2014 Takoma Park Voting Rights Taskforce

Final Recommendations

1. **General Improvements to Increase Awareness of Elections**

    a. <u>Signage</u> - Signage can be helpful for voters who are looking for polling stations; they also remind voters of elections and are a subtle push for potential voters to go to the polls. Signs or flyers could be placed in local businesses and public buildings throughout Takoma Park.

    b. <u>Targeted Social Network Ads</u> - Facebook and other social networks could be an excellent medium for reaching youth and more transient members of the Takoma Park community. Facebook allows targeting ads by zipcode, which would allow us to reach anyone who has an account and lives in Takoma Park. The ad could simply be informational, or could link back to an elections page on the Takoma Park website.

    c. <u>Facebook Event</u> - Additionally, the election could be setup as an Event on Facebook which would allow people to "RSVP" (i.e., pledge to vote). We should encourage people to adopt the VOTE logo as their profile image for the week or two leading up to the election, and creating shareable content to take advantage of network effects. A promoted post could work as well to spread the word.

    d. <u>Press Outreach & Publicity</u> - In addition to notices in the City Newsletter, the City should endeavor to make sure election information gets published in the Voice and the Gazette. This includes information on new and existing laws and requests for individuals to fill vacancies on the Task Force, the Board of Elections, and as election judges. As information on City committees are already publicized in the City newsletter and on the City's website, the Voice could be encouraged to keep this information up to date in its publications as well.

    e. <u>Encourage Discussion of Election in Schools</u> - Research has shown that when young people discuss elections in school, awareness of the election in their household can increase. As a result, school projects about local issues, class discussions, homework to talk to household members about the

elections, and/or local issues can have an influence on the entire community.

f. <u>Recruit Student Service Learning Volunteers</u> - Students in Montgomery County public high schools are required to earn 75 Student Service Learning (SSL) hours (volunteer hours) before graduation. Many high school students are eager to earn these hours by working in their hometowns, making high schools an excellent source of unpaid volunteers to register voters, spread the word at events, and otherwise help get out the vote. Advertising "SSL opportunities" for high schoolers through schools and through websites such as mcpsssl.org is an effective way to get volunteers.

g. <u>Encourage Youths' Interest in Voting</u> - Change 12 year old maximum age requirement for children accompanying adults at the polls to "cannot be accompanied by anyone who is eligible to vote or is over 18 years of age".

h. <u>Widely publish the election date</u> - All official communications or materials produced by the city for general consumption should contain a reference to the election date within 1 month of the election.

i. <u>Synronize with state and federal elections</u> - Change election to even years to coincide with federal elections, contingent of providing accommodations for Takoma Park's election laws.

2. **Increase Voter Registration for Takoma Park Residents (especially 16-18)**

a. <u>Educate high school aged voters</u> - The county should provide High School Social Studies teachers with information on how their students can register It should provide information about 16+ voting on Facebook with information on how to register. In addition, it should make connections between outside voter registration groups and high school teachers so that the organization can take a few minutes in class to register students to vote

b. <u>Implement online voter registration for TP specific voters.</u> Maryland as a state already has online voter registration, but it is not available for the class of voters who are only eligible in Takoma Park.

c. <u>Implement automatic voter registration for TP residents.</u> Enroll all eligible non-registrants as "pending" (just short of registration) in the SBE database. Notification would be sent to those pending registrants (on forms containing the required qualifying information language regarding citizenship and non-felon status), allowing them to opt-in to become registered voters and declare a party affiliation should they choose one. Sources for the list of all eligible non-registrants would include the MVA, State Department of Assessments & Taxation, and public assistance offices. For example, once these data were compared with the existing voter rolls, postcards or forms containing notice that the person has been added as a pending registrant

would be sent to the potential voters, and they would simply activate their registration by replying or by appearing at early voting to confirm their information. Potential methods for the government to seek a response from pending registrants might include in person at the Board of Elections, by mail, online, or at the polls

    d. Update provisional ballot language in the code to include residents under 16 and those convicted of a felony (5.22.010).

3. **Increase Participation of Tenants**

    a. <u>Directly Target Apartment Buildings To Encourage Voting</u> - City staff should compile a list of contact information for each apartment building and their respective tenant associations or building managers, if it does not already exist. The city should work with each apartment building to encourage a candidate forum, and to distribute voter registration forms and election information.

4. **How to get people to run for office**

    a. <u>Remind community members that they can run for office</u> - Dispel myths about experience and knowledge needed to run.

    b. <u>Educating the public on elections</u> - Provide basic information on how to run for office. Example: http://candidateproject.org/cms/resources/ Reach out to local organizations to provide the leaders and members with information on how to run for office and encourage people to do so (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2010: http://cawp.rutgers.edu/research/research_by_cawp_scholars/documents/Carroll_and_Sanbonmatsu_2010_MPSA-mayors.pdf)

    c. <u>Public campaign funding</u> - Public funding for municipal candidates matching the amount of total local donations (i.e., a candidate who raises $500 from Takoma Park residents would receive $500 in public funding from the city).

5. **Expand access to voting**

    a. <u>Move Up Nominating Caucuses</u> - Add to charter that nominating caucuses should happen at least 8 weeks before election instead of 4. This will encourage candidates to begin planning earlier, and allow for a greater amount of time to campaign and raise awareness about the election and about the confirmed candidates who are running. Additionally this helps give more time for Takoma Park residents who are abroad to receive their absentee ballot and return it.

    b. <u>Establish Standards for Early Voting</u> - Set early voting time period to a minimum of 1 week, as there currently is no minimum.

c. <u>Expand access to polling locations</u> - Require multiple polling locations in Takoma Park.

d. <u>Permanent Absentee Voting</u> - Establish a permanent absentee/mailing voter list of individuals who will automatically be mailed a ballot every election without going through the usual request process.

e. <u>Provide multilingual balllots</u> - Require ballots for any language spoken by at least 2% of the population (national standard is 5%).

f. <u>Make it easier for issues to come up for vote</u> - Reduce ballot legislative initiative petition requirement to 10%, in all cases except recall.

6. **Recommendations For Other Jurisdictions**

a. Montgomery County Council Recommendations

   i. <u>Extending Suffrage Rights</u>

- <u>Immigrant Voting Rights</u> - Montgomery County should request the State of Maryland allow each county to determine its own public policy with respect to the voting rights of noncitizens with a permanent resident visa in county elections.Montgomery County should allow noncitizens with a permanent resident visa to vote in county elections if State law is changed to allow noncitizens to vote.

- <u>Residents with Felony Convictions</u> - Montgomery County should work with civic and correctional organizations to ensure voter education and registration is a component of the reentry process. It should provide resources for such organizations to conduct "get out the vote" outreach among populations affected by incarceration.

- <u>Extend franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds</u> - The County Council and Executive should encourage the Maryland General Assembly to reduce the voting age from 18 to 16 years old for county elections.

   ii. <u>Presidential Commission on Election Administration Report</u> - The County Council should implement the recommendations of the Presidential Commission on voting, including recruiting public and private sector employees and students to become poll workers, creating advisory groups for voters with disabilities and limited English proficiency, and testing voting materials before Election Day.

iii. <u>Mock Elections and Council Seats</u> - The County should hold mock elections for young people to encourage civic engagement upon reaching voting age and establish a youth seat on the Council to represent youth issues.

iv. <u>Public and Private Forums in Participation and Engagement</u> - The County should encourage dialogue on how to increase voter participation and engagement through a series of public and private forums and informal conversation. It should reach out to community leaders, such as pastors, organizers, and business owners to host these conversations.

v. <u>First-Time Voter Seminar</u> - Montgomery County schools should host "first-time voter seminars" for juniors and seniors. This program could cover Maryland registration processes, polling locations, voting deadlines, etc. It could also encourage young people to enroll as poll workers.

vi. <u>High School Registration Competitions</u> - (Require public schools to provide voter registration services.) Montgomery County high schools should coordinate school-wide competitions for how many residents students can register to vote. Students would organize themselves into teams and compete against groups within their own school. Students may register each other and people within the larger community. Schools could host a pre-competition seminar to provide students with the information they need to successfully register themselves and other people. The seminar could cover topics like voter eligibility requirements, registration deadlines, and appropriate polling locations. This practice boasts the benefits of teaching students about the registration process, encouraging students to register to vote, and serving residents of the broader community.

vii. <u>Allow Same Day Voter Registration</u>

viii. <u>Electronic voter registration</u> - Maryland should integrate its electronic registration system with the MVA and online voter registration system so that information can be electronically and automatically transferred between systems.

ix. <u>Provide candidates with canvassing rights</u> - The County should change its zoning law to allow candidates canvassing access to apartment building, similar to the law adopted in Takoma Park.

x. Allow all county residents to vote at any polling location in the county regardless of the location of their residence.

b. State Recommendations

i. <u>Voting Rights for Residents With Felony Convictions</u> - The Maryland General Assembly should change state law to restore voting rights to residents with felony convictions who have served their time in prison and pre-release programs but who are still serving a term of probation or parole. The Maryland General Assembly should also change state law to allow incarcerated felons who are Maryland residents the option to register to vote during the pre-release phase before any parole and probation and have that 'pending' registration become active automatically on the date the person becomes eligible.

ii. <u>Immigrant Voting Rights</u> - The Maryland General Assembly and the Executive should allow each county to determine its own public policy with respect to the voting rights of noncitizens with a permanent resident visa in county and state elections. Several Maryland localities already allow immigrant voting in municipal elections.

iii. <u>Youth Voting</u> - The Maryland General Assembly and the Executive should allow counties to lower the voting age from 18 years to 16 years in county elections. Evidence suggests the earlier a person votes the more likely they are to become a habitual voter.

iv. <u>Same Day Voter Registration</u> - The Maryland General Assembly and the Executive should pass an amendment to the state constitution to establish Election Day registration. Same-day registration removes a significant barrier to voter participation and has been in use in several states for decades.

v. Lower to 18 the age to run for governor, lt. governor, state senate, house of delegates, and circuit court judge

vi. Purchase voting machines with ranked choice voting capabilities.

vii. Pass a statewide voting rights act to supplement and extend protections offered under the federal Voting Rights Act.

viii. <u>Electronic Registration</u> - Maryland should integrate its electronic registration system with the MVA so that information can be electronically and automatically transferred between systems.

ix. <u>Automatic Voter Registration</u> - The County and State should implement the Montgomery County voting task force's recommendations on automatic voter registration

x. <u>Mobile Voting Application</u> - The state of Maryland should contract with a vendor to create a "Vote Maryland" application for mobile devices. This technology could identify high traffic times at polling stations, lowering the amount of time voters wait in line. It would also be a useful tool for disseminating other election information, such as matching zip codes to polling stations.

- The DC Board of Elections designed a mobile application, compatible with both Google Android and Apple iOS, that provides DC voters with a variety of reliable information about the voting process. The application, DCBOE Vote, includes many services that will make voting easier, such as:

  - Voter Registration

  - Absentee ballot request

  - Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act voter Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) submission

  - UOCAVA voter Federal Write-In Absentee ballot (FWAB) submission

  - Election calendars with customizable alerts

  - And contact information for local elected officials

c. Federal Recommendations

i. <u>The Right to Vote</u> - Congress and the Executive should amend the U.S. Constitution to include an explicit right to vote. This amendment would further basic national standards for all jurisdictions, ensuring fair and free elections. This has been introduced as H.J. Resolution 44.

ii. <u>Voting Rights Amendment Act (VRAA)</u> - Congress and the Executive should pass the VRAA in time for the November elections of 2016. In its current state, the Voting Rights Act is limited in its ability to prevent discrimination in voting.

iii. <u>The LINE Act</u> - Congress and the Executive should pass the LINE Act, requiring states to provide the minimum number of voting systems, poll workers, and other election resources (including all other physical

resources). This legislation would guarantee some consistency among polling stations.