



Candidate: Jason Small
Ward#: 6

Embracing Change,
Championing Inclusive Growth

www.takomaforall.org

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: Navigating land use and utilization in a community inside the beltway is always an issue of being landlocked. We can't sprawl into undeveloped acres in any direction. With the school building adjacent to Dorothy's Woods and the closing of the Washington Adventist campus, there are places where existing commitments to the environment can be honored while rehabilitating these spaces.

Green space is actually really hard to come by in Takoma Park. Ward 6 does enjoy some great park spaces, but in My Ward, there are really very few places to play or gather as a community in usable and accessible green space. Our local parks within walking distance of my home are great for toddlers, but activity with grade school kids and organized play are hard to do. I'm glad that the rfp to reimagine a better and more functional use of the recreational center.

I'd Like to see land uses of current spaces that recognize that there are now many new families starting out here, and that well used green space is better open space. I think there are definitely NIMBY issues in any bedroom community. Many of the former rabble rousers that are longtime residents here now hold pretty valuable land as home owners. The issues in front on the young families are simply not the same as they once were. But the feeling of brotherhood and goodwill toward community is still a good goal. And I would like to remind all our residents that we can put these goals first for this generation and the ones to follow.

I'd like to see the city have the courage to engage robust planning rounds for these previously developed spaces first. They present wonderful chances to rebuild, and there are real opportunities to incorporate residents into this process. Best practices as I know them from my previous Job as a City Manager requires that government actors ensure these things happen. I would advocate strongly for starting here AND making more recreational spaces for the humans on the east side of Sligo Creek.

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: I am in favor of affordable fair housing full stop. I think that developers often fail to acknowledge that money can be made of margins less that 15%, and that municipalities with tax assessment authority are often held up by asset banking or failures

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: I think these zoning norms should be consistent with best practices for transit oriented development, but I also think that dealing with density means making a whole community. You can’t just put a vertical development in the middle of a neighborhood that is not also planned well. Ward 6 is going to change drastically with new development. Even if it is not within the city we will be shaped by it, and already are.

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](#) (p.6). Do you support the building of a new high school located in Takoma Park or Silver Spring?

A: YES.

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: I think that the long branch pool is not far. I also think that there is holdover racism in some of the towns assumptions about where they can feel “safe’.

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: Yes. And there should be more parking options for people who do not live within walking distance.

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 think finding a street lanes policy that accepts the corridor nature of traffic on Maryland main roads/state highways is necessary for a better future and safer kids.

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: Not a tax. A fee. We did this in Capitol Heights and it can be a lot more trouble if you call it the wrong thing.

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

A: I have an anomalous set of skills and experiences for a Black man. I spend most of my time standing in the breach of cultural topics, and I attended Yale and DePauw, which are both very conservative and condescending places. I worked in Capitol Heights as a regular municipal employee because people with credentials should prove they are worth something. I have no problem with the truth to power conversations.

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: I would solicit them and ask them to join committees. We are out here. We have been here. I have been all of these things besides an immigrant while living in Takoma Park, and I am married to one of those. I have felt this alienation. I am here to push back.