

From Tom Gagliardo
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1. Vision, Inclusion and Consensus Building

Please share your vision for Takoma Park, including how you would approach sustainability, economic vibrancy, and housing access. A 2021 consultant report commissioned by the City found that Takoma Park is a “Tale of Two Cities” with stark divides across lines of race and class. How would you ensure a wide range of residents is heard in decisions about residential, commercial, and public facility development? When those views conflict, how would you weigh them and explain your decision, and what experience do you have building consensus across a real division?

There is no question that many Takoma Park neighborhoods lack racial, ethnic and

economic diversity. That is a reality that exists throughout America. The good news is we have diverse Takoma Park schools. Both of my daughters were better prepared

for the real world because their friends and classmates came from a wide range of

backgrounds. They, as I do, know how one understands and navigates the world is

a product of how one has been treated by the dominant culture.

I encourage and embrace public participation in decisions that affect people's lives.

Information empowers people; and for people to meaningfully participate they need

information and the space to be heard. The City has failed to utilize its newsletter as

intended. The failure to provide all residents with timely, relevant information has

greatly diminished the ability of people who care to be heard and to influence decisions about residential, commercial, and public facility development. I intend to implement the

unanimously adopted City Council resolution that directs the Newsletter to “[p]rovide factual, accurate information about the city’s policies and programs and

other issues of concern to residents [and to serve as] an open forum for the discussion of City affairs.”

I will hold interactive public hearings at convenient times and conduct them similar to the way the Maryland General Assembly and Congress conduct hearings.

I have served as mediator in a variety of forums both as the mediator and as an

advocate for one of the parties. This year I was selected to mediate in federal court. Mediation requires time and effort, flexibility, creativity and optimism. It

doesn’t always work but it is worth the effort. I recoil at the notion that successful

agreements, whether negotiated by the parties directly or through mediation,

means everybody goes home unhappy. Success is when everybody is willing to live with the outcome and move forward.

The availability of land on Hospital Hill and the commitment of Washington Adventist University to build market rate, missing middle and affordable housing

along with local retail is a gift and an opportunity. Since 2022, when a concept plan was first publicized, I have supported building multifamily housing

there. (I did publicly state that zoning the property like downtown Silver Spring

was unnecessary.)

We need to stop labeling each other (NIMBY/YIMBY), put aside past disagreements

(I know it may be difficult to do) and work with Takoma Development Partnership to make the University's Vision 2030 real.

One experience I have had with consensus-building was as the chair of the Maryland State Bar Association Labor and Employment Law Council. I

Brought plaintiff- and defendant-side attorneys together and worked to enact the

Civil Rights Tax Fairness Act, which exempts monetary recoveries for emotional

distress, most often in sexual harassment cases, from state income tax.

2. Housing, Zoning and Rent Stabilization

Takoma Park has not seen a new multifamily building since the late 1970s.

Much of the

city is zoned R-60, which permits only detached single-family homes, and Montgomery

County, not the City, sets the zoning. Meanwhile, the City's rent stabilization law, the first of its kind in Maryland, is under review by the current Council.

What changes to the law, if any, would you support, and what would you pursue at the County on zoning? How

would you bring renters, housing providers, and homeowners to an outcome that each can accept?

I met a few days ago with a group of landlords. They are concerned about high

property taxes and the City's Fair Rent Return Process. Those concerns have not been

given sufficient attention. Of course, they don't welcome rent stabilization when it

decreases profitability. I believe I am correct to say that they understand the political reality of Takoma Park and can live with rent stabilization in some form.

And some said they often don't raise rents as much as the law allows.

The premise for aligning Takoma Park's rent stabilization law with Montgomery

County's is the assertion that rent stabilization is the cause for the lack of multifamily construction. That is a false premise.

First, until Hospital Hill became available there was little land available for large-

scale development. The McLaughlin Christian School and John Nevins Andrews

SDA School sites are smaller than Hospital Hill and may be suitable for townhouse or other

development. Months ago, I suggested to the Mayor and Council to look into New

Hampshire Avenue from 410 to Eastern Avenue as developable land. I support

zoning changes to make that stretch available for multifamily housing and I favor public

transit along New Hampshire Avenue linking the Langley Park Transit Center with the Metro at Fort Totten.

Developers build when money, land, materials and labor are available at affordable

levels and there is a market for what they build. That's 3Ms and 2Ls. Rent stabilization begins with "R".

3. Development Sites and Tax Base

Single-family homes make up about half of Takoma Park's housing units but pay about

77 percent of its property taxes. Meanwhile, the next Council will inherit decisions on

several of the city's most significant sites: the former Washington Adventist Hospital

campus, the New Hampshire Avenue Recreation Center, Takoma Junction, the

McLaughlin property on Poplar Avenue, and 6530 and 6600 New Hampshire Avenue.

What is your vision for these and similar sites, how would you attract developers who can deliver it, and what role should new development play in easing the burden on homeowners?

New development, once it's taxed, will spread the cost of providing city services.

But the incumbent Mayor passed an ordinance in her first term entirely exempting

property taxes on the increased value on new multifamily housing for ten years,

gradually decreasing the amount of tax that is waived over the next five years. Full

taxes would not be paid until the 16th year. That means in order to reduce the rapid

rise in property taxes (it is not realistic to think that a significant reduction is feasible) we need to spend more carefully. Many in Takoma Park work paycheck

to paycheck, are on fixed incomes or are federal employees or employees of federal contractors who have lost their jobs. All of these neighbors are severely impacted by fast-rising property taxes. Many are housing burdened and some have are starting to move out of Takoma Park. That's not right.

4. The Purple Line and Safe Streets

The Purple Line is expected to open in late 2027, with a station at the Takoma Langle

Crossroads. New Hampshire Avenue and University Boulevard remain dangerous

corridors despite Vision Zero and other initiatives. How would you leverage the Purple

Line for the city's benefit, and what would you do to make those corridors, and for that

matter, the city, safer for pedestrians, bicyclists, scooters, and other non-car travelers?

Pedestrian safety must be a top priority at the Crossroads which has already suffered through a long construction phase. Of course it should be a priority

throughout the City. We are fortunate to have representatives in the Maryland General Assembly who have and will continue to effectively address pedestrian and other safety issues.

We need to support them in ensuring full funding for safety measures whether

more sidewalks or bike lanes safely marked and separated from vehicular traffic.

Langley Park is an intersection of two counties and our city. The next Mayor needs to

establish stronger working relationships with Montgomery and Prince George's

County leaders-- and I already have those relationships.

I want to keep in mind that it can be reasonably predicted that the proximity of the

Purple Line station will increase rents on current small business owners and renters. We need to address that and find ways to prevent them from being displaced.

5. Growth and Climate

The City has committed to net zero emissions by 2035, but modeling presented to the City Council in January 2026 shows 55 percent of that goal is not achievable on the current path. Transportation is the largest single source at 54 percent of the City's emissions, and Montgomery County, not the City, sets building energy codes. How would you close that gap? Would you support making the 2035 target binding for municipal operations, where the City does control the levers, and what role does land use play for the rest?

We need to redouble support for the City Green Team, continue to electrify the

City's fleet, install solar and other passive energy systems on City buildings and

encourage and assist doing the same on privately owned buildings. And we must

acknowledge that we have a hostile President who denies the severity of the climate crisis, opposes new and repeals existing environmental regulation and

prioritizes short term profit over long term prosperity and survival.

I have said that in these difficult times, as important as it is be involved in national

politics, we cannot ignore the government that is closest to us.

In addition to discussing the pluses and minus of hiring additional city staff we

need to support the many organizations of dedicated and skilled Takoma Park residents in the forefront of preserving the environment and working to make our community climate resilient.

New development has its own value and cannot be halted because there is an

environmental impact. Developers, by the same token, cannot ignore the environmental impact of what they build. The City needs to encourage those who, for example, adhere to LEED standards and recognize the need for and are willing

to invest in environmental safeguards.