

Cara Honzak, 2026 Campaign for City Councilmember, Takoma Park, Ward 5

1. Vision, Inclusion and Consensus Building

My vision is a Takoma Park of belonging, not merely inclusion. In my first term, Councilmember Fulcher and I successfully advocated for adding this language to the Council's adopted priorities. I want every resident to be connected, safe, and able to be their authentic self here. I support sustainability in everything the City does, a growing local economy viewed through an equity lens that prioritizes small, minority, LGBTQ+, and women-owned businesses, and strategic growth in housing supply, especially missing middle housing, alongside renewal of our aging affordable housing.

Hearing residents: Our elections, with mail-in ballots, ranked choice voting, and ample debates, are a strong foundation, and the Council's vote is often the most powerful voice busy residents have. Between elections, Councilmembers and staff must meet people where they are, using qualitative and quantitative data and representative sampling to reach those less likely to show up. We must keep coming back to ask whether decisions are moving in the direction that those who are most impacted feel is right.

Weighing conflicts: I look first for win-win solutions. If none exists, I rely on core values: belonging, elevating marginalized voices, protecting the most vulnerable, a healthy environment, and collaboration. I explain my decisions and stay open to revisiting them, including admitting when I have made a mistake.

Experience: My two-decade career in international development was built on forging consensus among multi-sector stakeholders, particularly across health and environment sectors with widely divergent values. On Council, I have worked to find common principles across our own community. It is slow work, but we cannot let fear or exhaustion stop us.

2. Housing, Zoning and Rent Stabilization

As the City finalizes its rent stabilization analysis, I want to assess with Council and our housing experts which specific changes to pursue. One I want to brainstorm further, and which is among my top priorities, is easing administrative burdens and possible rent stabilization challenges for small residential building owners, especially those who live in their properties. I am also open to small tweaks that might attract housing investment which is now going into surrounding counties, D.C., or other states, but I am not interested in radical changes. Our policies are highly effective at keeping

rents affordable. Whatever we choose, we must find better solutions to our reinvestment problem, our limited financial resources, and the lack of new development that restricts growth.

At the County, I would:

- keep advocating to remove and modify zoning and financial barriers to townhouse construction on single-family lots, especially in a ward like mine near the Purple Line;
- push the County to make the new ADU rules easier to use in Takoma Park;
- follow and suggest some modifications in the finalization of the East Silver Spring Communities Plan, which abuts Ward 5; and
- begin discussing with City staff and County updates to the area of the 2012 Takoma/Langleys Crossroads plan inside of the TP boundaries to align with recent zoning changes around us.

Building agreement: I will seek to drive new dominant local narratives that align the equity goals of the Purple Line and environmentalists with the needs of renters, homeowners, and housing providers, using real data and maps and encouraging engagement in facts. The goals I have are continued renter stability, less red tape for small owners, more reinvestment, more ADUs on single-family lots, and a broader tax base.

3. Development Sites and Tax Base

Our City must make itself uniquely appealing to developers who share our values, so we can grow development and revenue. Right-sized, right-scaled development takes careful management, but the economic levers that make us attractive to investors are not something we can set aside. A sophisticated staff, which I believe we now have, and the policies Council has begun to put in place can help. Thoughtfully nurtured development can diversify our revenue base and fund public benefits we cannot afford alone. The City does not own most of these sites, and zoning is set by the County, but our City's voice still matters on each.

Washington Adventist campus: This is privately held. I voted for the Minor Master Plan Amendment zoning, which reflects extensive County-led, City-partnered engagement: housing, likely some retail, and possibly recreation space. I would start by giving strong voice to Washington Adventist University, that sits adjacent to the old hospital site, and is a minority-serving

institution that must be able to thrive however the site evolves, along with students, faculty, and the Ward 5 neighbors who live beside it. Sligo Creek must remain a healthy recreational and ecological asset.

Recreation Center: I want to combine external funding, including County recreation support we have not yet tapped, with City financing and keep issuing RFPs as needed for a state-of-the-art facility. That said, we cannot allow external financing difficulty (including from the County) should not be an excuse for delay. At the same time, the County's historic underfunding of downcounty services is a structural issue we must keep pressing to rectify, with urgency.

Takoma Junction: I support keeping the current paid parking as a key piece of a functional solution, with more dialogue toward a comprehensive design for the junction over time.

Other sites: I want mixed-use development with affordable and middle-income housing, recreation, childcare, education, retail, and sustainability-forward design. These may take years, but we are making headway.

4. The Purple Line and Safe Streets

The Purple Line promises greater regional equity, especially for Wards 5 and 6, where we have maintained many affordable units. We should preserve and grow that housing, add housing types, and make sure residents can ride to higher-wage jobs and return to affordable, high-quality homes and lifestyle. To do that we must:

- keep investing in small business corridors, including financing help, and resist displacement of long-standing, often minority-owned businesses;
- advocate for transit fares that promote accessible ridership for all; and
- build safer cycling and microtransit routes and more frequent transit connections.

Safety: We should watch how well the new traffic cameras on University and New Hampshire perform and whether they reduce accidents. I also look forward to the completed bike path segments on these routes.

Track record: I have pushed City staff to track Purple Line-related opportunities for externally funded sidewalks, bike paths, and signage, and to align our routes with newly funded ones. I worked with staff to send formal requests for more frequent bus service on heavily used streets, pressed for a

review of our bus stop contracts, and secured new benches on high-transit routes in Ward 5. A top priority of mine for the next two years is reviving the Maple Avenue Connectivity project and making it viable, equitable, and safe. It has been delayed too long, and I have concrete proposals for how we might move forward and build even more consensus.

5. Growth and Climate

As much as it pains me to say so, and I consider myself a climate champion, I cannot fully support making the 2035 target absolutely binding. I view it as aspirational rather than fully pragmatic. Binding mandates can force decisions that are too costly for the City to bear alone, and we must put our most vulnerable residents first and then ask whether we can reach our carbon goals as a win-win for people and the planet. Where those goals conflict, I will choose public safety and economic resilience, especially for our least advantaged residents, but thoughtfully.

The City is doing well with win-win programs such as energy efficiency investments in aging affordable housing, which lower resident costs and move us toward our goals. Land use and non-car transit are the most important remaining levers, though we do not control zoning or mass transit. Car ownership here is still very high. I would pursue a multi-tiered approach:

- advocate at the County for greater housing density and diversity, including middle-income housing on single-family lots, with priority near mass transit;
- invest as much as we can in electrification of our fleet and our City infrastructure including promoting electrification on/for individual residents, so that residents can also electrify their transit;
- bring services and recreation closer to homes; and
- strengthen micro and public transit, including family-friendly options, so households need fewer vehicles.

Best Regards,

Cara Honzak