

MDOT State Highway Administration
Takoma Junction Vision Study (TJVS)

Takoma Junction - Old Takoma Business Association Notes – 21 May 2019

Attendees

- Matt Baker, MDOT SHA
- Kandese Holford, MDOT SHA
- Monica Meade, RK&K
- Jessica Pilarski, MDOT SHA
- Tina Willey, TPVFD
- Mike Houston, SAG & OTBA (Co-op)
- Suzanne City staff, City Manager
- Sue Immerman, MAD Fitness
- Eve Kenney, MAD Fitness
- Renee Yates, Richardson Music School
- D. Doley, Richardson Music School
- Larry Silverman, S&A Beads, Inc.
- Chris Brown, Takoma Bev
- Bobbi Kittner, Kittner Studio
- Inan and Bruce Phillips, Healey Surgeons
- Gurcharan Singh, Takoma Montessori School
- Laura Barclay, OTBA
- Paul Dorr, Traffic Group
- Adrian Washington, NDC
- Cindy Dyballa, City Councilmember
- Kacy Kostuik, City Councilmember
- Richard Willey, TPVFD

Summary

- The purpose of the meeting was to reach out, specifically, to stakeholders who own/operate businesses to better understand their wants, needs, and desires for Takoma Junction.
- Some business owners inquired as to the relationship between the Takoma Junction Vision Study and the proposed 7221 Carroll Avenue development. MDOT SHA explained that these efforts are separate, though MDOT SHA is aware of concerns with the proposed development. The study team reiterated that the development review process is managed by M-NCPPC, and MDOT SHA's District 3 office is one of several reviewing entities.
- The primary takeaway was that there are members of the business community who are concerned with their business' ability to provide for adequate customer and employee access, waste removal services, and deliveries. Business owners also expressed a desire for a better community gathering space and to make Takoma Junction a destination for both local and regional customers. Finally, business owners agree that not precluding fire and emergency vehicles' ability to navigate Takoma Junction is vital.

Notes

Laura Barclay, Main Street Takoma Executive Director, welcomed attendees and reminded them that this was one opportunity to discuss concerns related to their businesses and mobility, including receiving deliveries, improving access, and accommodating parking.

Kandese Holford, MDOT SHA Takoma Junction Vision Study manager, introduced the study team and provided an overview of the study purpose, activities to date, and upcoming opportunities for input. Next, Holford invited attendees to speak about what they love, find challenging, and want to see preserved or improved at Takoma Junction.

Attendees were asked what would make Takoma Junction better? They provided the following responses:

- Less cut-through traffic, but unsure how MDOT SHA can enforce that
- Make the Junction less car-centric, and more “for the people”
- Install a streetscape where you can actually stop, rather than just adding lots of concrete
- Improvements should accommodate parking
- Unsure how much use the electric vehicle charging stations would receive
- Some attendees expressed concern that mural at B.Y. Morrison Park will be lost in course of development. They believe the mural is iconic and needs to be preserved.
- A more functional use for the former gas station shelter/pavilion
- More public gathering spaces; green space; i.e. “container parks”
- Moving B.Y. Morrison Park should be an option. Consider a less isolated, more vibrant park moved to the bakery side instead of being separated by traffic. It is a symbol of the City, but it can be preserved without staying in the same place.
- Deliveries are necessary, but safety for cars and pedestrians remains a big concern
- Attendees mentioned witnessing questionable motorist behavior entering and exiting the Co-op parking lot
- Carroll Avenue crosswalk at Grant Avenue must be maintained because it is great for the kids
- Employees need parking and need to get to work on time. Current operations at or near the Junction make this difficult.
- At certain times of the day, the southbound MD 195 (Carroll Avenue) at Ethan Allen left-turn cycle is skipped. Additionally, there is often confusion with the left-turn arrows and whether they allow left-turns on to Grant Avenue or to stay on Carroll Avenue

Attendees were asked what they want to preserve at Takoma Junction? Some noted, and many agreed, that preserving the businesses is the most important thing. Holford asked what that would entail? Attendees provided the following feedback:

- Make Takoma Junction more pedestrian friendly
- Make it easier to park and access businesses at Takoma Junction
- Provide more functional, accessible, safe, well-lit gathering spaces at Takoma Junction

Attendees were asked about community cohesiveness and how the needs in Old Takoma, west of Takoma Junction, relate to Takoma Junction?

- More connectivity is needed
- Whatever happens at Takoma Junction will affect businesses in Old Takoma
- Takoma Junction is a "junction" because it was a streetcar junction, a confluence of State highways. This layout facilitates lots of cut-through traffic
- Takoma Junction feels less industrial, there is a quality to it
- Businesses are locally supported but they need more regional traffic to remain viable
- Takoma Junction is known for traditions like the Takoma Park Volunteer Fire Department's annual Christmas tree fundraiser, which has created a repeat customer local base over 20-30 years
- Takoma Junction should provide more nearby locations with adequate parking, sales space, and delivery ability

Attendees asked MDOT SHA how the proposed parking garage at 7221 Carroll Avenue will work? MDOT SHA explained that the Vision Study aims to identify existing issues and craft a long-term vision for the future. Proposed conditions are evaluated as a part of the Montgomery County Planning Department's development review process.

Attendees asked MDOT SHA whether the final report could provide limitations or guidelines for proposed developments like 7221 Carroll Avenue to follow? MDOT SHA informed the group that the study would be used, along with other materials, to evaluate any potential future development in Takoma Junction.

Attendees expressed a strong dislike for the traffic light timing at Takoma Junction and stated that improvements *must* accommodate emergency services. If traffic does not move, safety becomes an issue.

City staff expressed concerns about businesses being able to receive deliveries and providing space for busses and trucks.

MDOT SHA asked business owners how they currently accommodate deliveries. Several business owners noted that delivery vehicles currently park in the closest available lane, often a travel lane. Some attendees asked whether existing businesses could more quickly load or unload to limit congestion and conflicts. One business owner noted staffing issues and the size of the deliveries as existing constraints to speedy loading/unloading when parked in a travel lane.

A City Councilmember expressed concerns about low power lines on Grant Avenue being a constraint for delivery trucks, leading delivery vehicles to use Carroll Avenue, instead.

Attendees noted that trash pickup can be just as important as deliveries. City staff informed the study team, and attendees confirmed, that businesses are each responsible for their own trash pickup, and that trash pickup is not coordinated among businesses. Currently, many different contractors provide these services at various times of the week.

Attendees noted that trucks and buses take up too much horizontal space. This causes issues for fire and emergency vehicles.

City staff asked whether MDOT SHA would be recording delivery information. The study team responded that if the information was provided, it would be used or shared as appropriate; however, the scope of the Vision Study remained high-level. City staff emphasized a desire for a healthy business community, and that MDOT SHA should consider deliveries.

Holford asked if there were any other topics the study team had not covered, before concluding the meeting.