

**City of Takoma Park, MD**  
**Reimagining Public Safety Task Force**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**June 22, 2021**

**Welcome, Review Charge, Timeline Graphic, Timeline Work Plan, Public Feedback Form, Community Listening Session 6.28**

Jevin Hodge (co-facilitator) welcomed Task Force members, attendees, and city officials (Councilmember Talisha Searcy, City Manager Suzanne Ludlow, Chief of Police Antonio DeVaul, and Captain of Police Dan Frishkorn). Jevin reviewed the charge to the Task Force; the timeline—noting where we are in the process; and the workplan—noting there are five touchpoints including tonight.

Jamal Holtz (co-facilitator) reviewed the public feedback form and the Community Listening Session scheduled for Monday, June 28. Jamal emphasized the importance of public participation in the process of developing recommendations regarding public safety.

Michael Akin (co-facilitator) introduced the subcommittee reporting portion of this meeting with the following observations: The Task Force has been working at the subcommittee level to review and process extensive information from public feedback, subject matter experts, other reports, city data, etc.

The topics presented tonight are not final, rather they are “discussion drafts” from each subcommittee that will continue to be refined by the full Task Force and through feedback at the Community Meeting on Monday night.

Some recommendations come from a belief that specific things can be done better, others come from a belief that Takoma Park can and should be “Best in Class” on these issues.

The Task Force has been looking to answer three questions: 1) what are we trying to solve for; 2) what solutions can we offer; and 3) how will implementation of Task Force recommendations be handled/monitored?

At the last meeting, the subcommittees reported out on themes and topics that emerged during their work. Since then, over this past week, the subcommittees have continued to refine their thinking. The high-level versions of current draft recommendations are listed on the slides. Committee leads will share where they are in their process.

Following the public portion of this meeting, the subcommittees will move into breakout groups to dig in on specifics and one representative of each group will report to the other groups to discuss overlaps and contradictions. The subcommittees' work will continue as the Task Force prepares to share the resulting draft recommendations with the public prior to Monday night's Community Listening Session.

At this time, Michael introduced the subcommittees and their citizen leads to review the materials on their respective slides. Additions made during the discussion are in blue.

## **#1 Community Quality of Life – reported by Sawa Kamara and Subcommittee Members**

### **Goal: Coordination of Community Resources**

Possible solutions:

- **Implement a dedicated City staff resource coordinator** to coordinate all community activities, groups, and neighborhoods.
  - This person could convene a group of the various people/ organizations serving the community, including homeowners, renters, organizations, community leaders.
  - **Identify a point person for a community task force to share official city information.**
- **Produce a Resource Guide** of mental health resources and community partners serving the Takoma Park community.
- **Promote access to after-school and job training programs.**

### **Goal: Public Safety**

Possible solutions:

- **Create/continue a Public Safety Task Force** to engage the community on an ongoing basis around needs, concerns and issues of public safety.
- **Implement a city neighborhood services division**, outside of the police department, responsible for parking violations, speed camera monitoring, and other code enforcement; non-criminal
- **Create a Community Safety Team** of unarmed police, mental health service providers, and outreach specialists; Provide specific training to these individuals in violence prevention and de-escalation.
  - Partner with referral sources for mental health/substance use resources & with alternative dispute resolution resources
- **Review specific police department protocol/policies/tactics** that impact community quality of life.
  - **Review the future of the K-9 Unit, use of license plate readers, etc.; police officer trainings.**

## Goal: Housing Safety

Possible solutions:

- **Increase resources for the Housing and Community Development Department** to respond to issues such as:
  - Housing/homelessness crises
  - The need for emergency housing options, i.e., shelters for victims of domestic violence
  - Eviction crises
  - Non-violent neighbor disputes
    - [Employ mediation techniques](#)
- **Implement an annual review and publication of apartments with code violations in the last 5 years** posted to the Takoma Park city website.
  - [Improve the standard of living within the apartments](#)
  - [Increase the frequency of inspections](#)
  - [Establish a tenants advisory board/association](#)
  - [Employ case managers to bridge the gap we currently see](#)
  - [Implement multiple communications approaches to spread information we don't have](#)
  - [Promote neighborhood, safety](#)

Subcommittee members made the following points:

- There is no lack of consensus at the subcommittee level regarding eliminating funding for the use of a K9 unit by Takoma Park after the retirement of the current K9. If there is consideration of a K9 unit in future, use the unit only for tracking.
- The subcommittee shared additional things discussed included establishing a full-time Takoma Park Public Safety Task Force [see #1 above]; a 24/7 call in line to address non-violent issues; recommendations regarding funding and reallocating funding; and increasing the number of housing counselors [see below].
- The subcommittee also recommends publicizing changes to police funding early enough for people to weigh in.
- The subcommittee recognizes that Takoma Park schools don't have School Resource Officers but they believe it is important that Takoma Park make a resolution that School Resource Officers be removed from Montgomery County Public Schools and make it known the Takoma Park does not believe that School Resource Officers are useful in resolving issues within schools.
- The subcommittee recommends a "Know Your Rights" course at the middle school and high school levels that give practical explanations around what is/is not required in police / civilian interactions.
- The subcommittee wants to explore a poverty exemption program to waive fees and fines for minor infractions if an individual's annual income is 300 percent of the federal poverty limit or below.

City Manager Suzanne Ludlow in follow up asked that when the city is doing something right call that out. A risk in making change is that if what is working well or should continue is not specifically protected, it can go away – an unintended consequence that can be surprising and unfortunate.

## **#2 Alternative Methods and Responses – Reported by Cedric Boatman and Subcommittee Members**

### **Goal: Policing**

Possible solutions:

- **Dispatch/Multiple Agency Coordination**
  - Emergency Call Center/311 operator resources response directed to non-law enforcement
- **Coordination of police response across multiple jurisdictions:**
  - **Training** - Use training programs that do not engage in military training or promote “warrior behavior”.
  - **Protocols** - Review and update cross-jurisdictional coordination protocols for incidents.
- **Community/police relationships and partnerships** - Community-oriented policing services (COPS)

### **Goal: Community Education**

Possible solutions:

- **Interrupt the school-prison pipeline:**
  - **Advocate** to Montgomery County that school administrators and teachers receive training regarding discipline of students of color
  - **Collect and publish** data on the disproportionate discipline of young people of color and its implications for their safety and futures
  - **Create** community learning forums on race, class, policing and policy

### **Goal: Data Transparency**

Possible solutions:

- Implement and publicize practices and policies related to sharing data.
- Make police arrest/stop and dispatch data publicly available at regular intervals

### **Goal: Implementation of Task Force Recommendations**

Possible solutions:

- Create a standing committee reporting to the City Council on progress on the recommendations.

Subcommittee members made the following observations:

- ❑ Subcommittee members emphasized the points covered in the draft recommendations regarding training, cross-training, and the use of force protocols.
- ❑ What’s happening in schools needs to include “Know Your Rights.”
- ❑ Have options to calling the police; dispatch personnel and 911 personnel trained and having the resources to make referrals to non-law enforcement. Reduce interactions between the police and citizens.
- ❑ Share data in easy-to-understand form at least quarterly so citizens know what’s happening in the city.
- ❑ It’s all about implementation; the subcommittee wants to see this process continue via a group of people charged with monitoring implementation and assisting future City Councils’
- ❑ Set up a community forum for all groups in the city so they can come and get together with a facilitator-to talk with each other so the people of this unique city would start seeing each other in a different way.
- ❑ The goal should be fixing the problem and not the blame; start with the community and the biases and attitudes that exist.
- ❑ Given the city’s commitment to racial equity, the data provided to the Task Force should be provided to the community at large. We need to know how we’re doing when it comes to equity in policing.

### **#3 Community Engagement and Transparency – Reported by Kiminori Nakamura**

**Goal: Increase public accessibility and citizen oversight of police complaints and disciplinary procedures.**

Possible solutions:

- **Post reports online** documenting investigations into alleged police misconduct
- **Create a citizen-led Police Complaints Board (PCB):**
  - Consisting of volunteer residents with relevant professional expertise, to whom citizens may directly submit allegations of police misconduct and other complaints about police department operations.
  - Evaluate if the number of complaints processed by the PCB eventually justifies creating one or more funded PCB positions.

**Goal: Update the police department’s body-worn camera (BWC) policy to ensure greater accountability and transparency by addressing:**

Possible solutions:

- Period of time in which live footage is captured

- Process by which/how quickly video footage is released after a **fatal** deadly use of force. Committee would like the release of footage that included any deadly force for example, even someone discharging a gun and the bullet missed.
- Use of BWC's with other biometric technologies such as facial recognition software. Clarification, other biometric technologies should be used with more safety guards/ rules.

**Goal: Strengthen community-police communication by revamping the Chief's Advisory Board.**

Possible solution:

- Improve ways in which community members can share their public safety concerns with the police department and receive timely responses and follow-up.

**Goal: Improve City-led communications:**

Possible solutions:

- Provide training & update protocols to ensure sensitivity, cultural competency, and fairness in official statements released by all city agencies.
- Improve the structure and content of city and police department websites.

**Goal: Move non-policing functions and functions that are not tied to a violation of the criminal code outside of the police department.**

**Goal: Clear communication of policing priorities: Chief should communicate to patrol staff that policing resources should be concentrated on serious criminal activities.**

Subcommittee members made the following observations:

- Make city budget alterations open to public view.
- Include a 24/7 call-in line (separate from 911).
- There is deep disagreement with creating a parallel process for submitting public safety complaints. The process should be plain so no one can avoid it.
- There is also concern about sharing data in a timely manner - similar to other subcommittees.
- There are also creative ways to share FAQ's about policing policy to the public - the public will not be able to dig into all these reports [we have received].
- It's challenging to dig through the data that is made public.
- Deprioritize minor infractions and ensure that other agencies are utilized for these non-violent types of crimes.
- Build in a rule that policies need to be reassessed regularly - especially as technology advances.
- Ensure there is top-down communication that ensures officers know that there are no performance points to officers who pull people over for minor infractions.

- Remove language about people's fines only being impacted by the poverty line. The poverty line is so incredibly low and there are many people who would be deeply, economically impacted by basic fines.

City Manager Suzanne Ludlow shared the following observations and suggestions:

- Be sure to share what you like/ what is working. Stating that clearly helps ensure it isn't changed later down the line.
- We don't currently have a lot of complaints; that doesn't mean that there aren't some that don't go unreported. Be sure to make sure your language reflects the actual data about current complaint trends.
- Add in descriptive language about your end goal for each recommendation. There could be multiple ways to get to your end goal, and we don't want a recommendation to be turned down because the method itself isn't feasible.
- Think about the effect of proposals that only allow officers to respond to violent crimes. We also want officers to be more connected to the community, but that will be very difficult if they only show up in the worst of circumstances.
- Think about how we attract and retain the best officers.

A Task Force member observed that they still want police officers to do community engagement, but want to make the distinction that we want police officers to not address non-violent issues: code enforcement, small traffic violations, crossing guards, etc. The police should have a different and more focused role.

Councilmember Talisha Searcy thanked the members of the Task Force for their work and ideas on these complex issues and noted places of alignment with current City Council priorities:

- There will have some funding to address your recommendations in the coming budget.
- The City Council is thinking a lot about committees and wants to ensure that if committees are created, that it is clear about the goal/intent of the groups. Over time it's very challenging to maintain committees and continually recruit for them.
- There is a differentiation between county, state, and city. Focus on the Takoma Park role in these recommendations. Who should truly bear the onus for this? Should this truly be a city role? Could this recommendation be something we advocate for at the county/state level?

Chief of Police Antonio DeVaul expressed appreciation for the work of the Task Force members and noted:

- A lot of what the Task Force is recommending the Police Department is already doing. He is happy to meet with the Task Force to discuss the overlaps.
- Complaints will be addressed by the new laws and Takoma Park will be in compliance.

- ❑ Please also memorialize what the Department is doing right. From watching tonight, you may get the sense that we are doing everything wrong. I do not believe that is the case. The members of the Department are here because they want to be here as guardians not warriors and they are watching the work of the Task Force unfold.

Michael Akin thanked all attendees and Task Force members for participating. A draft of the Task Force recommendations will be published at the end of the week in preparation for the Community Listening Session on Monday, June 28.

The meeting ended at 6:35 P.M.