



Candidate: Shana Fulcher
Ward#: 1

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: Addressing the housing crisis should be a priority in Takoma Park as it feeds so many other issues. A city with access to a Metro station is the more environmentally friendly choice for development since we are trying to stop sprawl. The City employees in the Housing and Community Development Department should be allocating time to research policies and grant proposals so that we know what innovative actions other cities are taking and we are taking advantage of money that is offered for building low income and moderate income housing. The City Council should give preference to companies that will build houses that go beyond what the MPDU requires. EYA is proposing to far exceed required low income housing levels with their development next to the Takoma Metro. New housing should meet the quality of life that many of us in Takoma Park are already privileged to enjoy, trees and public spaces included. We need to see our city as a whole and the projects as interconnected. No single project is going to

meet all of our needs on one plot of land. Some projects should focus on commercial use, such as the Junction, while others should focus on residential use, such as the Washington Adventist Hospital.

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: When I look at my own neighborhood, I don't see any homes affordable for low income families, so I am extremely hesitant to build new developments of housing that continue to feed that trend. If we allow duplexes and tiny homes to be added to properties, which I do favor, the market would still demand a price that a low income family could not afford.

There are some large tracts of land that are unused or underused but I don't think it is solely the effect of rent stabilization that has stopped builders from developing in Takoma Park. The Washington Adventist Hospital is a newly available area. We shouldn't only build new apartments in Takoma Park that low income individuals and families will not be able to afford. Takoma Park is supposed to support economic diversity.

If high income renters are taking up the space of low income families, then only building low and moderately priced units for rent, will not address this issue. I do agree that more research is needed specifically on how Takoma Park is affected by this issue, however ten to twenty years seems like a long time to give an exemption for when the term limits for the City's elected officials is two. My understanding is that when new apartments first enter the market, they do get to set the

rent without being hindered by rent stabilization. I would need to see a difficulty in attracting new developers to these newer tracts of available land before I would feel comfortable offering any exemptions.

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 have not had time to read the entire "Thrive 2050" plan before answering this questionnaire but have read the chapter on housing. We should expect the Federal and State government to provide programs with funding to help grow housing, but it is the responsibility of the City and County government to accommodate the housing needs of a community through land use laws. If the City is able to accommodate more housing closer to public transportation through revising land use, it should, however, the size of the buildings should not dwarf what is already there.

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. I'm disappointed that I haven't seen any consideration given to putting in any schools at the WAH site. The City agreed to give up one of the largest employers we had by supporting the hospital moving, and now the hospital is moving to close the urgent care center that it agreed to when it proposed closing. It could support our community now by offering land for new schools. I understand that building new

schools is more expensive than having more students attend a school that already exists, but at TPES we tend to have 10-13 classes per grade level and Blair is over capacity and operating with “temporaries.” In order to meet “teacher to student ratios” required by MCPS, we are adding more reading and math specialists to pull elementary students out for groups, but that is not the same as having smaller class sizes. I am amazed by Takoma Park school administrators and their staff’s ability to know their students when they have such large populations to serve, but it still must be hard to manage. Though building more schools isn’t within the powers of the City government, the City and its residents should rally behind better education for all of Montgomery County. If we allow Montgomery County Schools to fall behind, we all suffer whether we have school aged children in our homes or not.

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 would really prefer to see us keep Piney Branch Pool. As I mentioned above, we need more schools not just to put more students into the schools that we already have built. Piney Branch has a lot of odd dead space as hallways and stairways. Many of its classrooms don’t have windows. It clearly needs a renovation but it would seem that there is other space to gain through more efficient use of what is already there, and how many students should an elementary school actually accommodate? Many students will not have another chance of swimming if not offered in the school. It is fortunate for our community that Washington Adventist Services operates the pool in conjunction with Montgomery County Recreation. I think it’s really special that our community has this available to us. If we didn’t have this pool, the next

closest Montgomery County indoor pool is outside of the Beltway and takes more than one transfer on public transportation.

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 am in favor of this and have proposed the closure of the other lane on Laurel in Recreation and Engagement Committee meetings. We've talked about what closing the rest of Laurel might look like. We would need to see how many accessible parking spots the city would lose and make sure to provide them elsewhere. In addition, we would need to survey other Wards and commercial areas to ensure we provide them the same privileges. It would be great to provide a space for dancing and live music on the weekends. During the coldest parts of the year these areas may have less use and it may make sense to leave streets open for car use.

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: We should do more to provide cyclists with a safe space to ride. Streets are made to prioritize cars and others only have space when cars receive deference. Takoma Park should do what it can to change

that. It sends a strong message to everyone that the Junction and Old Town Takoma give pedestrians the right of way to cross all ways through the intersections and stop all traffic when pedestrians are crossing. Now that the hospital has moved out of Takoma Park and ambulances will travel through with less frequency, does Maple need the same width designated for cars? Could we provide bike lanes with more protection for riders? The “sharrows” were a good concept, but it didn’t seem like much thought went into them. The majority of bikers travel down the hill on my street, yet the sharrows pointed up my street. A public education piece was also missing as many people didn’t know that they were directional. If the City truly supported them, why didn’t we replace them after they washed off only a few short months later? If some streets are better routes for bikers, it would be helpful to provide signage explaining as much to car drivers and make suggestions for other routes to take. Takoma Park should also consider making more streets one way in order to accommodate safer biking.

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: I would support a vacancy tax. Vacant property does not serve a community well.

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: My experience is that people do a better job of talking nicely to one another in smaller groups and without a formal audience. City Council meetings are not the best way to get together for a discussion and build

consensus. There people tend to use hyperbolic language while trying to make their best points, without actually listening to one another. We should use more task forces, committees, and roundtables for these discussions. I believe that the majority of those of us living in Takoma Park have chosen to live here because we want to be a part of a community that is unique and helps others. I don't think that the arguments that we have are because anyone is being completely self-serving. In addition, City Council members, the City Manager, the City Clerk, and the City Staff should all have mediation training available to them. The City should help facilitate discussions where people are able to disagree without being disrespectful.

I am comfortable working through disagreements with people. My appointments in Girl Scouts have been positions where I have no power to force anyone do anything and it is only through consensus and building relationships with those that I disagree with that I am able to move forward.

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: The renters, POCs, immigrants, and young residents already involved on committees need to be asked "what made you want to join? What were the barriers that stopped you from joining?" We should better advertise the \$40 honorarium that members receive as this might encourage low income individuals to join. In addition, we should consider randomized mailings to residents, inviting them to join committees as this has been effective in encouraging more inclusive civic engagement in other cities.

Takoma Park Recreation should offer very basic Amharic and Spanish classes so that English as a second language members of our community know that we value their language and want to make them feel welcome here.