

Candidate: Alex Hadden
Ward#: 3

Dear Candidates for Elected Office in the 2022 Takoma Park City Council Election,

Takoma for All (TFA) is a group of Maryland and Washington 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, commercial spaces, and community amenities including schools, parks, recreation facilities and public spaces.

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 respond to the following questions?

1. Despite the recent failed Takoma Junction project, Takoma Park has several large tracts of land that are unused or underused. Please describe your vision for what you'd like to see Takoma Park officials do to promote these sites for revitalization?

A: With over 15 years of experience in economic development finance, my experience evaluating and negotiating large infrastructure projects will improve invaluable as the City looks to balance commercial viability, construction and operational risks, and promote sustainable impact of future developments in our community.

First, there isn't a scenario where the City has the budgetary resources to 'go it alone', whether the City owns the land or not. If the City intends to be a credible stakeholder in any future conversation around the development of owned, un-owned, unused or underused land under its purview, then the City must preserve its reputation as a reliable counterparty able to attract future partners to stimulate our small business community, improve our City's charm and livability, and advance our environmental and social values. This will require redefining what success means in relation to the Takoma Junction project and the contract with NDC. A failure at the Junction will drive up costs or jeopardize the City's ability to find the right partners for future collaborative endeavors.

In my conversations with Ward 3 residents, for those that are interested in the Junction project, there is nearly universal desire to see 'something rather than nothing'. After so many years of work and community feedback, there is a wealth of understanding of the exciting potential opportunities for the site. There will also be substantial changes in local, county and state-level representation following the coming election, which may provide an opportunity to breathe new life into discussions with relevant stakeholders.

Second, the two consistent requests I have heard from Ward 3 residents around the use of lands, such as the Washington Adventist Hospital site and the Washington-McLaughlin School, are either (i) preservation of community greenspace or (ii) affordable, multi-family housing. These two interests are not as contradictory as they appear, especially if housing is permitted at a density required to materially address the City's shortage of housing stock. Further, good multi-family housing development should be accessible to greenspace in addition to public transit. There is no shortage of qualified developers in the region capable of advancing

affordable or mixed-income housing projects; there are over 1,000 condo units being built in Washington, DC within walking distance of all Ward 3 residents, nearly all of which have an affordability component. The City will need to learn lessons from the Junction process to accurately define community priorities in order to de-risk and market any future development opportunities to qualified partners. The City also has *de minimis* resources to allocate to or catalyze housing projects, so it will have to identify existing County and State incentives that encourage housing development.

There certainly are broader use cases for some of these spaces, including education and healthcare. The Washington Adventist Hospital, especially, has a very large footprint. However, it will take further work with many stakeholders to reenvision the Adventist Hospital as a new community resource.

Third, redevelopment efforts should not displace amenities that are widely enjoyed and provide benefits to the community. For instance, if there was to be a redevelopment of the Takoma Park Recreation Center, the needs and uses of the existing facility by the beneficiary community should be thoroughly considered in any future planning. The building may be out of date, and the site underutilized versus current community needs, but the facility is still an important social center for many people, including African Americans and low-income residents.

Finally, with the larger macro uncertainties in the economy, the City Council must not make the mistake of thinking that the world it is operating in today is the same as the world it was operating in yesterday or will be operating in tomorrow. With the combined realities of rising interest rates, inflation, changes in commercial versus residential demand in real estate, and the potential for a slowing economy and/or housing market, the City Council will likely navigate choppy waters over the next two years, necessitating election of Councilmembers with the necessary real world experience to understand how these realities affect its work and the broader community.

2. Takoma Park hasn't added any apartment buildings ever since [it adopted rent control in 1981](#). If elected, would you support providing an incentive for builders to construct apartments by giving them an automatic exemption from rent control restrictions for a fixed period of time (e.g. 10-20 years)?

A: Rent stabilization measures should remain, so long as they do not create an environment that is un conducive to attracting more housing opportunities. A limited exemption to rent control may be attractive to housing developers at the margins, but it is far from the only factor that has deterred housing development in our community. If rent control exemptions were to be given to developers, it should be under a set of conditions that demonstrate the project's extraordinary capacity to meet community needs, including by reaching underserved segments, or addressing affordability and sustainability targets.

In my experience as an economic development lender evaluating affordable housing projects across multiple markets, I can confidently say that housing affordability, at its core, is about

housing supply. The City has had a plan for quite some time 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.” If the success of that plan was to be measured off of new units built, it has failed to date. There are areas in the community where increasing housing density may be successful, following rigorous evaluative and consultative processes drawing on lessons of the Junction Redevelopment process. Future housing density in sites like Washington Adventist Hospital, Washington-McLaughlin School, or the Takoma Park Recreation Center come to mind.

3. Do you support Montgomery County’s proposed general plan, known as “Thrive 2050”? If so, do you support Thrive’s central tenet to revise land use designations for properties that are adjacent to transit hubs like the Takoma Metro Station in DC and proposed Purple Line Stations in Takoma Park?

A: Living in Takoma Park is aspirational for many and meeting a portion of that need will have to come from new housing stock. Revising land use designations around transit hubs is a proven and reasonable strategy to grow and bring diversity into communities. Instead of outsourcing these housing density activities to Washington, DC, the City should take a view to pursuing housing development opportunities around new and future metro stops, Takoma-Langley and New Hampshire Ave. Mixed-use developments in these areas should be designed to serve a diverse community of beneficiaries, such as those that require affordable housing or those that need transit access to reach nearby commercial and employment centers, including D.C. and Silver Spring.

As it stands, there are more than 1,000 condo units being built within walking distance of every Ward 3 resident, yet none of the direct economic benefits of those investments are accruing to the City. In the near-term, the City must prepare for the reality of more visitors, passer-throughs and commerce as a result of housing developments being out-sourced to the City’s borders. Simply stated, basic traffic and pedestrian infrastructure in Ward 3 is not well designed for the prospect of increased vehicular and pedestrian traffic, including neighborhoods lacking the most basic investments, including usable sidewalks, especially in historically underinvested areas of ‘lower Ward 3.’ Nearly every Ward 3 resident sees the effects of cut-through traffic in their neighborhood (eg, Walnut, Sligo Mill Road, 4th Ave, Kansas Lane, Poplar, Elm, Columbia) in addition to bottlenecks on Carroll and Ethan Allen. Areas around Carroll and Ethan Allen, Takoma-Langley, and New Hampshire Ave need to improve pedestrian and bicycle-safety, which are abysmal in their current state, which will require City Council staff to work with County and State staff.

4. Although Takoma Park kids can choose from several high schools, Montgomery Blair High School is the “home” school for most kids and it is overcapacity by more than 300 kids. Blair HS is projected to be more than 900 kids over capacity in [less than 10 years](https://gis.mcpsmd.org/cipmasterpdfs/MP23_Chapter4DowncountyConsortium.pdf) (p.6). Do you support the building of a new high school located in Takoma Park or Silver Spring?

A: There appears to be support among Ward 3 residents that have children to invest in school facilities. The strength of the community’s schools has been one of the many reasons that Takoma Park has maintained a diverse and vibrant family-oriented community. However, fundamentally, this is an issue to be coordinated with the County, with an eye to a wide range of budgetary, location and community-equity considerations. The City Council will have to advocate with the County to ensure that overcrowding in our local schools is recognized and suitably addressed.

Related, there is also a desire to see more childcare facilities in the community, possibly incorporated into the larger development opportunities the City may see in the coming years, including program space for before- and after-school programs or early childhood centers.

5. The Montgomery County Public School system has previously proposed expanding Piney Branch Elementary School in a way that would eliminate the indoor pool. Do you agree or disagree with this proposal?

A: This issue has not been raised to me by a single resident in Ward 3. However, if the Montgomery County Public School system were to determine that the indoor pool should be eliminated, and the broader Takoma Park community supported the continuous provision of these services, then it may be appropriate to consider these services to be delivered under a future development project.

6. Takoma Park city employees are currently developing a much-needed public space management plan, but it’s already clear that some recent changes have been successful such as the partial closure of Laurel Avenue during the pandemic to increase

public space. If elected, will you consider voting to permanently close all or part of Laurel Avenue and other commercial spots to increase the public space for our residents and commercial patrons?

A: At this time, it is clear that our local small businesses on Laurel Avenue still require the use of public spaces to serve the community in a way that makes all members of the community feel comfortable. I do not think it is in the community interest to alter the current use of public space at this time.

We must not forget that public spaces under the City's purview also include sidewalks, parks, forested areas and stormwater infrastructure, which in portions of Ward 3 are often non-existent, underinvested in or unmaintained. With so much focus on potentially contentious development projects, the City and Takoma Park residents often overlook the reality that areas of Ward 3 have limited or poor sidewalk infrastructure, experience frequent flooding and have large tracts of wooded areas that are being left to be smothered by invasive species or are otherwise underutilized by the community (eg, Circle Woods, Dorothy's Woods, and the forest at Poplar and New Hampshire Ave). The City demurs when County public resources in our community need attention. The City needs to have a plan to adequately improve and connect these resources in a manner that makes these valuable community spaces accessible to all Takoma Park residents.

7. Cycling is a proven method to provide our kids and our poorest residents with a climate-friendly mode of travel around Takoma Park, but only if it's safe for users. Maple and Carroll Avenues are among the city's most active cycling corridors due to their proximity to community amenities. If elected, will you vote to provide our children and most vulnerable residents with a safe place to use their bicycles to access critical Takoma Park amenities?

A: I believe in the broad benefits of the proliferation of safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. I have been a bicycle commuter to and from downtown Washington, D.C. on the Metropolitan Branch Trail for many years. The City's sustainability efforts and resources need greater focus on encouraging citizens to be pedestrian-first where possible. In Ward 3, especially in the communities close to Eastern Ave and New Hampshire Ave, usable, interconnected sidewalks often disappear while afoot, encouraging reliance on automobiles. Children and stroller-pushing parents share the road when visiting local playgrounds, the farmers' market and community gardens. How is it possible that the City installs traffic calming measures, such as bump outs and speed bumps, but they don't require sidewalks on both sides

of the same, highly trafficked street? The City will lack credibility as a leader in sustainability until these issues are addressed.

8. The City of Takoma Park [currently only requires](#) vacant properties to be registered as such by their owners. If elected, would you support the creation of a vacancy tax to encourage landlords to make productive use of their properties?

A: Having previously owned a home and also been a landlord in nearby Washington, D.C. Ward 4, in which vacant homes were a persistent community issue, I support policies that incentivize absentee owners to make productive use of or divest of nuisance vacant properties. Such policies can be written to protect local or low-income property owners that are struggling to maintain their properties, while also targeting properties that are owned, held and undeveloped by real estate speculators.

9. How do you envision building consensus around controversial subjects likely to come before the council? What is your experience in reaching “across the aisle” and thereby overcome possible division in the city?

A: With over a decade of public service in development finance, my career has touched on projects financing digital infrastructure, affordable housing, financial institution strengthening, microfinance, small and medium enterprise lending, transportation, energy efficiency, clean energy generation and distribution modernization, impact investing and public-private partnerships. Every project I have worked on has required collaborating with some mix of domestic and foreign governments, institutional partners, community leaders, village elders, and the private sector. I have provided policy advice at the highest levels in the U.S. and overseas, literally to “both sides of the aisle”, with every current activity I work on requiring some form of bi-partisan Congressional consent.

When I talk to Ward 3 residents, I am continually reminded of how much we all have in common. Broad consultation should be a primary focus when the City Council considers planning and use issues of material municipal resources. However, in those discussions, focusing on our shared values is the surest way to advance our agendas. By focusing on making Ward 3 more livable, our corner of Takoma Park can be the best community to call home or run a business.

10. What are your plans to allow for residents with diverse backgrounds, e.g. renters, minorities, immigrants, and young families to be an active part of the discussion and decision making in the city (e.g. in Committees)?

A: Ward 3 is incredibly diverse socioeconomically, racially and culturally. Our community has modest modular homes, large new and historic single-family homes, townhouses, duplexes, multi-dwelling apartments buildings and the housing insecure. We are informal laborers, sole proprietors, small businesses owners, federal and non-profit workers and some of the country's largest brands and franchises. We are veterans, families, immigrants, single- or overworked-parents, the disabled, artists, retirees, and advocates. Yet, despite this diversity, City politics is often most responsive to the "squeaky wheel" of residents with the loudest voices and the most resources.

The City Council needs to elevate and address issues that are relevant to residents of "diverse backgrounds". As a Ward 3 resident, who lives in an area that used to sit in Prince George's County, I don't think I have ever been asked about the Junction Redevelopment by a neighbor that was not white and upper-middle income. Instead, I have found that the economically, racially and culturally marginalized members of our community often express concerns about being most disproportionately affected by gaps in livability, affordability, and safety. Some members of Ward 3 consider catalytic converter thefts a nuisance; others find replacing that loss a devastating economic blow to their household finances. In a community of few sidewalks, it is the poorest among us, and their children, that share the street with cars the most, due to not owning a vehicle. If there was any lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic, it was that we are only as strong as the most vulnerable among us.

My campaign is focused on giving voice to the issues at the doorstep of Ward 3 residents, while upholding the core progressive values of Takoma Park. In my community outreach, I hear underrepresented groups expressing fundamental concerns about livability: rising cost of living, underinvestment in Ward 3, and slow City responsiveness. Ward 3 faces unique challenges compared to other wards, due to historic underinvestment in communities along Eastern Ave and New Hampshire Ave. Important quality of life issues are often brushed off as multijurisdictional challenges or falling into a chasm of responsibility between Montgomery County and the City. The City's response under its authorities often lacks conformity to ordinances or uniformity across situations. In the near-term, we need improvements to the City's information collection and response, which should be paired with long-term focus on service excellence, factoring in data- and risk-weighted resource allocation to affected areas.

As Councilmember, I will provide multiple channels through which Ward 3 residents can communicate their concerns, starting during my campaign at www.alexforward3.com. Long-term, we need to increase voter participation among disaffected groups to amplify voices. Only a fraction of registered voters are participating in our local elections.

