



Candidate: Seth Grimes
Office: Mayor

**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: Takoma Park must remain committed to revitalization city-wide. I have written on a number of opportunities. See, for instance, my 2017 article, [Affordable Housing Opportunity: Takoma Park's Washington McLaughlin Property](#), and my recent [A Tale of Two Opportunities: Takoma Junction and the City's NH Avenue Rec Center](#).

Takoma Park has had and will continue to have extensive community discussions around revitalization, but we haven't advanced on revitalization. For example, Takoma Park's New Ave initiative never really got off the ground.

Let's continue community discussions, but an ingredient is missing: Outreach and opportunity-marketing to development partners. Several years back, I met with executives at shopping-mall owner B.F. Saul (Hampshire Langley Center); developer/operator JBG Smith; developers EYA, Washington Property Company, Enterprise Community Partners, and Montgomery Housing Partners; and representatives of Montgomery County's Department of Housing & Community Affairs, to discuss Takoma Park opportunities. These were informational meetings, but they signal how I would additionally promote sites for revitalization: through exploration and relationship building that fosters partnerships that can make revitalization actually happen.

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)?

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A: Takoma Park's rent stabilization provides an important protection for rent-burdened households, yet many see it as a disincentive for creation of new, multi-unit housing. [Economist Salim Furth asks](#), "Why would you enter a market where it seems like the government is actively trying to hurt you?" *Let's put the question to a test.*

In 2015, the Takoma Park City Council tasked a consultant to create a [Zoning Analysis + Concept Plans](#) for replacement of the Takoma Park Recreation Center on New Hampshire Avenue. (I was on the council at the time.) A Residential + Recreational Use Concept would place an estimated 156 apartments above a new Rec Center. Rec Center replacement progress has been slow, but on September 28, City Manager Jamal Fox announced pending release of an RFP. Let's see whether responses cite rent stabilization as a factor.

Regardless, certainly the city should discuss adjustments. For instance, might a phase-in system smooth the path to multiunit housing creation? For instance, the city could consider increases at a couple of points above the city's rent-stabilization allowance in the years following the current five-year exemption. And we should study whether other incentives would help the city boost new multiunit housing creation.

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 support Thrive 2050, and you'll see in [my November 2020 Planning Board testimony](#) support for "changing zoning to enable wider creation of smaller multi-unit buildings" (page 44). I observed, "Action 1148 calls for housing, particularly in the areas located within 15-minute walk or bike ride of rail and Bus Rapid Transit. I think we should develop a robust action plan that will bring us housing diversity benefits to all areas."

Further, I drafted and delivered [Takoma For All's testimony February 2021 testimony is support of County Councilmember Will Jawando's \(withdrawn\) Zoning Text Amendment No. 20-07](#). My TFA testimony called on the council to "amend ZTA 20-07 -- both allowance for duplexes, townhouses, and multi-unit apartments (including triplexes and quads) and lessened parking and infill density requirements -- to cover the full extent of incorporated Takoma Park."

Our testimony noted, "a ZTA 20-07 covering the full extent of Takoma Park would advance the goals of the city's 2019 Housing and Economic Development Strategic Plan and our city's commitment to racial equity and economic diversity." It further called for the ZTA to cover areas "within one mile of a Metrorail station and additionally within one mile of a Purple Line, BRT, or MARC station."

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: The mayor and city council can serve as powerful advocates on behalf of Takoma Park families, with Montgomery County Public Schools and county- and state-government authorities, supporting adequate school funding and facilities investment. If a proposal advances for a new high school located in Takoma Park or Silver Spring, I will support it.

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 have long supported keeping the PBES pool open. It’s an important community rec facility. In 2015, I worked against an active proposal to renovate the school eliminating the pool, working with community advocates, then-County Councilmember George Leventhal, and then-Montgomery County Recreation Department head Gabe Albornoz. I continue to oppose closing the pool.

I’ll add that in 2017 I worked with Mr. Albornoz to arrange \$4,000 in county funding for Lunch and Learn program use of the pool.

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: I was perhaps the earliest advocate for turning Laurel Avenue into a pedestrian/community space. Check out my September 2016 article, [Parking or public space?](#) And as I wrote then, we should seek to similarly repurpose other spaces around the city for public use. It’s about equity and equal opportunity.

I wrote in 2016, “It has been many years since developers, planners, and engineers laid out our streets. Times have changed — transportation choices, public priorities, and our sense how to best use shared community resources — so we revisit streetscape choices made decades ago. We add traffic calming, Bikeshare, bike lanes, and raised crosswalks, and we redevelop and downsize excess parking to create commercial opportunity and new housing and to boost community vitality. Montgomery County efforts have transformed Silver Spring. Takoma Park can also move forward.”

We should continue moving forward.

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 do a lot of cycling myself and have advocated for biking regionally. I'll cite as a Takoma Park example my 2017 comment to the Takoma Park Safe Roadways committee, "Two ideas I hope Safe Roadways will consider, if you haven't already, are 1) separated bike lanes on Maple Avenue between 410 and Sligo Creek Parkway and 2) subsidized Bike Share memberships for residents whose self-certified income is below a certain threshold. I have other thoughts, but these two are uncontroversial unlike, say, separated bike lanes on Flower Avenue, as part of the Flower Avenue Green Street."

On arterial streets, bicyclist safety can be enhanced by narrowing motor-vehicle lanes. I have in mind an approach to improving safety in Takoma Junction in particular.

And here is a commitment: I will work to lower speed limits city-wide from 25 MPH to 20 MPH and on Piney Branch Road and Carroll Ave, two arterials, from 30 MPH to 25 MPH.

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: If a vacancy tax is allowed by the State of Maryland, we could explore it although my preferred approach would be incentives for the renovation and reuse of residential vacant properties, for instance a [Vacant Dwelling Property Tax Credit like Baltimore's](#), coupled with strict vacant-property code enforcement and city-conducted maintenance, with liens in the case of property-owner non-payment.

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: Consensus building starts with – not just listening, but actively seeking out and soliciting a diversity of opinions across the community. Here’s a recent example (see image at right), a message I received on October 2 from a nonwhite individual in one of Takoma Park’s large apartment buildings with whom I had an extended conversation.

Healing community divisions is one of my highest priorities. I feel well positioned to do that because I maintain respectful relationships with *everyone*.

That includes, for instance, leaders and members of both Community Vision for Takoma and Takoma For All. People need to feel their opinions are valued and have received due, fair consideration, and clear and open response and explanations are a must.

Here I’ll mention that during my four years as Ward 1 City Council rep, I posted 172 blog articles on city and council business, roughly one for each week the council was in session. They’re still online, at onetakoma.com; keeping those posts online is part of being accountable. I was the first council member to schedule regular office hours, and I prided myself on quick response to questions and requests, including on social media, which I see as a valuable commons if managed sensitively and fairly, something I’ve worked toward as creator of the Takoma Park Facebook group, now up to over 3,600 members.

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 know and have worked with tenant leaders and residents across the city, for instance at Hampshire Tower, the Park Ritchie, Essex House, and Victory Tower, all rental apartment buildings with many lower-income and immigrant tenants. Outreach and active inclusion efforts are key, as is going to them – to renters, minorities, immigrants, and young families and organizations such as churches and also to businesses – and not expecting and requiring that they attend council meetings and make formal comments in order to be heard.

I’m a big believer in city committees, both for the guidance and service they provide and the role they can play in civic inclusion. [In 2012, I wrote](#), “city committees and associations are important in themselves, and they serve as a feeder system for elected office.” I have served on

Hello and Good Morning Seth,

Thank you for stopping by my home ([REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]). Though I am a republican, the fact that you stop by my home and, per my promise, I will vote for you as Mayor. It takes a lot of guts and character to knock on a stranger's door.

Additionally, if you ever need me to help work on any issues in your administration. I would be happy to because your party affiliation is irrelevant once you are elected. You are the Major for Takoma Park residents and the Senior Executive "In-Charge."

P.S. I am heartfelt; I don't have a hidden agenda. I genuinely want you to be a successful and blessed

five city committees myself – on the leadership of three. I was a 2019-20 member of the Committee on the Environment, which sadly imploded in significant part because they council had not ensured racial and economic diversity in their committee appointments. Active, intentional recruiting is key.

I will also (continue to) work with organizations such as CHEER, IMPACT Silver Spring, CASA, Small Things Matter, and the Takoma Foundation to leverage and support their community engagement efforts.