

Takoma for All Questionnaire
Suzy Stimler
Candidate for City Council, Ward 2

1. Vision, Inclusion, and Consensus Building

Vision: My vision for Takoma Park is a community that is vibrant, inclusive, racially and socio-economically diverse, environmentally sustainable, fiscally responsible, and transit-friendly with a City government that protects the most vulnerable among us.

Inclusion: To ensure that a wide range of residents is heard in decisions about development, the City should adopt a community engagement strategy that includes community meetings held in multiple locations in the City, permits online participation, offers multi-lingual support, and allows participants to break into small groups so that they can really listen to each other. Community surveys should also be conducted so that those who cannot participate in community meetings also have the opportunity to communicate their needs and ideas.

Consensus: I have years of experience in non-profits and mutual aid groups with non-hierarchical structures and consensus decision making processes. Working towards consensus requires trust and community members feeling like they have the opportunity to express their needs in a setting where multiple viewpoints are allowed and are safe to be expressed. It also requires listening to each other and time to reflect on both one's own needs and the needs of others. Decisions that come after such a process are smarter, better, and easier for everyone to accept.

2. Housing, Zoning, and Rent Stabilization

I am committed to retaining and strengthening Takoma Park's existing rent stabilization policy. Our policy has served us well for 45 years, and the vibrant, racially and socio-economically diverse community we love is its result. Rent stabilization provides housing and community stability, which in turn improves the physical and mental health and educational outcomes of community members. I would consider changing the exemptions for deed-restricted buildings, as many have units that are not deed-restricted or subject to rent stabilization. I would also like to look at making our fair return process easier or providing capital improvement pathways, to help landlords keep buildings safe, energy efficient, and profitable.

3. Development Sites and Tax Base

Development plans should be tailored to each of these sites. For example:

Former Adventist Hospital Campus: I support mixed-used development on this 15 acre site that will provide both new residential choices and new retail businesses that are walkable and bikeable. Such development would create employment for local residents and diversify the local economy. I want to see development that is environmentally sustainable and protects the Sligo Creek Watershed. I also support the use of local and state resources to expand affordable housing, catalyze “missing middle” opportunities, and ensure safe, affordable housing for seniors.

New Hampshire Ave Recreation Center: I have hope that we have a viable way forward to get both a new recreation center and additional housing on this site: a focused RFP with a lease-back option. In July of this year, the City was accepted into an Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel; this Panel will help us develop a new RFP for a new recreation center as part of a mixed-use development. City staff have also spoken with Maryland DHCD about assistance in releasing the RFP as well as marketing the RFP.

Washington McLaughlin Property: I would love to see affordable senior housing similar in scale to Victory Towers (721 Beacon Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20903). The Washington-McLaughlin property is zoned R60 and nestled in a residential neighborhood between Wards 2 & 3. In past years, senior housing projects in Montgomery County’s R60 zone have proceeded via special exceptions or conditional uses combined with preliminary plan and MPDU (Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit) provisions, and I think the community would be supportive of such a use.

New Hampshire Corridor: The New Hampshire Corridor between Ethan Allen/410 and Eastern Ave has been sorely neglected. I support the vision outlined in the 2008 New Hampshire Ave Corridor Concept Plan, which was developed after considerable community input. Development in the corridor will require collaboration with both Prince Georges County and the State Highway Administration as the current configuration of New Hampshire Ave is not friendly to bicyclists or pedestrians. With the coming of New Hampshire Ave Flash Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project and the New Avenue Bikeway Project, we should work toward the possibility of mixed use development that provides additional retail and housing choices.

Increasing our commercial base will diversify our tax base and help relieve the burden on single-family home owners.

4. Purple Line & Safe Streets

The coming of the Purple Line will bring both opportunities and challenges. I support mixed-use development near the station and want to maintain our local, independent businesses that currently occupy Langley Crossroads. Smart development and support to local entrepreneurs, executed in cooperation with the Takoma/Langley Crossroads Development Authority, will allow the City to capitalize on the increased foot traffic.

Additional pedestrian traffic without infrastructure changes to make University Blvd and New Hampshire Ave more friendly to pedestrians and other non-vehicular traffic will bring added danger. The City must work with the State Highway Administration, Montgomery County, and Prince Georges County to tame car traffic and to improve walkability.

5. Growth and Climate

Meeting ambitious goals for things not under the City's control is not realistic. We should continue the City's efforts towards reducing greenhouse gases through our electrification program. And I think it is reasonable to aim for zero emissions in city-owned resources and buildings by 2035. At the same time, we should look for other ways to address the climate crisis. The City has clear programs and metrics for reducing greenhouse gases emissions and preserving our tree canopy. We need to do more to address heat and biodiversity. As global temperatures rise due to the climate crisis, the urban heat island (UHI) effect compounds extreme heat risks. The City should support programs for green roofs and cool roofs to mitigate the UHI effect. Climate change also accelerates biodiversity loss. A healthy local ecosystem needs native plants, insects, and wildlife. I want the City to build programs that maintain and grow biodiversity and to track progress with the City Biodiversity Index, so residents can see whether our efforts are working.