

TALLE/Climate Action Coffee Recommended Priorities to
City Council of Takoma Park 2021

January 13, 2021

Dear Takoma Park City Council Members, Mayor Stewart, and other City staff:

As you prepare for your retreat on January 16, we invite you to share our vision for Takoma Park. As food for thought, please consider these questions:

What if Takoma Park aggressively supported the right to a healthy and healthful environment? What if Takoma Park was known widely as a model of environmental stewardship and climate resiliency? What if below a healthy tree canopy a robust network of native vegetation corridors thrived on public and private spaces welcoming birds, pollinators, and wildlife? What if community-led adaptation and mitigation projects that included youth, seniors, homeowners, and renters were supported by the City and its designated coordinator? What if every young Middle School student and their parents could both identify many native plants and non-native invasives and have an opportunity to participate in conservation efforts? What if well-maintained walking trails, nature exhibits, and neighborhood gardens were found in all six wards? What if all City Departments had actively integrated sustainability measures and projects? What if the heavy rain storms and anticipated droughts were mitigated by a healthy native greenspace? What if the City Council championed this vision?

Considering the above vision, we suggest **two priorities** with **action items** requests for you to consider below.

As many of you may know, the “Climate Action Coffee” began on October 2, 2019, as a partnership of the TALLE¹ group of the Takoma Park Mobilization with Andy Shallal and his Takoma Busboys and Poets restaurant. We have been meeting every week since, pivoting to Zoom in March 2020, as many organizations did. In addition to our weekly meetings, two subgroups meet every other week to work on community-related projects.

The mission of TALLE/Climate Action Coffee is to promote positive change in our communities and our local economies in the service of resiliency, racial equity, and carbon-neutrality. Instead of extractive ‘business as usual’, we aspire to inclusive models that prioritize drawdown; serve all community members equally; are healthy and generative; and that recognize the fragility and wisdom of nature in balance.

Threats: The City and citizens of Takoma Park face a number of challenges now and in the coming years:

- Continuing to address COVID, its costs, and fallout on individuals and families, our community, and our economy is certainly high on our collective agendas now.
- Climate change and related regional effects such as weather-related stresses on vulnerable communities, weather impacts on food supply, and potential influx of climate

¹ Takoma Alliance for Local Living Economy - <http://tpmobilization.org/talle> .

refugees/migrants. The pandemic and climate change both are large-scale stressors we must address. What are we learning from our response to the pandemic that also applies to how we face the climate change threat?

- The pandemic has helped us see some of the vulnerabilities in our food system. Climate change and potential near-term energy supply issues, especially with transportation fuels like diesel, may affect food delivery to the Washington DC metro region (on average, less than 5% of our table crops are grown in the region²). The need to improve our regional food self-reliance is great, and will grow. Making changes will take time.

Opportunities: We endorse the City’s climate plan to reduce emissions by focusing on buildings, transportation, and waste. We agree those are high priority and logical actions to take. However, we feel there are many opportunities for the City to show leadership by working with and facilitating additional projects in the community led by volunteers. We are inspired by Douglas Tallamy’s recent book, *Nature’s Best Hope*³, which outlines how residents can restore the plants in their own yards to benefit pollinators, bird life, and climate resilience. Tallamy outlines realistic and publicly engaging strategies to convert ecosphere deserts in urban areas to highly beneficial and resilient resources that will mitigate a range of climate change stresses. We are inspired by what our neighbors in Mt. Rainier are doing by working with their City council and other groups like the Sierra Club to create “pollinator corridors” connecting vegetated habitat so that beneficial insects can travel through urban areas.⁴ We are inspired by the Rewild Montgomery 2021 project⁵ to create 2,021 new areas of native plants in Montgomery County. We are especially inspired by the steady and growing interest of many volunteers in our own community to work with nature to improve our City’s habitats, with many resulting co-benefits.

Given potential climate and energy threats, we believe the City should explore ways to foster regional food self-reliance, by supporting more farmers markets, exploring the creation of regional food aggregation and distribution sites, and by strengthening connection with and support of farming in the Agricultural Reserve, which may become increasingly recognized as one of our region’s greatest assets.

The **following priorities** are what we recommend for immediate action in 2021. They were selected because they are both imminently doable and necessary to move us forward along a path that supports healthy residents and a healthful environment.

Priority One: Improve individual and community climate preparedness through local actions for climate adaptation, ecosystem resilience, and habitat restoration. Specific strategies to include:

- Policy priority, incentives, and education for planting native plants in public and private greenspaces, focused on covering bare ground, replacing impervious surfaces wherever possible with permeable surfaces and vegetation, and helping landowners to increase rainwater infiltration.

² “What Our Region Grows” (January 2019). Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. <https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2019/01/18/what-our-region-grows-farmers-market-farming-urban-agri-culture/>

³ <https://www.amazon.com/Natures-Best-Hope-Approach-Conservation-ebook/dp/B07NMH5GH5>

⁴ [Mount Rainier, MD] Native Plant Network - Luke Chesek Ward 1 City Council Believe in Community - https://www.lukeformountrainier.org/native_plant_network

⁵ Rewild Montgomery 2021 - <https://climateyogi.org/rewild-montgomery>

- Policy priority and strategies (e.g., in the updated Open Space Management Plan) to assess and restore public green spaces and parks with native trees and plants.
- **Action item:** Use Dorothy's Woods as an educational and demonstration area for sustainable urban habitat and watershed management.

Priority Two: Develop and implement policies to proactively partner with community and resident-led civic efforts. Specific strategies to include:

- Policy priority to effectively coordinate climate and environmental adaptation and mitigation strategies across all City Departments.
- Policy priority to engage and educate all neighborhoods in the challenges and benefits of environmental conservation and climate mitigation strategies.
- **Action item:** Designate one or more staff person(s) with specific responsibility to help coordinate and work with community and resident-led adaptation and mitigation partnerships.

We appreciate your consideration of these ideas and suggestions, and thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely yours,

TPM/TALLE Climate Action Coffee
<http://tpmobilization.org/talle>

For any follow up, please contact:

Randy Gibson, randy.gibsong@gmail.com, 240-355-0336
Philip Bogdonoff, pbogdonoff@gmail.com, 301-356-5132