corridor including Ward 5, properties have already increased in value without noticeable benefit to residents or businesses. City Council can magnify community feedback and work with community groups engaged in Purple Line impact like CASA and Long Branch Business League. In order to preserve and expand existing affordable housing and diversity of local businesses, the City needs to be more engaged in these ongoing community discussions that have been occurring for last few years with Purple Line partners and County. I worry about the low-income folks who will be priced out of housing in the neighborhoods near the stations. It seems sensible to me to mitigate some of that harm by increasing the number of housing units along the Corridor; rent stabilization measures; and offering increased subsidies to ensure that low-income residents can share in the benefits of increased property values, in particular low-income people of color.

The diverse local businesses along the Corridor have weathered disruptions from Purple Line and now COVID-19. Communities thrive when businesses thrive, and I’m in favor of developments that attract people and businesses into Takoma Park. We must engage and advocate for these businesses with as much dedication as other parts of the City. We can do more to protect the small mom-and-pop stores and restaurants that enrich our city. That’s especially true of small immigrant businesses. We’ll lose our uniqueness unless we protect those businesses that help us promote and celebrate diversity.

### Talisha Searcy (Ward 6)

In the Takoma Langley Crossroads, I would like to see high density mixed used development with the creation of additionally opportunities for public space and innovative spaces for small businesses to thrive. This area also creates opportunities for the City to bring employers to the area. Thanks to the work of City staff and the County, the Takoma-Langley Crossroads area has the necessary zoning in place for high density mixed used development

(<https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/communities/downcounty/takomalangleycrossroads/>). However, this is only the first step to truly realizing the vision for development in the area.

The fate of the Purple Line is a critical component to the future state of the Crossroads area. As City Councilmember, I will continue to lobby for the State to continue to construct the Purple Line. This includes providing funding for the businesses in the Crossroads as they wait for construction to resume.

Additionally, it is critically important that the City builds lasting partnerships with the businesses and property owners in the Crossroads. Taking an “anti-development” stance does not help the City when negotiating what happens on private property. It also doesn’t encourage private property owners to consider the City as partner. The City hired an Economic Development Manager which has been an important step forward towards building these relationships. I hope to continue to further these efforts while on the City Council.

## b. Takoma Park Recreation Center (New Hampshire Ave.)

### Kate Stewart (Mayor)

The Takoma Park Recreation Center is outdated, small, inefficient and unable to meet the needs of residents, particularly young people. We have been moving forward with plans to replace the Center. In 2019, I led the Council in taking a significant step forward by acquiring the land on which the Center sits from the County, putting the City in control of the development process. Recently, the City engaged in a community input event to get feedback on what residents want and need from the project. And, we will continue to seek input as we move forward. My current goal for the project is use the land for a mixed use project that allows the creation of a new and expanded recreation center and additional high density and affordable housing at no cost to the City. But, as we move forward I remain open to new suggestions and feedback as we continue to reimagine this important community space.

### Roger Schlegel (Mayor)

The public-private partnership approach for the Recreation Center project is sound in principle. The City’s challenge is to ensure an inclusive participatory design process whose outcomes are incorporated into the eventual design. Additionally, it is crucial that the City strongly assert its interests for the project, not only with respect to Recreation facilities and programs, but also with respect to the project’s generation of affordable housing, its adherence to City climate-emergency standards for new construction, and its advancement of racial equity.

With the design of the new Rec Center itself, I have participated in the community visioning process and have personally advocated for:

- safe and convenient access (in actuality as well as in perception) by bus/circulator, by bicycle, or on foot; including a pedestrian-activated crosswalk at the site
- space for childcare, a critical expressed need across all neighborhoods of the City
- space for before- and after-school study/activities, to complement or be coordinated with the programmatic aims of the Library renovation (and preferable with a satellite Library kiosk)

- a good flow between indoor and outdoor space, with great (sunny and shaded) outdoor space
- maximal green design
- outdoor space set aside for a pollinator garden and/or a community educational garden
- facilities allowing for creative and fitness activities by people of all age groups
- flexible space for meetings and education/training programs
- a splash area or other outdoor water feature
- a great gymnasium

With respect to the floors of the building devoted to housing, I favor a variety of sizes of housing types, including

- a supply of “simplicity” small-sized units which would be affordable on the market at very reasonable prices
- a supply of truly affordable units, as described in my answer to the first question above
- a supply of moderately-priced “workforce housing” units, with many sizeable enough to accommodate families
- units that could sell/rent for more on the basis of size or amenities to help subsidize the cost of more affordable units.

The building should have separate entrances for residents and Rec Center users.

The building should have a commodious “third space” for residents to use for free in lieu of everyone living in large-sized apartments,

Efforts should be made to see if the building could accommodate a small food-related establishment as an additional “third space” where Recreation visitors and building residents could meet.

Care must be taken to ensure that there is adequate on-site parking or incentives for residents to forgo the use of a vehicle, e.g. credits for occasional car rentals or transit incentives.

Care must be taken to ensure that parking needs generated by the project can be met on-site; with an awareness that the peak demand time for Rec Center parking may be different from the peak demand time for residential parking, such that some spaces could shift in their use over the course of a 24-hour period.

### Peter Kovar (Ward 1)

I’d like the City to continue the engagement process, working with our outside partner, to explore ideas for the site with residents of the community who live closest to the site and who would be most affected by construction and/or most able to take advantage of any housing and recreation opportunities available once the site is renovated. I think the overall plan of working with an outside partner to develop improved recreation facilities and a mix of affordable and market rate units is a positive vision for the space. But, again, we should only go forward with a specific plan after we’ve heard more from residents in that part of the City.

### Cindy Dyballa (Ward 2)

Acquiring the site from the county was a great step in the city moving forward for a renovated recreation facility combined with mixed-income housing and possibly small local retail. The current city engagement effort with immediate neighbors is critical to the success of the redevelopment and of a thriving recreation center.

### Kacy Kostiuk (Ward 3)

The Recreation Center project should move forward with collaboration from residents and a clearly defined project plan. I would like to see recreation space that is pedestrian/bike-accessible and prioritizes the needs of nearby residents, as well as housing on upper levels.

Like with development at the Crossroads, this development should be carefully planned with community needs in mind and should prioritize pedestrian and bike safety. The New Hampshire Ave Bikeways project the City has been working on is a great step in this direction, but more will be needed to make this space truly accessible and comfortable for pedestrians and bikes.

Space permitting, I would also like to consider the possibility of creating additional childcare facilities along with recreation and housing on this site. Childcare is a critical need in our city, and families would benefit from a larger program space for existing before/after-school programs and perhaps an early childhood center for younger children.

### Olly Swyers (Ward 3)

I'm excited about the prospect of lively new, mixed use community space in this location. This project needs to serve those already in the New Hampshire corridor, and so discussion about what happens here needs to be led by those same community members, both homeowners and renters, as well as business owners. I think first and foremost having open public space without a paywall is a priority. The Maple avenue rec center has plenty of space but most of it needs to be reserved for use in advance. I think it's important that this new center has a place with a better open door atmosphere, whatever ends up being there.

### Terry Seamens (Ward 4)

### Jarrett Smith (Ward 5)

### Sawa Kamara (Ward 5)

The Recreation Center re-development is a prime example of how we can have a measurable impact on residents of color and low-income residents. This is an important step forward in translating racial-equity policy into action. Because the Takoma Park Recreation Center (New Hampshire Avenue) primarily serves African Americans and low-income residents, it's important to focus on this and revitalize the center. That area of the city needs a place where children can study, exercise, and socialize. Children need places to go after school where they can funnel their energy into positive activities that promote lifelong learning, physical and mental health, and social cohesion.

The center should include three primary areas: a quiet area for individual and small-group study sessions, an athletic area for sports and other activities that promote physical fitness (e.g., yoga), and a computer lab/game area for socializing. I want Takoma Park children to have healthy minds and bodies, and it's essential for city leaders to provide all children in all wards with opportunities that will help them flourish.

If we develop a reputation as a city that cares for its children and that promotes racial equality by providing excellent services to all residents in all wards, we will also become a destination for families seeking an uplifting place to raise their children, which will increase our tax base and allow us to provide even more services. We can start a virtuous circle by revitalizing the Takoma Park Recreation Center (New Hampshire Avenue).

### Talisha Searcy (Ward 6)

I am excited about the possibility at the Takoma Park Recreation Center. First, I don't see the Recreation Center as an independent site but as a critical component of a larger campus that includes Hampshire Towers Apartments as well as the Takoma Overlook Condominiums. Therefore, this project will involve working with the community, neighboring properties, as well as a private developer to ensure that the project works for everyone involved.

In the end, I would like to see recreation services as well as housing at the site. I would also like us to use this site as a way to creatively address other issues across the campus such as parking and storm water management.

## c. Washington Adventist Hospital campus

### Kate Stewart (Mayor)

I would like to see the WAH Campus used for education, housing, and healthcare. The site is large enough to accommodate a new elementary school with room for early childhood education as well as housing and healthcare services. We must continue to work with County, MCPS, State & Adventist Healthcare leaders to find a way to turn the loss of the Adventist Hospital into an opportunity for positive change in the community.

### Roger Schlegel (Mayor)

I recognize that there is no guarantee now that Washington Adventist Hospital will be selling its property or otherwise opening up parts of it for redevelopment. However, the City should be convening stakeholders (residents as well as neighbors and interested agencies) now to explore various redevelopment or re-use options and arrive at a working vision for desired future use(s) of the property. The City itself as a key stakeholder should be working to align that vision with its strategic objectives for racial equity, climate response, and affordable housing.

My role as Mayor will be to help facilitate this visioning process rather than to advocate for my own personal ideas for the site. I will also say that I need time to walk the entire site (and learn about the status of each building, the steep slope, the infrastructure, etc.) before I can feel informed enough to venture any strong opinions. However, since you are asking for my opinion at this point, I will say that I am intrigued by the following possibilities.

Under a scenario whereby WAU retains control of the property:

- Establishment of a regional birthing center on the site, with the leadership of local midwife organizations
- Conversion of any available commercial-grade kitchens on the site to sites available to
- local food and nutrition advocacy groups, in concert with local farmers and food processors

- Use of the property for new community solar or wind power generation
- Use of parts of the property for new urban forest or community gardening
- Removal of unnecessary sections of impervious surface
- Establishment of a community-based, partly volunteer-staffed, mental health clinic and crisis response team, in conjunction with changes in the City public safety approach
- Use of part of the site for a County-operated fitness center, which could include exercise spaces and equipment and a swimming pool
- Conversion of any suitable space to small senior-living apartments
- Conversion of any suitable space to childcare operations and/or day space for adult children with special needs

Under a scenario where WAU sells the property:

- Any of the above uses as deemed high-priority by the community
- Use of part of the site for a new or replacement MCPS campus
- Use of a significant portion of the site for townhome, duplex-townhome, or other village-style moderate density housing, with the goal of generating a good mix of new middle housing in the heart of town
- Use of part of the property for a neighborhood-scale transit-transfer location (with a bike parking/bike rental area included)
- Rezoning to accommodate a few local goods-and-services businesses to support the goal of a walkable, “20-minute” community and also to provide an informal community meet-up area
- An adjacent small piazza/park with attractions/activities for children as well as seniors.

### Peter Kovar (Ward 1)

The former hospital location has great potential. While there are significant budgetary challenges connected to some of its potential uses, I can imagine it being the site of one or more of the following: a mixed housing development; a retail/commercial center; an elementary school; or a recreation facility, potentially with a pool. If it’s possible to build a large enough school, perhaps the existing Piney Branch Elementary School could be converted into a recreation center. The County Planning Office will be undertaking a review of the master plan for the property with an eye toward changing the zoning there. As part of that process, I look forward to a robust public discussion on how best to utilize the site in the future.

### Cindy Dyballa (Ward 2)

Washington Adventist Hospital campus. A county mini-master plan process for the site and the area is about to start. It should include rezoning to allow something other than the single-family housing the site is currently zoned for.

### Kacy Kostiuk (Ward 3)

The former WAH campus is a large piece of property with a great deal of potential. Utilizing this property to the greatest potential will require careful partnership and collaboration efforts. A project on this site should involve collaboration with residents and emphasize community goals and needs.

I believe that this location has potential for additional housing that could help address affordability and housing access issues. It also could potentially provide a location for a new elementary school to address overcrowding issues at Piney Branch Elementary. I would also be supportive of development that includes community-focused services such as childcare or healthcare, potentially taking advantage of the location next to Washington Adventist University to provide community services and learning opportunities for students at the same time.

#### Olly Swyers (Ward 3)

In an ideal world we would be able to get someone to convert the hospital building to housing or build entirely new housing in that space. In many cases, hospitals are much easier to convert into small apartments and studios because they often already have the plumbing, electrical and HVAC systems to support this. People have also discussed having a new local school there among other ideas, proposals for which I would be interested in viewing more carefully. As of now the Adventist site isn't up for development, and although the city has some sway in perhaps facilitating deals, ultimately what happens to that location is up to Seventh Day Adventist's. Right now it is functioning as urgent care and a COVID-19 unit, so until the pandemic is truly over we don't need to rush away a place that is providing necessary service to the community.

#### Terry Seamens (Ward 4)

#### Jarrett Smith (Ward 5)

#### Sawa Kamara (Ward 5)

The hospital campus is currently owned privately. The City is in no position to purchase the property but can use influence to advocate for options more needed by residents and local businesses. A large number of jobs and associated commerce left the City with the hospital move. The city should vet with residents various options that have been discussed over the years. These include affordable housing, mixed commercial/residential uses, green space, recreation areas, and schools. The City should be ready to coherently advocate for preferred options if the opportunity arises. If Takoma Park master planning or other visioning exercises occur, this should contribute to those processes. This site is sufficiently large to consider a healthy mix of activities serving different socio-economic and diverse ethnic backgrounds of our City.

#### Talisha Searcy (Ward 6)

I think this is a very unique site which creates a number of opportunities for development. The City could work in partnership with Washington Adventist University to increase the footprint of the University campus as well as develop an innovative housing model for "student/ young adult" housing which would be open to all young adults in the City. The site could be used by new City employer. The site could also create an opportunity for a new elementary school in the City.

**3. On the long-debated Takoma Junction development process, do you support continuing the existing County and City review process or do you propose restarting the development process, including a new Request for Proposals? If so, how would the City fund this work?**

### Kate Stewart (Mayor)

Over the last six years we have had dozens of discussions and I have written extensively about, spoken, and voted on this project. The last Council vote was in July, 2018. I voted in favor of submitting the draft site plan to the County Planning Department for technical review. The 2018 Resolution, along with the Development Agreement, requires among other things:

- 1) Storm-water treatment significantly exceeding City requirements;
- 2) Parking for area businesses;
- 3) Dedicated public space;
- 4) No formula retail stores;
- 5) LEED Gold certification or higher;
- 6) Minimization of impacts to neighboring properties;
- 7) Accommodation of Co-op parking and delivery needs;
- 8) Creation of an energy neutral building.

We have an opportunity for a project that will enhance walkability and vitality of the area for neighboring small businesses, improve stormwater treatment (at no City cost) for neighboring streets, eliminate an unsightly and impervious parking lot, align with environmental goals of increased density near existing transit (rail and bus), and provide the City hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue to support other important initiatives, such as affordable housing.

I support continuing the process of technical review and having the project come back to the City Council for discussion and vote before it goes before the County Planning Board. We do not yet know if the next iteration will meet our requirements, but I believe we should continue the process and allow the technical experts at the various State, County, and City agencies the opportunity to conduct a full and thorough review for consideration by the Council.

### Roger Schlegel (Mayor)

The most recent site plan submitted by NDC for Takoma Junction fails to meet community interests in many substantive ways; it does not effectively tailor the project to respond to the values and requirements expressed in the development agreement. The silver lining of the controversies that have accompanied the process over the past several years is that we are now quite clear as a community on the types of amenities and design features that could be combined in a consensus vision for the site's development. My vision of a successful Junction development activates that stretch of Carroll Avenue in a delightful way that provides flexible community space as well as new dining and commerce. I think that with good leadership, the community can come together around a shared vision and find the partners and the resources to make it happen expeditiously, and in a way that maintains safety and advances the City's values.

I intend as Mayor to press NDC to fulfill its obligations under the terms of the Development Agreement, but I am prepared to defend the City's interests on the site and terminate the agreement with NDC if it cannot meet its obligations.

I am a smart-growth proponent and have been teaching about, and speaking out in opposition to, suburban sprawl since the 1990s. I am well-versed in the principles of smart growth and have extensively researched urban design, walkability, and transit-oriented development.

Among those principles are the need for community consensus-building around infill development, the need for protecting open space, and the importance of using infill development to support racial and economic equity. I also understand at a basic level that the word “smart” implies paying careful attention to the constrictions imposed by a site within its situation. I understand that the word “growth” is meant to align with the objective of creating a greener, more walkable community *without* encouraging gentrification (a very tricky proposition that the smart-growth movement did not fully grasp at its inception). These are the principles that have guided my thinking about, and analysis of, Takoma Junction issues for the past ten years, beginning with my service on the Takoma Junction Task Force in 2010-2012, work for which I was honored with an Azalea Award. These are the principles that cause me to take issue with numerous elements of the NDC design in its most recent iteration.

It is easy to imagine how to apply smart-growth principles at sites along New Hampshire Avenue, East University Boulevard, Piney Branch Road, and near the Takoma Metro. However, we have at Takoma Junction a quite idiosyncratic piece of publicly-owned land that calls for a truly attentive and responsive smart-growth strategy. It is located along a block where two state highway routes crisscross -- and both routes are quite significant for regional commuters as well as local users. Via a long-standing arrangement it hosts the delivery operations (as well as some customer and employee parking) for the adjacent grocery store. It functions as the primary parking lot for a number of nearby businesses (just as the two large parking lots in Old Town serve that purpose). It is located close to the geographic center of the community, in the only significantly-sized commercial district that is not on the border of Takoma Park (the others are at Erie and Flower Avenues, on Maple Avenue at Sherman Avenue, and at the south end of Sligo Creek Parkway). It has a very steep wooded slope in the rear that is significant to the City for its tree canopy and stormwater absorption. It is underlain by significant portions of dumped fill material that would need to be excavated and hauled away in an ecologically sound manner. It is located along key pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes. It is located along a curving stretch of roadway which makes midblock egress and ingress difficult (although there is an option for aligning the entry/egress with Carroll Avenue northbound). It is located on a ridge where there are solar and wind opportunities. It offers the best possible location for flexible community gathering and vending space in a centrally located commercial district. It is located in a walkshed that includes neighborhoods of expensive detached homes as well as neighborhoods of rent-stabilized multi-unit housing and condominiums. And oddly, while it is served by buses, it is farther from any rapid transit stop than any other commercial site in the City (if we assume that the Purple Line and New Hampshire Avenue BRT will be built).

I do not support the current Takoma Junction plan (the version available to the public as of September 18, 2020). I would vote “No” on NDC’s current proposal or any further iteration of it that retains the same egregious failures to align with the City’s requirements and values.

Having had several years to put together a close-to-final site plan, and with a full understanding of the City’s interests and the site’s design limitations, NDC has refused to budge on the most problematic aspects of its proposal:

- On-street truck deliveries in a heavily trafficked area with few turnaround options
- Lack of legal or safe drop-off and pick-up options for cars pulling in front of the building
- No clarity on the quantity or cost of parking spaces available for other Junction businesses and their customers
- A mid-block driveway location too close to the Philadelphia Avenue intersection

- Unacceptably long queues for exiting vehicles, encouraging parking on neighborhood streets
- Intent to eliminate the crosswalk at Grant Avenue, crucial to pedestrian safety
- No commitment to the revitalization of B.Y. Morrisson Park
- Intent to reconfigure the intersection at Ethan Allen, which would increase traffic volumes, encourage use of Sycamore/Columbia/Poplar as a cut-through, and reduce convenience for pedestrians
- Removal of the existing bikeshare station and bus stop
- Barring an intersection reconfiguration, reduction of the planned “public space” to a size below the minimum deemed acceptable to a majority of Council members
- In conflict with the priorities for safety, alternate modes of transportation, and public gathering space expressed in the 2012 Takoma Junction Task Force vision and reiterated by the 2020 SHA Vision Study
- A deeper-than-ever extension into the forested area, with a corner that essentially abuts Columbia Avenue
- Permanent removal of a significant portion of the forested area, and no clarity on how much more of this area would be impacted by excavation and construction
- Above-ground garage in the rear, topped with an open-air patio for private use, with unknown lighting, sound, and exhaust impacts on the residential area
- No clarity on emergency egress from the rear or fire department access to the rear
- An inadequate stormwater management plan in terms of capacity for large rain events and impacts on the water table downslope
- Non-compliance with the City’s expectations for new construction expressed in the climate response plan, which emphasizes fossil-fuel free development
- Assumption that the owners of the Co-op property would consent to the removal of the driveway apron on Ethan Allen Avenue and thus reduce the capacity of their parking lot
- Due to the negotiated consent agreement between the Co-op and NDC, no clarity on adverse impacts on future operations of the Co-op or long-term functionality of that property as a local grocery store

Council members and staff have been discussing the status of the project via weekly scheduled meetings during the past two years, and the City -- as partners in the development project -- has thus had ample opportunities to assert City priorities and influence the refinement of the design. It seems clear that NDC should by now have a well-defined understanding of the expectations for a successful project, not only in terms of the City agreement but also in terms of other requirements and expectations on the part of the County and the State Highway Administration.

NDC’s initial proposal, which won it the partnership with the City, was far more modest in scale and more responsive to the design constraints imposed by the site and its situation. It shared many characteristics with other promising designs put forth by local architects, landscape designers and urban design experts. I have not ruled out the possibility that an experienced commercial development partner that is seeking to have a successful early project in Montgomery County can find the means to achieve a project that is viable for itself and for the City.

The intent of this partnership with NDC, as outlined in the 2015 Resolution to Negotiate that then-Councilmember Stewart herself introduced, was never simply to generate revenue for the City -- it was to help revitalize and enhance the Junction as a commercial and cultural district, within the constrictions imposed by the site itself and its situation, and in alignment with the City's values. As Mayor, I will continue the work of seeking that ultimate objective.

Should the partnership with NDC prove to be uncondusive to meeting that objective, I would lead the City Council to seek a different development partner, but only after a brief pause to

consolidate the consensus vision that the community seems to have arrived at via the arduous and argumentative process of the past several years. I am convinced by conversations with many local experts that the capital, financing, and goodwill exist to build a beautiful, appropriately scaled, responsive, and successful infill development on the site!

### Peter Kovar (Ward 1)

I agree with the idea of developing Takoma Junction, in particular because if we have a well-designed project there, it will help create a more vibrant, walkable community. That said, I'm not supportive of the current version of the site plan. I voted against the site plan when it came before the Council two years ago, primarily because of what I consider to be an inadequate amount of public space, along with what I view as excessive height. Though the plan has been modified to some extent since that vote, those fundamental concerns haven't been addressed.

Given the acrimony that has surrounded the project, I think it would be healthy for the community to seek a compromise. As review of the plan by the County and City moves forward, I'd like to pursue a version of the project that would have a somewhat smaller overall footprint. This would mean that many of those who have been active in the debate around the project, including me, would have to accept only some of what we want for the project. But I think having a smaller structure is important, as that could make it easier to address some of the objections that have been raised concerning not only public space, but also transportation, pedestrian safety, stormwater, and the overall impact of the project within the neighborhood.

In my view it wouldn't be beneficial to have continued lengthy delays. I'd like to see us make a decision and then move forward, one way or the other. From my perspective that means working in coordination with the County review process to develop a smaller structure, and coming up with a timetable for when we'd have a final vote.

### Cindy Dyballa (Ward 2)

I think we should continue the existing county review process, in line with the direction established by existing agreements, resolutions of other Councils, and the Takoma Junction Task Force. In 2018 I voted to move the proposed plan for the lot to county agencies' development review, and worked to address specific concerns about the proposal such as the Coop's operational needs, green construction, less height, and stormwater management. When the county agencies' process concludes and before any county planning board vote, I will pay close attention to how the revised site plan conforms with our previous requirements, particularly traffic, public space, sustainability and the Coop/NDC agreement.

### Kacy Kostiuk (Ward 3)

Takoma Junction is an important cultural and social hub for the community and is especially important to Ward 3 residents. In 2018, I voted to advance the Junction Project Concept Plan to the County Review Process because I believe in-fill development at this location has the potential to benefit residents and local businesses, reduce car use, and bring additional revenue for the City's social and environmental initiatives.

I favor continuing the existing County and City review process because it will result in a revised and more detailed plan that the City Council and community can consider thoroughly before deciding on next steps.

When the project comes back to the City Council for review, I believe that the Council must thoroughly review it and ensure a robust community input process. This must involve careful analysis, questions, and advocating for change where needed.

If the plan makes stormwater worse, creates unsafe traffic conditions, negatively impacts racial equity, or creates environmental hazards for the neighborhood, I will not support moving forward without changes that address these issues.

### Olly Swyers (Ward 3)

We are already so close to seeing the final review for the plans and input from SHA and parks and planning so at this point we can see what they come up with pending changes from both of those departments. This doesn't mean we let the process continue without oversight, at the same time city officials need to be extremely proactive in holding developers accountable to the questions and concerns of constituents, and the needs of the community and final plans need to actively incorporate all of the feedback that people have been providing for years. Ideally we receive an amended plan that scales down and back, meets all the standards set forth by our community. So far NDC's plans don't represent this kind of partnership or listening, and that is unfortunate. If significant changes aren't made from the current plans, I would not support it moving forward.

### Terry Seamens (Ward 4)

### Jarrett Smith (Ward 5)

No, I do not support this process or continuing as we have. The process so far has divided the community, and this is unacceptable. The city needs to scrap everything with the plans, proposals, etc. and start COMPLETELY over with a new Request for Proposal, etc.

### Sawa Kamara (Ward 5)

Other developments impact Ward 5 and racial-equity than the Junction. The city has given residents five years to voice their concerns, and it's time for process to move out of limbo. We should certainly reconsider the size of the building and address density, safety, and environmental concerns, including the storm water management infrastructure, but we should ultimately move forward with the process. It would be a mistake to restart the development process and ask for another round of proposals. It would cost the city money that could be spent elsewhere, and if the new process takes as long as the current process, it could be another five years before residents can enjoy the benefits of the Takoma Junction project. Because of COVID-19, the City needs to stay the course. Additional costs will be incurred without benefit if there is further delays in deliberations.

Because interest rates are lower than the average annual rate of inflation in the US, the city should issue a municipal bond to pay for the project. Investors who purchase municipal bonds benefit from tax incentives, which means that we could fund the project without raising taxes on families who are already struggling due to the pandemic while also offering a stable investment vehicle for investors looking to avoid the volatility of stock markets.

#### Talisha Searcy (Ward 6)

I don't think we should restart the development process. Unfortunately, you have to have a project proposal submitted to initiate County and State review of certain issues. Many of the issues that are being addressed as part of the Takoma Junction process (i.e. storm water, parking, bus stop locations, and intersection reconfiguration) are issues that would need to be addressed for any development project at the site. The review of these issues wouldn't typically start until we have a proposal submitted. Additionally, the City has the ability to recommend altering the developer's revised plan prior to final approval. Therefore, I don't see a benefit to restarting the process at this point.

#### 4. Would you promote multifamily construction by offering additional relief from rent stabilization for new buildings, as the District and many other jurisdictions do?

#### Kate Stewart (Mayor)

Rent stabilization is an important tool for the City to maintain affordability in Takoma Park. Rents in the City are lower than elsewhere in Montgomery County because of our willingness to protect renters through rent stabilization and other measures. The City has long provided for organizations to rehabilitate older properties and no longer come under rent stabilization, as long as these projects continue to support our affordable housing goals. For example, landlords who provide affordable housing to low- and moderate-income households under contract with a government agency (like the State of Maryland) may apply for an exemption from rent stabilization. I have been and remain open to considering a variety of housing strategies that would increase the stock of affordable housing in the City while continuing to use rent stabilization and other tools to protect our most vulnerable residents.

#### Roger Schlegel (Mayor)

Consistent with all of my intentions as Mayor, I will seek to examine all of the City's programs and partnerships to see how well they fulfill objectives and to consider adjustments that can improve fulfillment of objectives. The City's policies and programs related to the rental housing market and supply have the objective of maintaining an affordable supply of high-quality rental housing, and the City has gone further in the past year to commit to an increase in that supply. The first priorities for the City with respect to these policies and programs are to assess how to define "affordable," "high-quality," and "increase" in light of new City commitments and the regional housing crisis.

Operating and maintaining rental properties is a business and a source of income and employment for many people. I think that landlords should be held to standards for providing safe and well-maintained housing to their tenants, and I also believe that tenants should have the security of knowing that they won't be evicted without just cause so long as the building remains a rental property. I also think that

landlords should be able to make income from their properties so as to support their own families and to fairly compensate their employees.

Multi-unit dwellings are one of the most complex kinds of human relationships, as their management and upkeep truly are a cooperative responsibility of the tenants as well as the owners, given the sharing of walls, halls, ceilings, floors, and stairwells (and air itself, as the covid-19 pandemic has made everyone aware). As Mayor, I will work not only to ensure that the City and County effectively regulate these relationships but also to support the strengthening of tenant associations, the strengthening of the local network of landlords, dialogue among these groups facilitated by the City, protections from evictions without cause, and support (direct or leveraged) for landlords who need or wish to make upgrades to their properties for purposes of safety, sustainability, and equity.

In light of the considerations I've outlined above, I would not characterize a well-designed rent stabilization program as something from which new buildings should need "relief." If the upfront investments in land and construction are barriers to the production of new rental housing, then it is incumbent upon the City and its willing partners (including residents, church and civic organizations, banks committed to social justice, foundations, and intergovernmental entities) to identify and preserve land/easements and financing arrangements as soon as possible to allow for future construction of great, affordable rental housing.

#### [Peter Kovar \(Ward 1\)](#)

It would depend on the impact such a change would have on housing prices in the area. But my sense is that it would be preferable to take advantage of Federal and other tax incentives and the like as a means of promoting the creation of more rental units. Exempting or partially exempting new construction from rent stabilization will tend to make it harder for lower income residents to afford to live in the City (at a time when we already have too many residents who are housing burdened), and risk further exacerbating our housing affordability challenges.

#### [Cindy Dyballa \(Ward 2\)](#)

New multifamily construction should be mixed income, to support our city housing goals. The city can promote a variety of incentives to achieve this, such as modified PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) agreements and supporting a county density bonus in exchange for more moderately priced units. I'm not familiar (yet) with the District approach, and I would like to learn more about how it would integrate with our community's rent stabilization rules.

#### [Kacy Kostiuk \(Ward 3\)](#)

We need to promote multifamily construction in targeted locations within the city to increase our housing stock. We need to do so with affordability in mind and ensure that current residents are not pushed out as a result.

There may be situations where relief from rent stabilization is appropriate, but we need to very carefully consider what is proposed in a project and how many affordable units the project would offer to balance a request for an exemption. Takoma Park is a much smaller community than DC with many fewer opportunities for housing development, so we need to be extra careful in how we utilize and take advantage of these opportunities. New housing should prioritize our community goals of maintaining a

diverse community, emphasizing racial equity, creating improved affordability, and meeting the needs of residents.

### Olly Swyers (Ward 3)

We have to be very careful, considering that DC has one of the highest displacement rates of any city, in mirroring their process for development. This would need to be considered at a project by project basis but I would not want to do anything to weaken the system we have for protecting renters.

### Terry Seamens (Ward 4)

### Jarrett Smith (Ward 5)

I believe that any developer should be given an opportunity to make the proposal to allow mixed income housing projects in the city. Takoma Park's goal is to ensure affordable housing is available to residents today and in the future. The city has a very good example of this being successfully executed by MHP and Victory Housing, therefore, I believe this example can be scaled throughout the city where development opportunities exist. Regulations should be double downed to codify tenant's rights, especially, if they are not part of Takoma Park's rent stabilization. There needs to be a hybrid approach. The 3 new development projects on the horizon (Takoma-Langley Crossroads, Takoma Park Recreation Center, and the Washington Adventist Hospital Campus) offer tremendous opportunity and I believe another location that offers a land use and economic opportunity for housing is the New Hampshire Avenue corridor.

Takoma Park does not provide social services, and the county's support is somewhat uneven and in some ways leaves many without full breadth and depth of what is needed to have a balanced life with access to educational resources, internet, transportation, etc. The opportunities for sustainable and affordable housing exist, the city simply needs to be very strategic and develop a long-range plan by which to execute.

### Sawa Kamara (Ward 5)

YES! I will advocate for multifamily construction and want to offer additional relief from rent stabilization for new buildings.

It's essential to develop land for new housing only when a developer/builder proposes intermixed housing that includes apartments, condos, and single-family homes. I understand that some developers/builders may be disinclined to build multi-family housing for fear that they will not make a substantial enough profit by building apartments in a city with rent stabilization measures in place, but even with those measures, developers/builders would still have sufficient economic incentive to build multi-family housing if they were also permitted to build condos and single-family homes at the same time and in the same area that they are permitted to build multi-family homes.

Rather than granting permits to two or three separate developers/builders to build apartments, condos, and single-family homes, the city should give a permit to a single developer/builder to build all three types of housing concurrently. While the profit from building a multi-family housing unit might be less than the profit from building a condo complex or a single-family neighborhood, if the profits of all three types of housing are averaged out, they would still be sufficient economic incentive to entice developers/builders to build housing that would help low- and low-to-middle-income residents.

There are several ways to both incentivize building and to maintain rent stabilization measures. Our decisions should balance the needs of developers/builders and residents who are struggling to pay their housing costs. For too long city decisions have been biased in favor of developers/builders.

### Talisha Searcy (Ward 6)

I support offering additional relief for rent stabilization of new buildings. However, we need to be honest with ourselves. Other jurisdictions, like the District, are able to offer more financial incentives to encourage the development of affordable housing because they initially focused on economic development activities such as soliciting new employers to the area. The initial economic development generated the tax revenue necessary to offer an incentive package to developers to build more affordable housing. Currently the City has its Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) Program. However, the PILOT Program alone, isn't enough of a financial incentive to build high quality multifamily construction. That is why it is important that we work with the County and State to ensure that more incentives are available to encourage housing development. This is also why it is critically important that the City works to increase development along New Hampshire Ave and the Crossroads.

## 5. City public engagement currently over-represents the views of older, white, and home-owning residents. How would you change the process to better engage renters, minorities, immigrants, and young families?

### Kate Stewart (Mayor)

I have always made it a priority to listen and to ensure all voices are heard. Often that's easy in Takoma Park, where many residents are passionate and active. But some groups in the City, such as immigrants, Black and Brown residents, and the young, find it harder to be heard.

During my time in office, Takoma Park became one of the first cities of our size in the country to adopt a racial equity framework for decision-making. This decision has put equity consideration front and center in the work of the city and has made concrete differences in people's lives. For instance, the City prioritized building the new bus shelter at the corner of New Hampshire Avenue and 410, as opposed to other locations in the City, by using racial equity criteria.

Among the things I have done to better engage under-represented voices:

- Moved some Council Meetings to the Takoma Park Recreation Center to improve access for residents living near New Hampshire Avenue;
- Led efforts to ensure Black and Brown young people's voices were part of the selection of new Police Chief;
- Held community meetings, lunches, and coffees in apartment buildings, restaurants, and other spaces throughout Takoma Park to hear voices that are often not included in community conversations (and to support economic development throughout the City); and
- Helped establish a Youth Council to ensure the Council receives input from young people in the City.

There is more work to do in this area. Currently, the Council is reexamining how our committees are structured to ensure the inclusion of diverse voices. We are also developing a task force to address police reform and public safety issues so that we can move forward on these issues in a way that centers Black and Brown voices and experiences. I support bringing expertise on this issue into the City government by hiring a chief equity officer who would be responsible for gathering data, operationalizing racial equity framework, and helping the City and Council find new ways to engage residents and under-represented voices.

### Roger Schlegel (Mayor)

I have written and spoken extensively on this topic. My position is that we cannot have economic or racial justice without a comprehensive, cohesive plan to prioritize participation and problem-solving by and with residents from all races, ethnicities, and language backgrounds, and of every status.

From the start of my campaign, I have already been seeking to change the process by working relentlessly with volunteers to meet and engage with residents in renter neighborhoods of the City, especially nonwhite and immigrant residents, and by making myself as available as possible to young families via Zoom calls, informal meet-ups in the street, and presence at both farmer's markets. Conversations in these settings make it clear that there are a host of everyday issues with which residents would like to see more engagement from the City (and more opportunities to engage). These issues include:

- safe, affordable childcare,
- convenient and comfortable transit,
- availability and cost of wi-fi, internet, and printer access,
- computer literacy and availability,
- park maintenance and adequate play spaces for children,
- responsiveness and courtesy of public safety personnel,
- responsiveness of other City staff,
- building maintenance and safety,
- availability of affordable and convenient retail,
- third spaces for teens as well as adults,
- local jobs and training,
- assistance in working through the residency and/or citizenship processes,
- assistance for informal businesses seeking to attain legitimate status,
- access to mental health services, health screenings, clinics, and prenatal care,
- help for families of children with special needs,
- access to City and County information in languages other than English,
- protection and enhancement of the natural environment,
- access to healthy, affordable food,
- local food-growing opportunities,
- protection from eviction without just cause,
- spaces and opportunities for festivities that highlight and introduce others to rich cultural traditions,
- spaces and opportunities for local entrepreneurs to build a local customer base, and

- opportunities to work alongside and get to know residents who are homeowners.

A good place to start in building new social networks across the homeowner-renter divide (and thus changing patterns of public engagement) is to activate existing organizations, coalitions, and/or new City committees to focus on the issues above that clearly cut across socio-economic categories. On reflection, one can see that every one of the issues above does offer such opportunities. My experience as a diversity trainer and as community leader in a diverse neighborhood tells me that new relationships and social networks are forged across lines of class, income, race, ethnicity, age, and language when people come together to *work* on common goals rather than simply to dialogue about the issues. We have no shortage of community interests to work on together, particularly as we enter the heart of the twenty-first century and begin in earnest to transition back to more locally-scaled ways of living.

A comprehensive effort to register and activate all voters is also important; this year's unexpected experiment with mail-in balloting may prove to be something that the City wishes to continue regardless of the health situation in two years.

Once the community can set new common goals with strongly established objectives, the oft-discussed challenges of where and how to meet and communicate seem easy by comparison. Closing the digital divide and thus being able to normalize distanced (e.g.

Zoom-based) participation in meetings is an important first step, as remote meetings can help many residents get over the hurdles of scheduling, transportation, and family supervision. For in-person activities (and actual *activities* are better than mere *meetings*), confidentially arranged stipends or vouchers/allowances for transportation and childcare (or provision of childcare onsite) could be transformative supports for new participants in public processes. Perhaps most importantly, intentional education and training of older, white, home-owning residents is needed to help them get past the kinds of informal patterns of communication and engagement that can cause them to make unwarranted assumptions about renters, immigrants, residents of color, or younger people, and that can lead them to be dominating or exclusionary in meetings, communication, and activities. Up front, it's essential that the City do a better job of training in, and insisting upon the use of, basic parliamentary procedures in official meetings (with any necessary adjustments of ground rules to ensure equitable participation) such that the rules themselves can serve as recourse for those seeking to undermine inequitable patterns of participation and power.

It is naive, however, to ignore the deep-seated biases, norms, and political dynamics that lead to the domination of public processes by property owners. With that awareness, I believe that the work of balancing participation cannot be separated from the work of building wealth for Black, brown, indigenous, and people of color as well as immigrants.

With all of these thoughts in mind, here are some broad value statements that I would apply to my work if I am elected Mayor of Takoma Park:

- White people, in the absence of people of color, or in white-dominated discussions and
- spaces, cannot presume to "know" what policies and priorities are most important to non-white residents.
- Effective and equitable allocation of government resources (common resources) is an essential element of any meaningful approach to racial justice in Takoma Park.

- Every public space in Takoma Park -- every street, every park, every facility -- should feel as welcoming to persons of color, at any time of day or night, as it is to white people.
- No one who lives in Takoma Park, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, or language, should experience police-initiated, police-induced trauma.
- Anyone who grows up in Takoma Park should have a realistic chance to own a home in Takoma Park and build up equity.
- In light of past racial wrongs and in the spirit of reparations, the City should act -- and leverage others' actions -- to help build up wealth and economic opportunity for historically disadvantaged residents of color.
- White people, having been the beneficiaries of white supremacist government policies for several generations, should rightfully play a significant role in the pursuit of racial justice in Takoma Park.

Specific actions I would seek to take on the Council to build a unified, diverse community where all residents are equally empowered:

- 1) Commission a coalition of local civic organizations, congregations, nonprofits, and educational institutions to create a truth-finding initiative to catalogue the history and impacts of institutionalized racism in Takoma Park, as it has been supported by local residents and institutions as well as by municipal, county, state, and federal policies. An outgrowth of this effort should be a rewriting of the Takoma Park collective "story" to highlight and celebrate the experiences and contributions of non-white residents of the area from pre-colonial times to the present.
- 2) Institute an annual program of required anti-racist training for all members of committees, boards, and task forces, as well as the City Council; require the City Manager to extend anti-racist training to all staff; incorporate an anti-racist teachable moment into every City Council meeting; and reduce the salary/wage racial disparity among City staff.
- 3) Introduce program-based budgeting and metrics to ensure that programs, services, staff time, and infrastructure maintenance/improvements are allocated and directed in ways that promote racial and geographic equity -- not just aiming for racial parity, but truly geared toward equity, which has "leveling the playing field" as its goal.
- 4) In the climate response strategy, recognize that persons living in multi-unit housing, persons using public transportation, etc. are already generating a smaller carbon footprint than persons living in detached homes and driving cars, for the most part. Therefore, in the short-term and mid-range climate action strategies, Do NOT prioritize requirements that unfairly burden populations that are primarily residents of color at present, either directly or indirectly.
- 5) In the climate response strategy, DO prioritize actions that leverage and incentivize new economic opportunities for residents of color in Takoma Park, in partnership with other local businesses, organizations, and institutions (such as our two in-town colleges and the University of Maryland). Our push to develop a more local, "twenty-minute" economy, with more local food and energy production, more carbon sequestration, and new approaches to deliveries and transit, should generate meaningful wealth-building opportunities that close the wealth gap for BIPOC residents.

- 6) In the climate response strategy, DO prioritize actions that make transportation as low-cost, reliable, and convenient as possible, for the benefit of all residents, and affording dignity, safety, and comfort for all those who walk, bike, or use transit.
- 7) As a pillar of the City's strategy for guiding commercial development, insist that new development as well as redevelopment do no harm to existing businesses owned by, significantly patronized by, or significantly staffed by, people of color (residents and non-residents alike) -- either during construction or as a long-term consequence.
- 8) Similar to the rent stabilization program, pilot an affordable retail stabilization program to make it more likely that affordable goods and services remain in close proximity to residents on lower and fixed incomes in the City.
- 9) Work with the local realtor community to create and disseminate information to prospective buyers stating very clearly the City's stance on, and commitment to, racial equity, so that all people who move into the City are fully apprised of this long-term City priority and its attendant impact on the allocation of public resources.
- 10) Investigate and, if feasible, work to leverage the establishment of a local "Equitable Takoma" credit union or banking arrangement into which Takoma Park residents could place capital that could then be used locally to spur economic opportunities (home-buying, renovations, college loans, and business start-ups and expansions) that would have racial economic justice as their core mission.
- 11) In the Recreation Department, offer free language courses and conversational opportunities in English, Spanish, Amharic, French, and any other widely spoken local languages, with the encouragement of all Takoma Park residents, including native English speakers, to become conversant in a second local language.
- 12) Fast-track the development of a playground in northern Ward 6 as a gathering place for building social networks across racial difference in that neighborhood. Review the condition and safety of the Eastridge Avenue playground in Ward 5, and make improvements as needed to the facilities and safety of the area.
- 13) Evaluate all public spaces in the City, especially small parks and gardened areas such as those along Philadelphia Avenue, to assess how and whether they might be better activated as free, informal, unsupervised public gathering spaces.
- 14) Ensure that the Library and Rec Center redevelopment projects, and any ancillary programs related to after-school or enrichment activities for young people, closely involve many residents of color, incorporate their concerns and perspectives, set objectives and measure efficacy, and ultimately contribute to positive outcomes for young people of color as they go through their lives.
- 15) Ensure that the redevelopment of the City-owned property at Takoma Junction advances racial equity, not in a secondary way, but in terms of the access to and use of that centrally located site itself.

### Peter Kovar (Ward 1)

There are many reasons the current engagement approach isn't working, which means we'll have to use multiple strategies to get to a point where we hear from a more representative cross section of

residents on an ongoing basis. I'd like us to do a deeper dive into the results of the previous resident survey and focus group findings, and consider conducting additional focus groups in multiple languages to help determine new approaches. Meanwhile, we should also explore whether the engagement model being used for the New Hampshire Avenue Recreation Center, as well as the Task Force approach we'll be following on reimagining public safety, may have valuable applications to broader engagement on municipal matters.

In addition -- and some these ideas may make more sense for a post-COVID period -- we should think about testing on a pilot basis strategies to encourage participation in Council meetings such as periodically holding meetings in other locations in the City (including potentially houses of worship or apartment buildings); scheduling Council meetings for times other than weeknights; having real-time translation of Council meeting discussions and debates; including more detail on Council meetings in the monthly newsletter; making child care available on a more regular basis during meetings; and offering "door prizes" for attendance at Council meetings. Separate from Council meetings, we should continue our efforts to make the membership of resident committees more representative of the City's population; heavily publicize the Council's priority setting retreats perhaps with watch parties in coordination with tenant associations, and have occasional informal Council roundtables (with several Councilmembers from other Wards) in multi-family buildings, houses of worship, businesses, day care centers, etc.

### [Cindy Dyballa \(Ward 2\)](#)

I don't think we can rely on one process. Our many different residents get their information, and express their views, in different ways. We've already begun some important approaches to actively engage a much wider range of residents, share information in various languages, and employ different ways of hearing their views. I especially want to draw on the experience of city staff during the pandemic about what works for renters and for people of color, and apply it to civic engagement generally. I'd like to learn similar lessons from the current targeted outreach process for the recreation center. And a revamping of the committee process, to better engage all our many types of residents, is underway.

### [Kacy Kostiuk \(Ward 3\)](#)

The City needs to build new structures for improved engagement with renters, immigrants, Black and Brown residents, and young families. The only way we can create and maintain policies and programs that truly meet the needs of our community is through collaboration and input from the community as a whole, and we do not currently hear the views of renters, immigrants, Black and Brown residents, and young families enough.

I believe we need to:

- Increase connections with tenant and neighborhood associations. By providing supports to these existing associations and creating connections between them and City staff, we can create a natural feedback process where the City receives input on the needs and perspectives of residents through existing grassroots processes
- Make changes to the committee structure and recruiting processes to create committees that are diverse and representatives of the community at large
- Create more connections and collaboration with school PTAs, where a diverse group of community parents are already connected

- Plan in plans for targeted outreach to communities that we are not hearing from as often to ensure their perspectives are heard on city projects and initiatives
- Deliver information in multiple languages and through multiple formats (online, newsletter, fliers, new apps and technology, etc.) to reach more people

### Olly Swyers (Ward 3)

Our current engagement relies primarily on city council meetings and listservs, which aren't necessarily accessible or interesting to people who want real representation or want a voice that isn't going to be drowned. We need to do more to engage on social media, expand online forums, do regular town halls and make sure that language justice and occupy style stacking is used in the facilitation of these meetings to prioritize marginalized voices.

### Terry Seamens (Ward 4)

#### Jarrett Smith (Ward 5)

Efforts to mobilize the people of color in this city have been successful in some ways however, the communities of black and brown people need to feel like they are part of the community. City administration needs to be inclusive of black and brown people, given the fact that the city is majority ethnic. Civic participation has always been a "care about" for me and what I would encourage city administration to do is to continue to use city council meetings to educate voters on the civic process. Invite renters in the community to bring their ideas, concerns, and issues forward. I continue to encourage residents of Ward 5 to engage with city administration, their city council representative, and even county administration if necessary. I encourage this practice for any black or brown person as this is part of what governing is. No door should be closed, and no concern should continue without being addressed.

### Sawa Kamara (Ward 5)

As a community health worker in the field of public health and as a volunteer organizer trying to help my neighbors deal with food insecurity, I work with residents who are often under-represented in typical public engagement structures like committees or City Council meetings but have their own ways of communicating within their communities and social networks. They are often too busy to engage in City processes that they do not see relevant to their lives. My personal experiences in Takoma Park have demonstrated clearly that the existing channels don't reach the most vulnerable people in our community, particularly low-income residents, limited English proficient residents, and people of color.

First, are we tracking the problem adequately to hold City accountable? The preferred channels may be committees, public hearings, City Council meetings but we need to document and discuss on ongoing basis shortcomings with these channels. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses and proven that immigrants and people of color have not tapped into available relief.

Regular City-funded surveys should be conducted to solicit feedback with special emphasis to get feedback from residents who are underrepresented in public engagement channels. This may require translation, oversampling and more targeted outreach but the costs of being biased by a subset of residents is an equal concern. We should minimally translate all information into Spanish and Amharic because there's great strength in inclusion, and if you want people to know and to care, we have to speak their language.

Second, we need to modify the structure of committees, to change the way that the city council interacts with the community and to bring these discussions more to the Ward 5 community in an open regular and consistent way. With COVID-19, we have learned how to better use information technology to do that but we have realized its shortcomings. We may need to continue to learn and adapt in this environment but in order to gain trust it needs to be done openly, consistently, inclusive of all Ward 5 residents. It may require changing established committee criteria to increase representation of people of color and immigrants in all wards (for example, specific minimum criteria for people of color, limited English proficient, or Wards). We should also be advocating for a broadening of access to information technology to ensure that it's accessible to all residents, whether in our schools, libraries, or other places where our residents naturally come together.

As an elected member of the city council, I will do everything in my power to bring services and information to the people because otherwise the efforts of those offering the services are wasted. My public service mantra is this: "If the people can't come to you, then go to the people." That principle would guide my every action as a member of the city council.

### Talisha Searcy (Ward 6)

I believe that there are a number of things that we can do increase engagement. First, we have to think about what residents need. For example, we know that childcare is a challenge. How can we work to provide childcare during Council meetings? The pandemic has taught us to use technology in a novel way. For example, could we use translated robo-calls like, Montgomery County Public Schools, to provide residents with information about what is happening in the community? I also support looking at our committees to ensure that we are asking people to volunteer on things that matter to them.

## 6. Takoma Park, Piney Branch, Rolling Terrace ES, and Montgomery Blair HS are at or over capacity. Do you support advocating the Montgomery County Public Schools system for a new local school? How else would you work with MCPS to provide sufficient capacity and quality for our growing community?

### Kate Stewart (Mayor)

I have and will continue to advocate for a new school in Takoma Park. In 2018, under my leadership, the City adopted a Resolution that calls for MCPS and Montgomery County to:

- Allocate the funds required for the expansion of Piney Branch Elementary School which is necessary to partially accommodate the growing population of school age children;
- Study the feasibility of using the Washington Adventist Hospital campus, which meets the criteria for school site selection, for the location of a new school;
- Develop a process for siting new schools when no available site is identified in a Master Plan;
- Give serious consideration to acquiring privately owned land for schools, especially in dense Downcounty locations, with both the short-term costs of land purchase and the long-term costs of busing students weighed into decisions; and

- Ensure that walkability, sustainability, racial equity, and the development of strong community schools be important factors in decision-making about school sites

The resolution is not nearly enough. We need to continue to work with our colleagues at other levels of government to move forward. I have deep relationships with members of the County Council, MCPS and our state delegation and will continue to make sure that our voices are heard as the County makes decisions about new schools. I appreciate what my fellow elected officials say about this work. As County Councilmember Hucker recently commented:

“The way she advocates really matters as well. Some electeds send us a letter and then they're done. They phone it in. That's not Kate's style. Kate not only sends the letter. She testifies, she testifies in person, she sets up delegation meetings, she comes to Rockville and meets with colleagues individually and lines up the votes to make big things happen.”

While the City of Takoma Park does not control our local schools, I plan to continue advocating to make things happen and to ensure that our residents continue to have access to high quality public schools.

### [Roger Schlegel \(Mayor\)](#)

I believe that smaller-scaled local schools create stronger, more secure, and more cohesive learning communities that build lasting relationships across difference in communities. At the same time, I am opposed to redistricting approaches that result in the continuation or deepening of racial and economic segregation among students and families. Given that Takoma Park is as diverse as any part of Montgomery County, I support advocating MCPS for a new local school. In my response to question 2(c) above, I described my openness to exploring the repurposing of a part of the Washington Adventist Hospital campus for a new or replacement school.

My understanding is that MCPS views our two vacant/underutilized education campuses in town (John Nevins Andrews School and the Washington-McLaughlin School) as too small to accommodate modern school facilities or as poorly situated in terms of transportation and bus access (in the case of JNA). I recognize that there are cost savings and curricular enhancements that can be achieved with larger campuses and student bodies; however, I would still like to pursue conversations with MCPS about piloting experiments with smaller campuses and student bodies in Takoma Park, in alignment with our interest in becoming a locally-scaled community while staying diverse.

Redevelopment of the Takoma-Langley Crossroads area or of middle/lower New Hampshire Avenues could also present fresh opportunities for co-locating an educational campus in a vibrant commercial district that is convenient to light rail and/or potentially bus rapid transit, so I am open to working with the County on such possibilities.

Finally, I think it's important to mention that the construction of the new Math and Science building at Montgomery College, disruptive as it has been to our community, generates important opportunities for City and local partnerships with Montgomery College to help local students transition into successful careers in a burgeoning local green economy that is establishing new ways of generating and saving energy, utilizing land and water, supporting public health and well-being, expanding the local food system, and innovating systems of transportation and delivery.

### Peter Kovar (Ward 1)

The Council has weighed in on this topic previously, including during the discussions about the potential renovation of Piney Branch Elementary School, and in the context of the MCPS Site Selection Committee. We need to stay active: I'm very disappointed that there's been a failure or inability on the part of the County school system to appropriately take into account the important role Takoma Park plays -- especially through our rent stabilization law -- in providing affordable housing for immigrant and lower income families. When that's combined with chronic under-projections of student population growth in our area, we end up with insufficient space and over-crowded schools. Particularly now that we have a potential school site at the former Adventist Hospital property, I'd like to see us undertake a coordinated effort to press the school board and our other County elected officials to make siting of a new elementary school in or near the City a high priority.

### Cindy Dyballa (Ward 2)

I see part of the city's role as advocating for our residents to the county and state. I support continuing our advocacy to MCPS about down-county overcrowding, the importance of expanding high-quality educational capacity in our community, and the urgent need for a new local school. Many PTA leaders are city residents, and we can support their leadership on these issues.

### Kacy Kostiuk (Ward 3)

School access is critical to our community, and I believe that one of our schools' strengths is that they are community schools with diverse student bodies and walkable access for many. We need to look at issues of capacity and future projections, as well as advocate to the County for the fact that our capacity levels are likely to grow beyond some projection models because we typically have large numbers of families moving in with children who will attend schools.

We need to ensure that our local schools are thriving more now than ever. COVID-19 has resulted in significant challenges for many children and families. I know from personal experience how challenging distance-learning is for families, and much more so for families without the option to work from home, without access to Internet and technology, with fears of eviction, food insecurity, and more. Our schools and childcare providers will play a critical role in recovery -- both now and into the future. We need to ensure that there is adequate space for our young people's needs so that we can keep our students at local schools and ensure they do not face uncomfortable, crowded settings.

This means working together with active school PTAs, school leadership, and the Board of Education to advocate for our needs and find solutions. We should look for opportunities to create a new space for Piney Branch Elementary if we can locate one nearby that can provide greater capacity, as the PBES site is the smallest property lot in the county. We need to advocate for our community's school needs and ensure that students at all levels have the space they need.

### Olly Swyers (Ward 3)

The first thing we need to do is address zoning that makes some schools overcrowded and other schools under. Because Montgomery county allocates the same amount of funding for every child, the way to make sure all schools are of quality is to ensure that that funding is allocated equitably. If overcrowding is still an issue in local schools then I think we should absolutely look towards a location for a new public school in the community.

### Terry Seamens (Ward 4)

### Jarrett Smith (Ward 5)

I support a new school because as our community continues to grow, the youth in our community must be educated. As our community and the country continues to become more ethnic, education is a very basic necessity to thrive in our society. Schooling for youth ages K-12 are essential therefore, I believe if we were to reimagine required amenities on a school campus such as shared use facilities for computing, sporting, arts and crafts, etc. Given the latter, financing a new school is possible. Overcrowded classrooms and under resourced schools are no way to prepare a child for his/her future or even the future of our country.

### Sawa Kamara (Ward 5)

City Council will be better able to serve Ward 5 residents if it uses new data available to understand these problems. Solving overcrowding in our schools must begin with a thorough analysis of new MCPS boundary analysis and census data, including the racial, income, and linguistic composition of our wards. That data will help us determine actual needs and ways to make more equitable decisions about the overall needs of individual schools and Takoma Park students. Another part of the solution involves performing needs assessments among the parents whose children would be affected by the expansion of the MCPS and among the staff, teachers, and administrators of the schools governed by MCPS.

We also need to examine the school development and renovation plans already in the works. Besides building one or more additional schools to relieve overcrowding, we also need to renovate Takoma Park Middle School and Silver Spring Internationals so that we can alleviate some of the overcrowding within the classrooms of those schools. We also need to determine ways to improve school infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to rethink staffing, spacing, safety, and information technology resources in our schools, and we must consider these features carefully for all of our schools going forward.

Overcrowded schools represent one of the most serious harms perpetrated against our children, especially children of color. Our leaders have allowed our young minds to be crammed into schools like Rolling Terrace ES and Montgomery Blair HS. They have set the students up for failure, and then they have the gall to shake their heads in disappointment at the low high school and college graduation rates in those communities, which are often communities of color. There's a direct and immediate connection between overcrowded schools and low educational achievement, and it's impossible to address the latter without first addressing the former.

The problem with overcrowding at schools isn't just that students have less one-on-one time with teachers in their classrooms. It's also that the school doesn't have enough computers, books, or supplies to go around, which is a serious problem in schools whose student body population is largely comprised of children from low-income, food-insecure families. As a result, our children are failing to achieve proficiency in reading and math. We can't expect our students to achieve proficiency if we can't give them what they need to succeed, and in many cases that includes food so they don't go to class hungry.

I currently help Ward 5 find food for distribution, primarily among Latino, Ethiopian, African, and African-American residents, although there are certainly many white residents who receive food through our program. I never allow a person's background or language to stand as a barrier to receiving

the support they need. That program has a direct impact on a child's ability to learn in school, and I hope to expand it so that all students in our community have enough to eat.

### Talisha Searcy (Ward 6)

I support encouraging the creation of more down-county schools. The most important thing that the City can do is lobby the County to ensure that MCPS addresses overcrowding in our schools and identifies locations in the City for a future school.